

# PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM\*

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Educating the mentally retarded is recognised as a major problem in present day society. Various approaches to educating the educable mentally retarded (E.M.R.) have been attempted in public schools: the self-contained classroom; the resource room with a specially trained teacher; and the mainstreaming of the child into the regular classroom (Martin, 1974). Whatever the educational arrangements, maladaptive behaviour has constituted a major problem in the public schools (Larber, 1969). Thus, while the curriculum for the mentally retarded emphasises the development of practical and useful knowledge, major emphasis must be placed on controlling or modifying and/or eliminating maladaptive behaviour in the classroom.

The application of basic research on maladaptive behaviour are chiefly directed toward the child's environment (Lavitt, 1970; MacMillan, 1970; Walker and Buckley, 1970; Piper, 1972). Since the child spends most of his time outside the classroom with his parents, parental influence usually plays a major role in determining the environment to which a child is exposed as well as the type of behaviour exhibited by the child (Burchinal, 1964; McCarthy, 1968; Paulous, 1969; Peniston, 1967; Glassner and Navaree, 1965).

The current study attempted to determine whether parental attitudes, levels of education, socio-economic status, and the number of parents in the home, are contributing variables to maladaptive behaviour of E.M.R. students in the classroom.

## METHOD

### Instrumentation

The design of this descriptive study required each participating parent to fill-out a comprehensive battery of sociometric questionnaires (CPAGD, HTFISP, and MBC) on their E.M.R. children in the primary special education classes of a metropolitan Virginia public school system. On the basis of research and theory in the area of special education, the sociometric questionnaires selected were those which measured the relationship of the variables: parental attitudes, levels of education, socio-economic status, and number of parents in the home, which influences the behaviour of the E.M.R. child in the classroom.

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The sociometric questionnaires were collected on each subject in the order discussed below:

**Parental Attitudinal Survey (Hereford, 1963);** Measures parent attitudes in five areas: (1) confidence in the parental role, (2) causation of the child's behaviour, (3) acceptance of the child's behaviour and feelings, (4) mutual understanding and (5) mutual trust.

**Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 1957);** Measures the income of a parent as it relates to his social interaction and education. The scale is based upon the assumption that occupations have different values attached to them by members of society.

**Maladaptive Behaviour Checklist (Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, 1973);** Assesses inappropriate behaviour observed in the classroom.

**Subjects:** The total samples was composed of 35 E.M.R. children who were selected at random from each of the four primary E.M.R. school populations. Because of the nature of the study, the sample of 35 boys and girls were divided into two groups: children from one parent families and children from two parent families. An equal number of boys and girls were taken from each grade to facilitate statistical analysis of differences between the sexes and the various grade levels.

The one parent children group had a mean chronological age (CA) of 9.5 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 8.6. The two parent children group had a mean CA of 9.8 years with a SD of 8.8.

The E.M.R. children that were involved in this project were all defined as E.M.R. (IQ scores - from either Stanford-Binet or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children (W.I.S.C.) - between 48 and 78) by the Special Education School District for Mentally Retarded Children of Petersburg County where they attended classes.

**Method of Data Collection:** Data were collected by means of sociometric questionnaires, observation techniques and school records. The data were collected separately for each of the four previously mentioned variables.

The Herefords' Survey of Parental Attitudes' (Hereford, 1963), was mailed to the parents of each child in the sample with written instructions as to how to complete the answer sheet. A self-addressed stamped letter accompanied each questionnaire.

School records were used to determine the occupation, levels of education and number of parents in the home. This information was used to complete Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 1958) which was used to measure the relationship of education and socio-economic status association with maladaptive behaviour.

The Maladaptive Behaviour Inventory (Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, 1973) was used as a behaviour checklist by four special education teachers for observing (one week) the maladaptive behaviours of the students in the classroom.

**Analysis of Data:** Multiple Regression Analysis of Variance was used to test the significance of the relationship between two or more predictor variables. Also, partial correlation statistical procedure was used to determine the relationships between one or two variables when another variable's relationship with the initial one or two (variables) are being "held constant" or "partialed out."

## RESULTS

The data obtained from the collection of the sociometric questionnaires and the administration of the Maladaptive Behaviour Checklist form were analysed by multiple regression and partial correlation. The level of significance was established at .05 analyses.

A Multiple Regression Analysis of variance F-ratio was obtained from the collection of the measuring instruments used in this study and are presented in Table 1. Partial correlation coefficients representing the four independent variables (Parent's level of education, parents' attitudes, number of parents in the home, and parents' socio-economic status) are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 1**  
**Multiple Regression Analysis of Variance for Four Independent Variables**  
**Relationship to Maladaptive Behaviour of Mentally Retarded Children**  
**in the Classroom.**

Variance	df	MS	Parents Level of Education F	Number of Parents in Home F	Socio- Economic Status F	Parents Attitudes F
Levels of Education	1	211.81	12.02**			
Residual	33	17.63				
Number of Parents in home	2	310.39		57.49**		
Residual	32	5.40				
Socio-Economic Status	3	207.86			37.92**	
Residual	31	5.48				
Parental Attitudes	4	158.96				30.24**
Residual	30	5.26				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>					

\*\* P<.01, F = 12.02, df = 1 33

\*\* P<.01, F = 57.49, df = 2 32

\*\* P<.01, F = 37.92, df = 3 31

\*\* P<.01, F = 30.24, df = 4 30

Analyses of levels of parents education, number of parents in the home, parental attitudes, and socio-economic status scores for the sociometric questionnaires collected yielded statistically significant multiple regression analyses of variance F-ratios (P<.01), and significant partial correlation coefficients (P<.05) for each independent variable computed. As illustrated in Table 1, all four independent variables were statistically significant. Thus, the data on these four variables indicate that they represent those segments of the parents attitudes and social characteristics most reliable in influencing maladaptive behaviour of E.M.R. children in the classroom.

TABLE 2

**Partial Correlations of the Number of Parents in the Home,  
Socio-Economic Status, Levels of Education, and  
Parental Attitudes Relationship to Maladaptive Behaviour  
in the Classroom.**

Independent Variables	Partial Correlations
Number of Parents in the Home	0.83846**
Levels of Parents' Education	0.65264*
Socio-Economic Status	0.12764*
Parental Attitudes	0.28629**

\*\*P<.01

\*P<.05

The partial correlations data in Table 2 shows the relationship among the independent variables in this study. The number of parents in the home correlated with maladaptive behaviour while socio-economic status, levels of education, and parental attitudes were held constant. Thus, the predictive power of the number of parents in the home, in relation to maladaptive behaviour had the greatest influence ( $r=.84$ ) followed by a high correlation with levels of education ( $r=.65$ ) and parental attitudes ( $r=.29$ ). Socio-economic status had lesser influence on maladaptive behaviour ( $r=.12$ ) of the E.M.R. children in the classroom.

Analysis of the above figures suggest that those parents with low levels of education showed a negative attitude toward their E.M.R. children which was significantly correlated with maladaptive behaviour in the classroom, in contrast to those parents with high levels of education who displayed a positive attitude. The parent's socio-economic status significantly correlated with E.M.R. children's maladaptive behaviour in the classroom. Generally, as the parents' socio-economic level increased the maladaptive behaviour scores of the students decreased significantly. Both parents' in the home was strongly associated with appropriate behaviour being displayed by their children in the classroom as opposed to one parent's presence in the home which was related to maladaptive behaviour being displayed by their children. The number of parents in the home seemingly had a greater influence on maladaptive behaviour than the parents' level of education, the parents' socio-economic status and/or parents' attitude.

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has presented valuable evidence concerning the maladaptive behaviour of the E.M.R. child in the classroom, indicating the investigation's importance in understanding parental influence on the behaviour of the E.M.R. child. Certainly the important role played by the child's parents seems noteworthy.

It appears evident that programmes must be developed in the public schools that would help the parent understand the social, physical and mental needs of his mentally retarded child. These programmes might have as their goals the improvement of parents' educational status and the attitude of parents towards their *mentally retarded children*.

This study implied that a teacher should become more cognisant of the home and parental backgrounds of his students. This familiarity would aid in developing an understanding of the effect the parent has on the behaviour of his child in the classroom and consequently, the teacher could devise ways of modifying or alleviating the behaviour.

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of parental influence on maladaptive behaviour of mentally retarded children in the classroom. A random sample of 35 mentally retarded subjects was drawn from the primary special education classes in a metropolitan Virginia Public School System. Data were collected from the subjects' parents by means of sociometric questionnaires and from their teachers by means of a maladaptive behaviour checklist. Analysis of the data indicated that the parents level of education, number of parents in the home, socio-economic status and the parents attitude toward their retarded children significantly correlated with their maladaptive behaviour in the classroom.

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