

Teen Parent Education to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect
Grant Number 90 - CA - 1320

Summary Report
1987 - 1990

Prepared by:

Marcia Bok, PH.D.

University of Connecticut

School of Social Work

&

Stuart Kermes, MA

Eastern CT Parent-Child Resource System, Inc.

Putnam, CT

I. Project Summary

In 1987 Eastern CT Parent-Child Resource System Inc. received a demonstration grant from the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect to test the effectiveness of 12 week educational groups on reducing the propensity for child abuse and neglect among adolescent mothers. The original proposal was to utilize a pre- and post-test evaluation design with which to measure the impact of an educational group on these women's attitudes towards their children, knowledge of certain subject areas such as budgeting and child development, and their skills in maintaining a household as perceived by their case worker. In addition to the weekly group sessions, each client received case-management services which ranged from referrals and information to short-term counseling. There was also a program component targeted to male partners.

The program was offered in two sites in Northeastern Connecticut through two existing Young Parents Programs (YPP). The YPP in Willimantic was run by the local child guidance clinic and in the Northeast, by the local home health agency. The grantee did not directly operate either of these programs, but sub-contracted out. The grantee had an ongoing relationship with these programs through the provision of regular yearly operating funds from other sources. The Willimantic area is dominated by the town of Windham with a population of roughly 21,000. The area is an economically depressed former mill region. Twenty-five percent of the population is Hispanic. The Northeast Region is a mixture of farming communities and small mill towns. Both areas have high rates of poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy and infant mortality.

The program was revised during the course of the project. The twelve-week model was replaced with a full year open-ended group in response to client interests and needs. The male outreach component was changed from one half-time position in each region to one full-time position in one. In the rural Northeast, several groups were consolidated into one because of logistical difficulties.

A number of findings of general significance developed. In working with men, the program targeted hardcore males, who were involved in using drugs or in the drug trade. The resources of the program simply did not match the difficulty of the problem. It is suggested that future programs work with those males who are only in need of case-management assistance in becoming contributing partners of their families. This strategy would have the possible effect of creating a pool of role models in a community that could influence younger men. The data-collection instruments were found to be of limited validity and reliability. It is suggested that a more naturalistic instrument be developed to more directly measure parent-child interaction as a better indicator for evaluating programs of this type. The long-term support group proved to be an effective model in terms of generating client participation and interest.

II. Program Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this program is to provide parenting education and support services to pregnant teenagers and young parents to help improve knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in child rearing and to improve the quality of parent-child relationships.

The objectives of the program were to provide:

1. parenting education programs to pregnant teenagers and young parents in a group setting;
2. peer supports to reduce the isolation of rural areas;
3. in-home services to some of the teenagers who need more intensive services;
4. educational and support services to young fathers
5. to evaluate the impact of these services on client knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in child rearing and in parent-child relationships.

III. First Year Findings

A pre-and post-test design was used with a variety of standardized instruments for the first year evaluation.

The Screening Measure for Client Referral to RAPP Programs was used to gather information to decide what level of service clients need, such as groups, individual counseling, or parent aides. The instrument is completed by the person most familiar with the client's home environment, probably the caseworker or group worker if the latter is providing individual counseling. The purpose of the measure is to provide observational ratings of the client's child care skills, home management skills, and general stability. The instrument contains 14 Likert-type scale items.

The Attitudes and Opinions Questionnaire is completed by clients at both pre- and post-testing. The instrument consists of 39 true-false items intended to measure knowledge of and attitudes toward the topics covered in each group session. The scale yields a total scale score, as well as scores on 10 subscales, each corresponding to a different group topic.

The Parenting Stress Index is a 101 item Likert-type scale which used a 5 point agree-disagree response format. It can be used with parents of children ages 3 months to 5 years, and takes approximately 20-30 minutes to verbally administer. It provides information on child characteristics (adaptability/plasticity; acceptability to parent; demandingness/degree of bother; mood;

distractibility/hyperactivity; and reinforces parent), and parent characteristics (depression, unhappiness, guilt; attachment; restrictions imposed by parental role; sense of competence; social isolation; relationships with spouse; and health). This measure can be useful in predicting a child's current and future adjustment to school; child abuse; parental stress; family functioning; and special behavior disorders.

Two other scales were proposed for use in the original evaluation proposal; the Conflict Tactic Scale and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales. These scales proved impractical and/or inappropriate to the content of these groups.

The analysis of the data from Year I highlighted the fact that twelve two-hour sessions consisting primarily of information was not a large enough intervention to produce significant changes in these adolescents lives. Only two of the fourteen items of the Screening Measure, 1 out of 10 subscales of the Attitudes and Opinions Questionnaire and only 3 out of 10 items of the Parenting Stress Index showed statistically significant differences between pre- and post-testing. (See Year I Evaluation Report for specific details).

The Male Outreach component was not implemented in the Northeast region the first year because of an inability to identify appropriate staff for hire. In Windham a worker was finally hired. After six months of effort six of the eight male participants were lost to prison on drug charges. The worker had earlier felt the effectiveness of his work was limited and left the program at this point.

IV. Second Year Activities

1. Male Outreach

After several meetings with program staff, other service providers and community leaders it was decided that one of the difficulties with this component was the part-time nature of the position. The program budget was revised and Windham was chosen as the site for a full-time male outreach position. Windham was selected for two reasons. First, because of the high number of potential program clients located in one, predominately Hispanic, housing complex. It was felt that the start-up time needed to get the word out would be shorter without the transportation barrier inherent in working in the rural Northeast area. Second, the risk factors for both spouse and child abuse were believed to be greater in the Windham area.

A male staff person was hired in May and worked through August. He worked with over forty-two clients during that period, primarily providing job assistance, and referrals to social service programs, mostly for drug treatment. The time period as to short to assess to what extent these referrals were

utilized.

The worker met resistance to any efforts to organize a group, even when the group was organized around a recreational activity. An attempt was made to conduct a joint activity with the mothers in the Young Parents Program, but the event had to be canceled due to bad weather.

2. Northeast Mothers Support Group

During the first year the strategy of holding three separate groups in different locations throughout the region proved to be a logistical nightmare. Finding suitable space for both the day-care and the meeting in each area, and recruiting three different groups of young mothers was more than one full-time job. The clients felt strongly that they wanted a longer group and the first set of post-test results and caseworker observations suggested that the problems involved in improving these young mothers parenting skills required more intensive intervention. Staff decided that for the second year one group would be organized in a central location which had the best available facilities, with space for day-care in an adjacent building rather than right next to the meeting room where the groups were often interrupted. Clients were asked for suggestions for group topics and space was left for open sessions. Attendance averaged 12 - 15 young mothers and 14 - 17 children.

3. Windham Mothers Support Group

At the start of the second year the staff in Windham attempted to recruit a new twelve week group and to begin a support group for the graduates of the previous years groups. It proved difficult to maintain consistent attendance, so by mid-year a single open-ended group was developed. Attendance stabilized at 8 - 10 mothers and 10 - 12 children for the remainder of the year.

VI. Findings and Recommendations

Profile of participants: Thirty-eight young mothers participated in the program during its second year. Among the twenty-one participants in the Northeast, the average age was 20.52. Two were high school graduates with the average grade completed being the 10th. The average number of births for this group was 1.76 with a maximum of four. All participants were white reflecting the composition of the surrounding area.

Among the seventeen participants in Windham, one had

graduated from high school. The average grade completed was just under the 10th grade. Their average age was 19.12 years and the average number of live births was 1.14. Forty percent (7) of the participants were Hispanic and sixty percent were white. Hispanics currently comprise 25% of the general Windham County population.

Test results: The small sample size made the use of chi-squares as a test of significance impossible. The use of the paired T-Test also proved unreliable. In addition, there was some question about the validity of the measures used because of the clients comprehension of the questions. This was particularly a problem for some of the Hispanic clients, since none of the tests were translated into Spanish and many answers were left blank.

There was no testing done with participants in the male Outreach component.

Recommendations:

A) Development of New Instruments. None of the data collection instruments chosen for this project adequately measured the changes in parenting skills and strategies. Staff reported improvements in the level of care among many clients on the basis of periodic home-visits that occurred over a period of twelve months for those who participated in the 2nd. year of the program. None of those informal observations was corroborated by any of the formal measures. A more naturalistic measure that would be able to observe and rate parent-child interactions over time would be a more effective approach for the evaluation of programs of this nature.

B) Long-Term Group Intervention Most Effective. The twelve-week didactic group model proved ineffective for several reasons. For a group that had experienced significant failure in school settings, the short-term group had too many connotations of school. Several weeks were required to create a climate of trust among the participants and for them to become comfortable with the day-care arrangement. The level of comprehension was questionable after only one session and there was little opportunity for reinforcing lessons from one week to the next. A climate of peer support for alternative positive modes of parenting was difficult to establish within 12 weeks and then was not continued.

In contrast, the longer group allowed for multiple sessions on one topic, more client involvement in the management and organizing of the group, and the opportunity to pay more attention to the dynamics within the group. This allowed the group leader to relate particular experiences to prior lessons, foster the leadership abilities of several members of the group and correct misconceptions about earlier material. The longer-term nature of the group also fostered deeper friendship among participants and helped create outside informal networks of

support.

C) **Target Moderate-Risk Males.** Although the programs experience working with young men was limited, the strategy of targeting limited resources (one staff person and some activity money) to hard-core unemployed and often drug involved men was ineffective. Based on the work done in the last quarter of the project, the men who seemed most responsive to the intent of the program were those youth who had not become fully immersed in the drug trade, but who were not equipped to fully support or participate in their new families. This population needs assistance with jobs and schooling, and with social and parenting skills. If a program targeted them for a period of time enough role models might become available in a given community to begin to counter the notion that young men have to abandon their new families.

Organizational Results of the Demonstration Project: Very little group work was being done with youth in this region prior to the receipt of this grant. Both agency sub-contractors have developed a commitment to doing group work with this population and have continued the groups past the grant period by utilizing Title 19 funding. The Rural Adolescent Pregnancy Program has been pursuing funding for a program based on the MELD model and will continue to seek ways to develop more group interventions with this client population.

Clayton



**eastern connecticut
parent-child resource system inc.**

162
158 main street putnam connecticut 06260 928-6567

July 16, 1991

Ms. Betty Little
Office of Human Development Services/HHS
Division of Grants & Contract Management
Room 341-F2, Hubert Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Betty
Dear Ms. Little,

Enclosed please find the final report for our Teen Education to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect #90-CA-1320. I apologize for the delay and appreciate your indulgence.

Sincerely,

Stuart Kermes
Stuart Kermes
Executive Director

cc: ✓Charlotte Smallwood