



Exploring Cultural Differences in Children's Exposure to Television in Home-Based Child Care Settings

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Introduction

Infant exposure:

Conflicting findings have emerged from research on the effects of TV on infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. On the one hand, there are beneficial effects of television specifically designed for preschoolers, such as Sesame Street. On the other hand, early television use before 2 years is controversial and is becoming a major public health issue (Thakkar, Garrison, & Christakis, 2006). Heavy exposure to television before 3 years has been associated with poorer school performance, increased bullying, poor attention and sleep problems (for review see, Thakkar et al., 2006). The American Pediatric Association (1999) has recommended no television for children under 2 years.



The role of child care:

Research on media exposure patterns typically does not consider the role of child care (Christakis, Garrison & Zimmerman, in press). Christakis and colleagues found television exposure by infants, toddlers and preschoolers is four times higher in home-based than in center-based childcare settings. Over 50% of children under 1 year of age are in some form of non-parental care and this number rises to over 60% in preschoolers.

Results from a recent study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health Development (NICHD) suggest that child care environments that were stimulating and well organized positively influenced children's vocabularies, attention skills, memory skills, and their ability to get along with peers. In contrast, more time spent in front of TV during childcare is associated with more behavior problems, smaller vocabularies, and lower scores on math problems (NICHD, 2000). The results suggest that better environmental quality, provider's emotional availability, and higher caregiver-to-child ratio predicted optimal television usage (NICHD, 2000).

Optimal television use was defined as restricting the amount of time the television was on, restricting the content of the shows to child appropriate programming, and discussing the content and building activities around the content. Little is known, however, about media usage in home-based child care settings.

The present study examined the question: Are their cultural differences in how low-income children of color are being exposed to television in their Family, Friend, and Neighbor child care settings?

Method

Participants were 100 Family Friend and Neighbor low income child care providers providing care in a densely populated community, characterized by high poverty, high crime, and high unemployment (Census Bureau, 2001). Half of the sample was African American (n = 50) and the other half was Latina (n = 50). Half of the providers had a high school education or less and the other half reported having some college experience.

Procedure. Television usage was measured using a 1-7 scale from 1, "poor or inadequate use of television" to 7 "optimal use of television" from the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) (Harms & Clifford, 1989) based on a four-hour observation of the child care provider and the children in her care. This item was correlated with demographic information, a survey about childrearing beliefs (Kontos et al., 1995), an emotional availability observational tool (Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 2000), and an environmental quality observational tool (Harms & Clifford, 1989).

Results

The average score on television use for providers in this sample was slightly above a score of "minimal" (M= 3.4; SD = 1.66). Most of the providers scored "minimal" or below (71%) and only a third scored at "good" or above (29%). In a series of correlational analyses we examined factors that predicted more optimal television usage (scores of 5 or above). Overall there were no effects of caregiver education or income on television usage patterns.



The factors that were associated with more optimal television use with Latina and African American providers were:

- *workshop attendance
- *higher perceived support from the childcare community
- *perceiving that one's financial needs were adequately met
- *higher levels of language and reasoning learning activities
- *higher levels of emotional availability
- *higher overall environmental quality.

The differences between Latina and African-American providers are summarized in Table 2. We decided to analyze each ethnic group separately in order to understand factors unique to each cultural group associated with optimal television use. In addition to the factors analyzed in Table 2, we found that the African American providers were also more likely to endorse more restrictive beliefs about childrearing. The nurturing child rearing beliefs were also associated with optimal usage but not as strongly as restrictive beliefs.

Table 2
Provider Characteristics. The table shows the similarities and differences between Latina and African American childcare providers. Each measure is described in terms of the minimum (min) and maximum score (max), the mean score and the standard deviation. When the groups differed significantly an asterisk is placed beside the characteristic.

Provider Ethnicity	Measure	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Latina	Total number of children in care under 5 yrs. Old*	1.00	8.00	2.28	1.41
	Perceived Needs and Resources*				
	Attendance of workshops (hours of training)	.00	96.00	15.24	16.80
	Child Care Community Support *	.00	1.67	.89	.61
	Organize activities w/children *	.00	4.00	1.02	1.44
	Learning Activities (FDCRS subscale)	1.44	5.22	3.42	.71
	FDCRS overall score *	2.00	5.27	4.05	.62
	Emotional Availability (total score)	20.00	36.00	30.96	3.35
	Use of TV (FDCRS item # 24) *	1.00	7.00	4.00	1.26
	African American	Total number of children in care under 5 yrs. old	1.00	6.00	2.40
Perceived needs and resources*		13.00	43.00	26.78	6.84
Attendance of workshops (hours of training)		.00	105.00	22.86	23.51
Child Care Community Support *		.33	2.00	1.42	.48
Organize activities w/children *		.00	4.00	2.34	1.53
Learning Activities (FDCRS subscale)		2.56	6.22	3.93	.88
FDCRS overall score *		3.16	6.41	4.37	.72
Emotional Availability (total score)		14.00	38.00	30.10	5.49
Use of TV (FDCRS item # 24) *		1.00	6.00	2.82	1.80

* No ethnic differences were found for annual household income

Discussion

Predictors of better television usage for Latina and African American providers:

- higher environmental quality
- better emotional availability
- lower caregiver-to-child ratio

In contrast to other low-income regulated child care settings (Jordan, 2005), book reading and optimal television viewing were used in complementary ways in low-income informal care settings.

Overall, Latina providers had more optimal television-use scores than the African American providers.



For the Latina providers, the following were associated with optimal television usage:

- higher involvement with the child care community
- higher rates of attendance at workshops
- more intentionality in regards to planning daily activities for the children in their care



For the African American providers,

- endorsement of more restrictive beliefs
- having very firm boundaries and non-nonsense expectations of children (but not harsh and punitive) is a protective factor for these children (e.g. Ispa & Halgunseth, 2004).

• This study demonstrates that optimal childrearing strategies are often culturally and ecologically-bound. This shows us that in this at-risk population, there were a number of providers who were maximizing care for children. That is, there were a number of factors that predicted resilience.

Future Directions

- Are providers who use television in optimal ways more emotionally available to begin with?
- How exactly does better use of television impact a provider's emotional availability to the children in his/her care?
- How is acculturation impacting television usage?
- What neighborhood factors predict restrictive beliefs and how do those beliefs impact media usage?

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