

Parental Demographic Factors Affecting the Application of Common Methods towards Tantrum Management in Toddlers: Implications in Designing a Parenting Skills Program

John Michael O. Lorena, RN MAN
Trinity University of Asia – Philippines
jmlorena@yahoo.com

Abstract

Temper tantrums are considered an outburst displayed by young children towards their parents or guardians. These behaviors can be considered normal and a reflection of immaturity as the child strives to accomplish age-appropriate developmental tasks. Moreover, toddler discipline is a very difficult task for parents and caregivers when dealing with temper tantrums. Parents must also learn that there is consistency in the way that these behaviors are handled when they cross the boundaries. With this in mind, the study determined parental demographic factors affecting the application of common methods towards tantrum management in toddlers. The study selected parents from a public (n=40) and private (n=40) schools. A validated self-made questionnaire was utilized to gather information pertaining to temper tantrums, its scenarios, manifestations and methods utilized by the parents. Based on the results, it was identified there are nine (9) methods used by parents in tantrum management and the most common methods utilized by parents are ignoring (87.50%) and distraction (55.00%) in private school while reward scheme (55.00%) and distraction (52.50%) were common in parents from the public school. It was also shown that the parent's age, marital status, educational attainment and number of children showed a significant relationship towards the common methods such as ignoring, cuddling, positive reinforcement, body

language, and rewards scheme. The present researcher presents a proposed design utilizing the results shown in managing temper tantrums in children.

Keywords : Corporal Punishment, Demographic Factors, Tantrums, Time-out, Toddlers

Introduction

Temper tantrums are emotional outbursts typically displayed by young children. Crying and screaming generally characterize them. All children experience temper tantrums at some point, and they are considered a normal, healthy part of child development. Harrington and Robert (2004) mentioned in one of his articles that all young children from time to time would whine, complain, resist, cling, argue, hit, shout, run, and defy their teachers and parents. Temper tantrums, although normal, can become upsetting to parents because they are embarrassing, challenging, and very difficult to manage. On the other hand, temper tantrums can become special problems when they occur with greater frequency, intensity, and duration than is typical for the age of the child. Temper tantrums are common between ages 12 months to 4 years (toddler stage). These behaviors may be considered normal as the young child seeks to achieve autonomy and mastery over the environment. They are often a reflection of immaturity as the child strives to accomplish age-appropriate developmental tasks and meets

with difficulty because of inadequate motor and language skills, impulsiveness, or parental restrictions. Tantrums can become less frequent and even prevented by not giving the performer an audience and by not giving into his or her demands. The present researcher considers toddler discipline as a very difficult task for parents and caregivers. As parents, limits must be set and structure should be provided to create an atmosphere in the home that makes these limits easier to respect. Thus, it is important that the toddlers clearly know where these boundaries lie. Parents must also learn that there is consistency in the way that these behaviors are handled when they cross the boundaries.

Objectives

The study aims to determine and explore the relationship of the common methods being used by parents in controlling temper tantrums and their present demographic profile. As such, results can serve as a basis for designing a parenting skills program.

Methods

The research design of the study is considered as descriptive correlational. In this method, the data were collected through survey questionnaires and results were analyzed using statistical techniques. The researcher conducted this study in public and private schools using purposive or selected sampling. The researcher believed that the data gathered from these two institutions would provide more reliable data due to mixture of parents coming from different classes of society (from low to mid to high socio-economic status). Furthermore, it may also be hypothesized that parents from these two institutions may have different perspectives regarding child discipline. Nannies or caregivers are excluded from the study. A total of 80 parents, 40 from each type of school, participated in the study wherein they were asked

to answer a self-made questionnaire.

To test the validity and reliability of the survey-questionnaire, a pool of experts was tapped to validate the instrument. Suggestions for the improvement of the instrument were considered and inputted. It was also subjected to a pilot study which was pre-tested by the researcher's colleagues. The result of the pilot study was subjected to statistical treatment to determine its validity using the Cronbach-Alpha Coefficient (0.83216). This questionnaire is composed of statements which can help gain information pertaining to temper tantrums, its scenarios, manifestations, and methods utilized by the parents. Interview sessions as part of data gathering were not utilized. Data obtained were analyzed thru descriptive statistical analysis using frequencies and the phi coefficient and point-biserial correlation analysis was utilized for correlating the demographic profile and the methods used in dealing with temper tantrums.

Results

Demographic Profile of Parents

The results show that majority of the respondents from the public school belong to 40 years old and above (35.00%). Whereas from the private school, majority came from age bracket of 26-32 years old (25.00%) and age bracket of 40 years old and above (25.00%). The summary of the other results are as follows: for public school: 19-25 years old (13.33%), 26-32 years old (23.33%), and 33-39 years old (30.00%). For private school: 19-25 years old (13.33%), and 40 years old and above (26.67%). Majority of the respondents from the public school (40.00%) and private school (67.50%) are college graduates. The data suggests that the parents are well educated since most of them have finished collegiate degree. Although, in reality not most of the college graduates opted to become housewives (rather than become professionals) to personally guide the development

of their children. Majority of the respondents from the public schools have two children (37.50%) in the family. In the private school, majority of the respondents have more than one child in the family, (37.50%) of the respondents have two children whereas (37.50%) have more than two children in the family. Generally, well-off parents have the capacity to sustain the needs of their children thus; having a large number of children is not an issue. Majority of the respondents from the public school (90.00%) and private schools (82.50%) are married. Some of the respondents from the public school (5.00%) and private school (10.00%) are single parents.

Methods Commonly Used by Parents in Dealing with Temper Tantrums

In the study, there are nine methods commonly used by parents in dealing with temper tantrums namely: (1) Ignoring, (2) Time-out, (3) Cuddling, (4) Corporal Punishment, (5) Positive Reinforcement, (6) Negative Reinforcement, (7) Distraction, (8) Body Language, and (9) Reward Scheme. It was seen that the methods commonly used by parents in public school are the reward scheme (55.00%) followed by distraction (52.50%). However, ignoring (87.50%) was the most favored method of tantrum management followed by distraction (55.00%) by the respondents from the private school. Furthermore, corporal punishment was still popular among some respondents from the public school (42.50%) and private school (35.00%). According to Schmitt (2006), ignoring is still the method of choice for temper tantrums. Ignoring your child's extreme display of kicking, screaming, and crying is not a negative reflection on your parenting skills. In fact, it can even offer a great "parenting moment" to help your child learn to deal with strong emotions. So, stay calm and stay close but no eye contact. Your child needs you to be there. The most commonly used strategy for tackling behavior problems in toddlers other

than ignoring is the use of the reward scheme. Reward strategies only work well when they are used in combination with the types of direct teaching, environmental, and reactive strategies. Positive reinforcement coupled with a reward scheme is a key to manage temper tantrums in children. Some parents use this magical energy in favor for the purpose of discipline. A study published in a 2001 issue of the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis found that positive reinforcement ensured quicker disciplinary results in a 10-year-old with autism (De Leon, Iser G., et al., 2001). Positive reinforcement acts as preventative medicine for your child's misbehavior. Instead of punishing when your child acts up, she's motivated to seek praise and kudos before making behavioral choices.

Association of the Demographic Profile and Methods used in Dealing Temper Tantrums

It was shown that single, widowed or separated parents prefer cuddling since it has a positive correlation. Single parents can utilize the cuddling method during tantrum outbreaks because it is more physical thus the child who is having tantrums can feel sincerity easily. Ignoring ($t=-0.95$) and positive reinforcement ($t=3.44$), on the other hand, have significant relationships toward the respondent's number of children in the family. This data further suggests that parents who have less number of children are utilizing ignoring, since it has a negative correlation. Positive reinforcement on the other hand has a positive correlation suggesting that it is more utilized by parents who have more children. For parents with more children, positive reinforcement is encouraged since that would ensure an immediate happier self and less stressed parent (Bee, 1995). Children in a large family are able to adjust immediately to a variety of changes and crises (financial). On the other hand, a more intimate type of discipline strategy is highly recommended for parents who have less number of children, that is – ignoring

since it eliminates inadvertent positive reinforcement for unacceptable behavior. Thus less number of children is encouraged to properly guide the development of the child (APA, 2000).

In terms of the educational attainment of the respondents, ignoring ($t=2.170$) and positive reinforcement ($t=3.800$) showed a significant relationship. Positive correlation exist both on ignoring ($t=2.170$) and positive reinforcement ($t=3.800$). It may suggest that the higher the educational attainment of the parent, the more likely they will utilize ignoring and positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is crucial to discipline. One of the most powerful forms of positive reinforcement is parental attention (as compared to ignoring), which should focus on good behavior rather than undesirable behavior. Unfortunately, undesirable behavior more frequently gains parental attention. Parents must identify appropriate behaviors and give frequent feedback, rewarding good behavior immediately so that the child can associate the reward with the good behavior. Rewards can range from smiles, words of praise, and other signs of affection to special activities, extra privileges, and material items (APA, 2000).

Moreover, methods such as ignoring ($t=-6.4535$), body language ($t=-5.2937$) and reward scheme ($t=-1.9836$) as methods have significant relationship towards the age of the respondents since the computed t -value is higher than the tabular value (1.96). The data shows that ignoring (highest

negative correlation) is the most common method utilized by younger parents followed by body language than reward scheme. Ignoring may be the choice of younger parents because they rear their own children in much the same way they themselves were reared. Body language such as glaring of the eyes and firm stance are also common since toddlers are generally afraid of loud voices and big glaring, rounded eyes. Older parents, as they believed that behavior that is rewarded would be repeated prefer reward scheme. Reward schemes are part of behavior modification theory being employed by more experienced parents (Foss, 1996).

Discussion

Due to the results obtained in the above-mentioned, the present researcher had provided a proposed design towards the understanding on the principles of temper tantrum management and its effect on child's behavior regardless of the age and educational background of the parents. Such understanding can be done through a Parenting Seminar conducted during Parents-Teachers Communication (PTC) Day or hold a lecture seminar series in coordination with the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) of various schools wherein the target participants are the parents themselves. Its indicators can lessen the incidence of corporal punishment leading to physical abuse and positive outcomes on child's behavior as manifested by excellent academic performance.

The following strategies can be utilized to manage temper tantrums effectively:

1. Use of ignoring for younger parents and those who have less number of children. Ignoring as a method is very structured. Though it sounds simple, it requires mastery. But once the child calms down, give the attention that is desired.
2. Use distraction by getting the child focus on something else that is acceptable.
3. Hold or cuddle the child who is out of control and is going to hurt himself/herself or someone else. Reassure the child that everything will be ok and help the child calm down. Parents may need to hug their child who is crying and say “I love you” more often. For parents, who have less number of children, constant cuddling and holding them would give them a sense of security.
4. Talk with the child after the child has calmed down. When the child stops crying, talk about the frustration the child has experienced. Try to help solve the problem if possible.
5. Use of positive reinforcement and reward scheme. Focus on the good behavior rather than the undesirable behavior. Parents must identify appropriate behaviors and give frequent feedback, rewarding good behavior immediately so that the child can associate the reward with the good behavior. Rewards can range from smiles, words of praise, and other signs of parental affection to special activities, privileges, and of course, material items. In this technique, the child earns rewards (such as star badges, star stamps) for desired behaviors and loses the rewards for undesirable behavior. The rewards can be cashed in for prizes after a specified time.
6. Minimize or avoid spanking. It is a less effective strategy than time-out or even ignoring. Although spanking might immediately reduce or stop an undesired behavior, its effectiveness decreases with subsequent use. The only way to maintain the initial effect of spanking is to systematically increase the intensity with which it is delivered, which can quickly escalate into abuse. Thus, at best, spanking is only effective when used in selective infrequent situations.

To further increase the awareness on the family size and its composition and its direct impact on parenting skills, a Parent’s Class can be initiated in partnership with the government’s program on Family Planning. This program can be done during prenatal consultation with emphasis on family size, composition, economic status and health beliefs which could directly influence child’s development.

As to the conducting of future research,

a more thorough study on temper tantrums as well as effectiveness of each method can be done. Moreover, a comparative study of the outcome effects of each of the methods is highly recommended. A similar study but more phenomenological in perspective is highly encouraged. Lastly, a more updated evidence-based and follow-up studies are needed to provide scientific basis on the discussion of effective parenting skills on managing tantrum outbreaks.

Reffences

- American Academy of Pediatrics (2000). Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and family Health Guidance for Effective Discipline. *Pediatrics*, 101(4), 723.
- American Academy of Pediatrics (2000). Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent care: Development Issues for Young Children in Foster Care. (RE0012), *Pediatrics* 106(5), 1145-1150.
- Bee, H. (1995). The Developing Child (7th ed). New York, USA : Harper Collins.
- DeLeon, Iser G., et al (2001). Choices Between Positive and Negative Reinforcement During Treatment For Escape-Maintained Behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. 4(34), 521-525.
- Foss, G. (1996). A Conceptual Model for Studying Parenting Behaviors in Immigrant Populations. *Advances in Nursing Science*. 19(2): 74-87.
- Harrington, Robert G. (2004). Helping Children at Home and School II. East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD, USA 20814.
- Schmitt, B.D. (2006). Your Child's Health. Bantam Books. Mc Kesson Provider Technologies, incorporated.