

MATERNAL ACCEPTANCE/REJECTION OF MEXICAN MIGRANT MOTHERS

Maternal Acceptance/Rejection of Mexican Migrant Mothers

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This study examined correlates of maternal acceptance of preschool children in a sample of Mexican-American migrant farmworker mothers, including problems in life conditions (education, employment, relatives, friends, partner/spouse, children, health, housing, and finances) and social support (task, emotional, source, satisfaction, accessibility). One hundred Mexican-American mothers of preschoolers who participated in the Texas Migrant Council's Headstart Program were interviewed with regard to demographic information, social support, and problems in life conditions. The results supported the hypothesis that total social support accounts for more variation in maternal acceptance/rejection than problems in life conditions alone. Social support accounted for 75% of the variance in maternal acceptance/rejection of preschool children, and accessibility to support predicted the largest proportion of the variance. The results suggest that it is important to identify Mexican-American migrant farmworker mothers isolated from social support, since such isolation, in combination with problems in life conditions, places their children at higher risk for maternal rejection.

Long-term problematic life conditions have been found to affect parental behavior during the preschool years. These conditions include the quality of the marital relationship (Belsky 1984; Crouter, Belsky, & Spanier, 1983; Makosky, 1982), unemployment and social isolation (Garbarino & Sherman, 1983; Zur-Szuffro & Longfellow, 1982), and financial status (Belle, 1989). In particular, ongoing problems in life conditions have been predictive of maladaptive responses of mothers to children. Problems associated with living environment, marital and parental status, physical health, mental health, age, intimate relationships, lack of education, and socioeconomic status (Colletta, 1981; Garbarino & Sherman, 1983; Makosky, 1982; Radloff, 1980) detract from mothers' effectiveness as caregivers.

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Problematic life conditions converge upon Mexican-American migrant farmworker mothers. Yet, only since the mid-1970s have researchers begun to recognize the extent of stress in the lives of Mexican-American women in general (Ruiz, 1977; Ruiz, Casas, & Padilla, 1977). Even less is known about the problematic life conditions of Mexican-American migrant mothers and their potential effects on maternal behavior.

Not all mothers exposed to problematic life conditions succumb to the stress in their lives. The ameliorating effect of social support on parental stress is well documented. Although social contact with neighbors, friends, relatives, and significant others has beneficial effects it is the match between support wanted and needed, and support received that is critical (Belle, 1982; Belsky, 1984; Gottlieb, 1985). For low-income mothers in particular, support provided by spouse, relatives, and friends seems to be negatively associated with maternal restrictiveness and punishment (Colletta, 1981; Crnic, Greenberg, Ragozin, Robinson & Basham, 1983; Powell, 1980; Wills, 1985). Cross-culturally, mothers who are isolated in their childrearing, and who lack others to help provide periodic relief, have been found to be harsh and rejecting of their children (Colletta, 1981; Navarro & Miranda, 1985; Rohner, 1975). Other studies have documented the general effects of isolation upon persons belonging to low socioeconomic and minority groups. In general such individuals are more likely to experience stress because they are unlikely to have substitute sources of support in times of need (Keefe & Casas, 1980; Salgado de Snyder, 1986; Vega, & Kolody, 1985; Vega, Kolody, Valle, & Hough, 1986).

The present study was designed to assess the problematic life conditions of Mexican-American migrant mothers and to investigate the effects of social support on the relationship of those conditions to maternal acceptance/rejection. It was hypothesized that total social support (task, accessibility, emotional, sources, satisfaction) would account for more of the variation in maternal acceptance/rejection than problems in life conditions (education, employment, relatives, friends, partner/spouse, children, health, housing, finances).

METHOD

Sample

One hundred Mexican-American migrant mothers of normal preschoolers, aged 3-5 years who were currently registered with the Texas Migrant Council's Headstart Program, volunteered to participate in the study. Services for children from 0 to 5 years were provided to prevent children from being left inadequately attended at home or in the field where accidents might occur. Texas has the largest population of Mexican-American migrant farmworkers and is the primary home base for migrants in the United States. Because of this, a sample from this state was thought to be repre-

sentative of the Mexican-American migrant population. The Texas Migrant Council's Headstart Program provided the farmworker families.

The mothers were randomly selected from the lists of families registered at the central headquarters of the Texas Migrant Council in Laredo, Texas. Criteria for selection included having a normal preschool child 3-5 years, who was registered in the Headstart Program. Participants were initially contacted by the Headstart parent coordinator who was a major link between the family and the Headstart program. Because some families did not have telephones, the parent coordinator was the primary means of directly communicating with the mothers. Parent coordinators contacted mothers at the Headstart schools when they were either dropping off or picking up their preschool child. Participating mothers were not paid.

The mothers were told that the purpose of the study was to help others learn about what made their life either difficult or easy during the migratory harvest season. After the mothers consented to participate in the study, they were interviewed for 2 hours at three centers located in Laredo, Crystal City, and Carrizo Springs.

The 2-hour interview requested information that was part of a larger study that examined maternal mental health and coping strategies. All mothers approached agreed to do so. Many respondents spontaneously said that the opportunity to help other mothers like themselves influenced their willingness to participate. The opportunity to share these experiences in either English or Spanish was also a positive influence on their consent.

As a group, the respondents averaged 8.3 years of education. The majority (62%) spent 11 or more hours each day working in the fields. Their ages ranged from 19 to 57 years, with an average of 30 years. Of the sample, 72% had been born in the United States, and 26% in Mexico; 2% did not report their birthplace. Of the mothers, 89% were married. The majority of the mothers (59%) saw their families every day, with an additional 15% seeing their relatives one or more times a month during the migratory season. They were primarily a group of working mothers (85%), with migrant labor as their only source of employment (90%).

These mothers averaged 3.7 children, whose ages ranged from 1 to 11 years. The average was 9.7 years for the oldest child in each family. The target preschool child, the child each mother was asked to think about when answering questions related to children, averaged 4.3 years.

Procedures

English and Spanish versions of the recruitment statement and consent form were available. Questionnaires had been developed in English, but they were translated into Spanish for the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were then translated back into English in order to assure linguistic and conceptual accuracy by a Spanish linguist. The questionnaire was administered by an interview. The mothers were given the choice of being

interviewed in the language of their choice. Trained bilingual interviewers individually read each question to the participants during a 2-hour interview because of the potentially limited ability to read or write that other researchers have documented for this group (Reyes Associates, 1980). Interrater reliability, calculated as percentage of absolute agreements on interview responses, averaged .97 with a range from .94 to .99.

Interview questions focused on four major areas: (a) demographic information, (b) social support, (c) acceptance/rejection, and (d) problems in life conditions. Demographic data included the mothers' age, number of years of education, place of birth, number of years in the United States, number and ages of children, marital status, and socioeconomic status.

Social support. The Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB), developed by Barrera, Sandler, and Ainsley (1981), measured supportive actions which included maternal aid, sharing tasks, giving advice, and helping others master emotional distress. In order to measure the type and amount of support received, respondents were asked to rate the frequency of 40 supportive items on a 5-point scale with the following range: (1) *not at all*, (2) *once or twice*, (3) *about once a week*, (4) *several times a week*, (5) *about every day*. In addition, total ISSB scores were calculated by summing the frequency ratings across all 40 items. A range of (40) *not at all* to (200) *about every day* is possible. The ISSB has well established validity with a high internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Barrera et al., 1981). An internal consistency reliability of .97 using Cronbach's alpha was found in the present study.

Because the ISSB was developed with a sample of college students, it did not include questions on the specific assistance that low-income mothers of preschoolers need, such as childcare, housework, transportation, groceries (Belle, 1982; Belsky, 1984; Colletta, 1981). In order to measure the special support needed by low-income mothers, 7 questions from the Stress, Support, and Family Functioning Interview (SSFI; Colletta, 1981) were also included.

The SSFI was based on the Harvard Stress and Family Project (Belle, 1982) that developed instruments able to predict the mental health and role behavior of adult low-income mothers. The SSFI has well established reliability and validity (Colletta, 1981). SSFI questions were forced choice and focused on specific issues, precluding vague responses. For example, mothers were asked, "How is the following task done in your household? . . . Shopping for groceries." The possible responses included: (1) *you only*, (2) *you mostly*, (3) *you and someone else equally*, (4) *someone else mostly*, (5) *someone else only*.

Responses from the ISSB and SSFI were combined to give a total social support score, as well as the cumulative frequency of subscores measuring task support, accessibility to support, emotional support, sources of support, and satisfaction with support.

Maternal acceptance/rejection. Maternal responses which included warmth/affection, aggression/hostility, neglect/indifference, and rejection were measured by the Parental Acceptance/Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) developed by Rohner (1975). The PARQ is a self-report 60-item instrument that asks mothers how they treat their children. Responses are forced choice and the range is: (4) *almost always true*, (3) *sometimes true*, (2) *rarely true*, (1) *almost never true*. The PARQ ranges from 60-240. A low score reflects maximal parental acceptance and minimal parental rejection. The reliability and validity of this instrument are well established. On average, the internal consistency of this instrument has been .95. All four scales have been found to be significantly ($p < .001$) related to their respective validation scales (Rohner, 1975). In the present study, an internal consistency reliability was established at .85 with Cronbach's alpha.

Problems in life conditions. The Problems in Life Conditions scale, based on the Harvard University's Stress and Families Project (Belle, 1982) and revised by Colletta (1981), was used to measure problems in life conditions. The scale focuses on unchanging or slowly changing oppressive conditions that are endured daily and are subjectively stressful and undesirable and that involve role, status, health, and way of life (Makosky, 1982).

Problems in life conditions measured in the present study included: education, employment, relatives, friends, partner/spouse, children, health, housing, and finances. All questions were forced choice, but varied in form. Some responses required dichotomous scoring such as yes/no, while others provided polytomous responses. All questions were focused on specific issues and precluded vague responses. In the area of finances, for example, respondents were asked, "Do you ever find yourself wondering how you will manage if the price of food continues to go up?" They were then offered two possible responses: (1) *no*, (2) *yes*. The total problems in life conditions for each respondent was the total frequency of problems in life conditions. In the present study, an internal consistency reliability of .90 was established with a Cronbach's alpha.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to explain the variance in maternal acceptance/rejection in the presence of problems in life conditions with social support. Table 1 presents the pairwise correlations, means, and standard deviations for the variables. Although the independent variables were intercorrelated, the magnitude of the correlation between problems and support variables were not considered high enough to remove the variables from consideration. Extreme collinearity exists only when the intercorrelations are within the .8 to 1.0 range (Nie, Hull,

Table 1
Pairwise correlations, means, and standard deviations of main variables

	Total Sources Support	Total Task Support	Accessibility	Total Emotional Support	Total Satisfaction Support	Maternal Acceptance/Rejection	M	SD
Total problems	-.24**	-.07	.01	-.31**	-.14	-.03	122.79	16.44
Sources of support		.22*	-.12	.22*	.09	-.05	1.30	.66
Task support			-.02	.00	.05	.03	43.75	39.66
Accessibility				.01	.06	-.86***	24.62	39.06
Emotional support					.37***	-.04	36.62	8.57
Satisfaction with support						.02	317.86	62.99
Maternal acceptance/rejection							106.47	100.14

Note: $N = 100$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Brent, 1975). The problems in life conditions scores for each respondent were forced into the equation in the first step. The total social support score was then entered in a block. As can be seen in Table 2, total social support accounted for 75% of the variance in mothers' acceptance/rejection of their children, $F = 56$, $df = 1, 98$, $p < .001$.

Next, the social support subscores—the cumulative frequency of task, accessibility to support, emotional support, sources of support, and satisfaction with support—were entered sequentially. The contribution of each variable to the overall prediction was assessed at each step by the significance of the beta weight. An alpha of .05 was set as the level of statistical significance. When social support subscores were entered in stepwise fashion, accessibility to support was statistically significant, ($R = .88$, $p < .000$), as Table 3 illustrates. Residuals were directly examined and no outliers, deviation cases, or other influential characteristics were detected.

Assessment of accessibility to support included measurement of contacts with actual sources of support, while moving through the mother's migrant stream. The majority of mothers reported access to their husbands (77%), followed by access to daughters and sons, parents, siblings, and other relatives and friends. In describing the task support available, the respondents were asked to rate the amount of sole or shared responsibility in a variety of household tasks. The most frequent source of task support was the respondent's husband (78%). Emotional support measured whether a mother could depend on her spouse/partner, family, or friends to share personal problems. Fifty-three percent reported they could count on their husbands if they had a problem they needed to share; 58% commented on the availability of family; and 45% felt supported by their friends. While closeness to parents was reported (77%), only 45% reported they could discuss their problems with their parents. In addition, relatively few (16%), agreed with their parents concerning the rearing of children. In describing their satisfaction with support, 91% of the respondents reported satisfaction with persons available for confidence.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study supported the hypothesis that total social support accounted for more of the variation in maternal acceptance/rejection than did problems in life conditions alone. Access to support from spouse, partner, family, and friends was the strongest contributor of social support for this sample of Mexican-American migrant mothers. Having access to a selection of supportive persons to whom one may turn in time of need may be better than having only one person available. With greater choice, more resources for solving a problem may be available as other researchers have also found (Vega & Kolody, 1985). A mother's access to a variety of supportive persons while enduring the problematic conditions of

Table 2
Multiple regression analysis of maternal acceptance/rejection with problems in life conditions and total social support

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Multiple R	R ²	Change R ²	F ^a	F ^b
Maternal Acceptance/Rejection	Total problems	.08	.01		.31	.53
	Total social support	.87	.75	.75	40.54	56.28***

Note: N = 100.

^aSignificance of the joint effects of predictors ($df=J, N-J-1$), where J is the number of variables entered at each step.

^bSignificance of the unique explained variance by each predictor.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Stepwise multiple regression analysis of maternal acceptance/rejection in Mexican-American migrant mothers

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Multiple R	R ²	Error B	F
Maternal Acceptance/Rejection	Accessibility to support	.88	.78	.13032	29.13*
	Satisfaction with support	.89	.79		27.93
	Task support	.80	.80		26.95
	Emotional support	.89	.80		25.58
	Sources of support	.90	.91		24.36

Note: N = 100.

* $p < .000$.

being a migrant farmworker parent may be an important factor that influences her response to her children. Without access to supportive relationships, the mother may feel abandoned, without anyone to turn to in time of need. Previous research (Colletta, 1981) has suggested that a mother with no one to share her problems may be less warm and accepting of her children. If the mother has access to supportive relationships she may be more likely to receive the assistance that she needs, which in turn enables her to be warmer and more accepting of her children. The findings here further suggest the importance of identifying those mothers who are isolated or lack access to spouse, partner, family, and friends. The problem in access to these individuals, along with consequent isolation, could have harmful effects on parenting. The fact that this study interviewed mothers with social support available from the Texas Migrant Council was a source

of bias and a limitation of the study. However, the transiency of this group during the harvest season (May–November) and the difficulty of contacting and selecting participants in migrant labor camps on private farms and securing necessary clearance from farm owners and crew chiefs made identifying a more clearly representative group impossible. Using self-report of behavior as the sole estimate of maternal acceptance/rejection was another limitation of the study.

Two important conclusions may be drawn from this research. First, access to social support is associated with maternal acceptance/rejection. However, as others investigating the effects of social support have suggested, if we are to understand the concept of support as a factor that promotes maternal warmth and acceptance, research must focus on not only the structural components of support such as access, but also the content of the helping relationship (Salgado de Snyder & Padilla, 1987; Vega & Kolody, 1985). This is needed to determine the actual conditions of the social contact that constitutes support. Second, the findings of the present research underscore the importance of social support to maternal warmth and acceptance in the presence of problematic life conditions. Future research with Mexican-American migrant mothers should also consider the effects of such psychological resources as feelings of self-esteem and mastery on maternal warmth and acceptance/rejection, as well as problematic life conditions and social support.

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