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## ABSTRACT

Attitudes of both parents of 52 educable mentally retarded children in special education classes were examined. Results from the Attitude Toward Handicapped Individuals (ATHI) scale and the Parent Child Rating Scale (PCRS) indicated no significant differences for sex. It was found that the ATHI scale could be effectively used to group individuals on a continuum of acceptance/rejection attitude dimension toward handicapped persons. (CL)

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A STUDY OF PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR  
HANDICAPPED CHILD

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Many parents of educable mentally retarded children have numerous demands placed upon them due to their own developmental and inter-personal crisis that arise when dealing with their child's condition. The difficulty stems from the fact that while they are learning to cope and modify their expectations of their retarded child, they must also render help and support to the child who is also making adjustments. Some parents are unable to cope with this situation because some professionals are unable or unwilling to give them the basic assistance needed. One such professional can be the special class teacher.

Teacher impact on the child-parent relationship is well accepted by both parents and professionals. The importance of attitudes by parents of the retarded and themselves is also well accepted. Parental expectation of their child's school adjustment and progress can be as important as understanding and acceptance of the child's handicapping condition. The focus on parent-child, child-teacher, parent-teacher, teacher-teacher, and significant other professionals in relationship to the parties cited requires a serious need to assess and study attitudes.

Special education is haunted by a growing number of instruments that purport to measure attitudes, yet little effort is directed toward ascertaining the basic

efficacy of them in terms of validity and reliability (Haughton, Gorton, and Lazar, 1974). Shaw and Wright (1967) indicated that attitude scales should not be used in isolation, but rather as part of a battery of scales if truly meaningful data is to be derived.

The measurement of parental attitudes, both mothers and fathers in a paired design situation can be a valuable source of information for the special class teacher. Levy (1974) reported that this technique was used with the Attitude Towards Handicapped Individuals (ATHI) scale and the Parent-Child Rating Scale (PCRS) to study the attitudes of mothers and fathers toward their multiply handicapped child. She asserted that the two instruments provided useful information that enabled the special class teacher to help the multiply handicapped child and parents. Such information helped in planning a diagnostic-prescriptive learning program for each child, counseling individually and together of the parents, and the establishment of an effective parent group, and for stressing child-parent relationships, parent-teacher relationships, and child-teacher relationships.

Haughton, Gorton, and Lazar (1974) conducted a correlational study with the ATHI, PCRS, and a Teacher Rating Scale (TRS). The TRS was developed by Hewett (1968).

No high or significant correlations were found to exist between the three instruments (Haughton, Gorton, and Lazar, 1974). Levy, (1974) reported similar findings for the ATHI and PCRS. It was concluded that the three instruments all measured different dimensions of parent/teacher attitudes toward a child's handicap condition and school behavior.

In a recent study, Lazar, Haughton, and Orpet (1975) successfully used the ATHI scale to identify and group individuals based upon their scores along an acceptance/rejection continuum. This allowed them to study individual adjustment as measured by the Is of Identity test (Weiss, 1954). This was in keeping with the Shaw and Wright (1967) recommendation mentioned earlier.

#### PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to assess and study the attitudes of paired parents, that is both the mother and father of the same child in a class for the educable mentally retarded. This study would focus on two attitude dimensions: (1) how do the parents view their child's handicap, and (2) how do the parents view the child's school life? The following null hypotheses guided the investigation:

1. There would be no significant mean score differences between all the mothers and fathers when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales.

2. There would be no significant mean score differences between the mothers and fathers in Group A when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales. Group A consisted of those parents where both scored 70+ on the ATHI.

3. There would be no significant mean score differences between mothers and fathers in Group B when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales. Group B consisted of those parents where both scored below 70 on the ATHI.

4. There would be no significant mean score differences between mothers and fathers in Group C when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales. Group C consisted of those parents where one scored 70 or above on the ATHI and the other below.

5. There would be no significant mean score differences between parents in Group A and the parents in Group B when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales.

6. There will be no significant mean score differences between parents in Group A and the parents in Group C when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales.

7. There will be no significant mean score differences between parents in Group B and the parents in Group C, when compared on the ATHI and PCRS scales.

#### METHODS & PROCEDURES

Subjects: The sample used in this investigation was made up of 52 paired mothers and fathers who had a child in a special class for the educable mentally retarded. One hundred and four individuals comprised the total sample. Subjects were selected from 15 special classes located in Texas, California, and Illinois during early fall. Both parents had to be the natural parents of the child.

Procedures: The ATHI was administered first, followed by the PCRS. Both parents were administered the instruments at the same time either at home or school. They were not allowed to talk during the testing session. Five individuals collected the data during a one week period in a three state area. Uniformed administration procedures were followed. All the instruments were scored by the staff at CSULB, as well as the statistical treatment of data.

Instruments: The ATHI scale by Lazar (1973) is a modification of the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) scale that was developed by Yuker, Block, and Youngg, 1966). It was felt that by changing the term "disabled" to read "handicapped" a much broader meaning would be implied. The ATHI is a 20

item instrument using a six part Likert type scale for each item as follows:

- + 3 I agree very much
- + 2 I agree pretty much
- + 1 I agree a little
- 1 I disagree a little
- 2 I disagree pretty much
- 3 I disagree very much

The ATHI's function is to measure attitudes of acceptance or rejection of handicapped individuals by non-handicapped persons. The possible range of scores is from 0 to 120, the higher score indicating greater acceptance and understanding, while the lower score indicating rejection. Lazar (1973) has set the score of 70 as the lowest level of acceptance.

A Pearson product-moment correlation of .80 was reported between the ATHI and the ATDP (Form-0) and a coefficient of stability (test-retest) of .73 over a two week period for the ATHI (Stodden, Graves, and Lazar, 1973). In a more recent study, Lazar and Denham (1974) reported a Pearson product moment correlation of .83 for the same two instruments.

Haughton, Gorton, and Lazar (1974) reported a .13 correlation between the ATHI and the PCRS, while Levy (1974) found a .06 correlation between the same instruments. Neither were statistically significant.

The Parent Child Rating Scale (PCRS) was developed by Lazar (1972) as a 60 item instrument, containing 22 negative and 38 positive factors concerning the handicapped child and



behavior related to school academic work, home, peers, and self-perceptions. An adjusted score is obtained by subtracting the negative and positive items, thus yielding a total corrected score. The parent is asked to rate their child using the following five point scale for each of the 60 items:

- 1 - never
- 2 - rarely
- 3 - sometimes
- 4 - often
- 5 - always

It has been asserted that the PCRS helps the parents and teacher identify and focus on specific concerns toward the the mentally handicapped child's school life adjustment. Data yielded helps reduce small talk during parent-teacher conferences, and tends to focus on parent nominated items for discussion, thus conserving valuable time and energy.

Parental groups: The first major group was by the sex variable, and in this case we had 52 males and 52 females. Next, the parents were placed into one of the following three groups depending on their ATHI score:

Group A - Both parents scored 70+ on the ATHI.

Group B - Both parents scored below 70 on the ATHI.

Group C - One parent scored above and one below 70 on the ATHI.

Treatment of Data: Independent mean t tests were used to statistically treat mean scores for the ATHI and PCRS scales. Parental pairing, sex, ATHI, and PCRS were the critical variables for study.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of biological parents of an educable mentally retarded child placed in a public school special education class. Two major attitude dimensions were investigated using the ATHI and PCRS scales: (1) how did the parents compare in terms of understanding and acceptance versus rejection of their child; and (2) how did the parents view the child's school adjustment. Seven null hypotheses were stated to guide the investigation.

In Table 1 the results support the null that no significant mean score differences would exist between the mothers and fathers on the ATHI and PCRS scales. This finding supports that of Levy (1974) who also found no significant differences between parents on the two criterion instruments. In the Levy study focus was made toward a multiple handicapped child, whereas in this study the focus was on an EMH.

In Table 2 the data supports the null hypothesis that no mother and father differences would exist on the

ATHI and PCRS when both parents scored 70+ on the ATHI. While no significant differences did exist, a study of the ATHI means in Table 2 shows both parents as very high in acceptance and understanding with mothers slightly higher. The reverse is true when the means of the PCRS are compared. Here the fathers then to have a slightly higher mean score. One explanation for this directional favor for the fathers is that they may not be as close to the child's school activities as the mother. Yet, in Table 1 we find that on the PCRS the mothers were higher on the mean as a group.

In Table 3 the first part of the null hypothesis is sustained in that no significant difference was found between the mothers and fathers on the ATHI. As would be expected when using the ATHI Score continuum for grouping, both mothers and fathers were rejecting, with the fathers slightly moreso, but not significantly. The null concerning the PCRS is rejected because there is a significant difference between fathers and mothers at the .01 level. In this instance, the fathers appeared to be very critical and negatively oriented toward their child's school adjustment. While no tests were made, a PCRS mean comparison of the fathers in Group B when compared with the means for the fathers in Groups A and C would

allow one to conclude with the suspicion that this group of fathers would differ significantly from the other two. This group would lend itself very nicely to further investigation for a future study concerning other possible variables that might allow for better understanding of this particular group that scored very low on both instruments. A further avenue of research effort in this particular instance with be undertaken.

In Table 4 the first part of the null hypothesis concerning the ATHI must be rejected in that a significant difference at the .01 level was found favoring the fathers. This is a rather unique finding that is most difficult to explain in that the senior author has found in past studies with the sex variable, the positive bias tends to favor the females. One other avenue for investigation would be to see the nature of mixture here by going to the raw data. Had the sample for Group C be larger so that we could have formed two groups, above fathers versus below mothers, and above mothers versus below fathers, we might be able to obtain a more realistic picture of the interaction. The only real explanation for this finding is that some unique artifact about this group of fathers must exist. What it is cannot be explained at this time.

The results in Table 5 appear to support the rejection of the null hypotheses concerning the ATHI and Group A when compared to Groups B and C. In both instances a significant difference at the .001 level was found favoring the higher and more accepting attitude disposition to Group A. The finding can actually be expected when one uses the ATHI score continuum placement method for grouping. Yet, when the data in Table 5 is reviewed in terms of Group A and the other two groups on the PCRS, no significant differences are found. In fact, when the PCRS mean of Group A is compared with Group C the slight edge favors Group C being somewhat better. Group B is also significantly different from Group C on the ATHI with the higher level of acceptance and understanding favoring Group B. To some extent, as was asserted regarding Group A on this matter, it could also be expected to some degree for Group C as well.

The fifth and sixth hypotheses concerning Group A and the PCRS are sustained by the data in Table 5. The seventh hypothesis concerning Group B versus Group C must be totally rejected in that Group C was significantly different on both the ATHI and PCRS, at the .001 and .01 levels respectively.

#### CONCLUSIONS & SUMMARY

In this study it was found that the ATHI scale could be effectively used to group individuals along what has been

called the ATHI continuum of acceptance/rejection dimension of attitudes toward handicapped individuals. In this particular study the focus of attitudes was directed toward the educable mentally handicapped. That when groups are formed, results with another instrument concurrently could be given more meaning and usefulness, such as was the case of the PCRS. When grouped for sex, such as mothers versus fathers, no significant differences were found on both criterion instruments. Yet, when the ATHI was used for grouping, some sex differences were teased out. This was also true when the ATHI continuum was used for grouping.

One major feedback item from this study not cited in the body of the paper was the need to modify the PCRS so as to eliminate some confusion that is caused by a mixture of positive and negative items. Thus, a revision of the PCRS will be made to correct this disadvantage that surfaced in this study, as well as in the Levy (1974).

Finally, pairing of parents for research is a very promising approach and is recommended for further effort with the ATHI, PCRS, and other scales as well. The writers agree with the notion of Shaw and Wright (1967) that in the study of attitudes a combination of scales should be used to tap a variety of dimensions about the attitudes people hold.

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TABLE 1.

Comparison of All Mothers and  
Fathers on the ATHI & PCRS

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	df	t	p
Mothers	52	74.60	16.55	102	.05	n.s.
Fathers	52	74.42	15.68			
Mothers	52	81.40	20.80	102	1.16	n.s.
Fathers	52	76.58	21.72			

TABLE 2.

Both Parents Score 70+ on the  
ATHI Scale  
GROUP A

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	d.f.	t	p
Mothers	16	94.69	10.63	30	1.66	n.s.
Fathers	16	88.19	11.47			
Mothers	16	78.44	25.99	30	.46	n.s.
Fathers	16	82.50	23.76			

TABLE 3.

Both Parents Scores Below 70 on the  
ATHI Scale  
GROUP B

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	d.f.	t	p
Mothers	16	62.50	7.95	30	1.66	n.s.
Father	16	ATHI 57.56	8.82			
Mothers	16	79.36	15.66	30	2.86	.01
Fathers	16	PCRS 62.50	17.65			

TABLE 4.

One Parent Above and One Below 70  
on the ATHI Scale  
GROUP C

GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	d.f.	t	p
Mothers	20	68.20	9.47	38	2.91	.01
Fathers	20	ATHI 76.90	9.44			
Mothers	20	85.40	20.17	38	.58	n.s.
Fathers	20	PCRS 82.10	15.76			

TABLE 5.

ATHI GROUPS COMPARED ON PCRS  
AND ATHI

ATHI GROUP	N	MEAN	S.D.	d.f.	t	p
A	32	91.44	11.37	62	12.45	.001
B	32	60.03	8.63			
A	32	80.47	24.58	62	1.75	n.s.
B	32	70.94	15.51			
A	32	91.44	11.37	70	7.38	.001
C	40	72.55	10.32			
A	32	80.47	24.58	70	.46	n.s.
C	40	84.25	19.03			
B	32	60.03	8.63	70	5.49	.001
C	40	72.55	10.32			
B	32	70.94	15.51	70	2.99	.01
C	40	84.25	19.03			

\* Independent mean t test

CODE TO GROUP LETTERS & MEANING:

Group A - Table 2. Both Parents Scored 70+ on the ATHI.

Group B - Table 3. Both Parents Scored Below 70 on the ATHI.

Group C - Table 4. One Parent Above And One Below 70 on the ATHI.