

## Family Environment and Parent-child Relationships as Related to Executive Functioning in Children

Schroeder, V. M., & Kelley, M. L. (2010). *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(10), 1285-1298.  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a912490225>



Civilian-  
Focused  
Article



*Schroeder and Kelley (2010) used indexes and surveys completed by parents of school-aged children without an identified developmental, learning, or behavioral/cognitive disorder to determine the associations between family environments and parenting practices with specific executive functions in the children. Executive functions are higher level cognitive processes used for the coordination of planning, use of working memory, and execution of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions.*

### Key Findings:

- Greater family organization (e.g., established routines, orderly household) was associated with greater executive functioning, specifically: children's ability to plan, organize materials, retain information in working memory, inhibit, shift, and monitor behavior and thoughts (control behaviors and thoughts).
- Greater parental support was linked with children's greater abilities to plan-organize, inhibit thoughts and behaviors, and greater working memory capacity.
- Appropriate limit setting from the parents was associated with children's abilities to control emotions and inhibit, monitor, and shift thoughts and behaviors.

### Implications for Programs:

- Professionals should provide one-on-one programs for parents and families to establish appropriate routines, rules, and family roles to encourage children's cognitive development (e.g., organized thought, behavior control, and working memory) by creating rules and routines and discussing appropriate roles with the entire family.
- Programs should help parents provide the support children need by encouraging and teaching the spouses, other parents, and program staff to support each other, as greater parental support is consistent with greater child executive functioning.
- Parents should be encouraged to set age appropriate limits for their children in order to encourage the development of behavior appropriate boundaries.

### Implications for Policies:

- Health care professionals, social workers, and school counselors working with families should be provided with the necessary tools to help families establish organization and support systems to promote child cognitive development.
- Across programs and services, staff training should include education about the associations between family dynamics and child cognitive functioning.
- Policies should be enacted to support parenting courses that can facilitate and encourage developing a parenting strategy that consists of high organization, high support, and appropriate limit setting.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research should examine whether increased organization and appropriate limit-setting within early childhood programs is associated with improved cognitive functioning in children.
- Additional research should explore whether programs providing parental support can improve children's cognitive functioning.
- Future research should include the perspectives not only of the parents, but possibly the children and another caregiver that spends a regular amount of time with the child.

Prepared by Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit <http://reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu>

## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Parents of children aged 5-12 years completed online questionnaires that included the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function, Metacognitive Index, Parent-Child Relationship Inventory, and Family Environment Scale.
- This article focuses on civilian children.

### Participants:

- Children ranged in age from 5-12 years. M=8.54 years (SD=2.11).
- 64% of children were European American, 22% African American, 5% Asian American, 4% Mexican/Hispanic American.

### Limitations:

- Only parents' perspectives are included in the data. Using other perspectives (e.g., teachers, children) may reveal different patterns of results. It is also important to note that genetic confounds may account for the results obtained in this study.
- Children with development, learning, or behavioral/cognitive disorders were excluded from the study; thus, the study may not be generalizable to all children ages 5-12. Additionally, only parents of children who were associated in some sort of after-school care or program were reached to participate. This yielded a predominantly middle class and non-Hispanic white sample that does not allow for assessing whether there are truly differences in these areas.
- Parents are only able to report on their children's cognitive functioning in certain contexts (e.g., at home); behavior and functioning in other contexts (e.g., at school, in daycare) cannot be assessed through these measures.

## Assessing Research that Works

Research Design and Sample				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ☆
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Research Methods				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ☆
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Limitations				Quality Rating:	★ ★ ☆
	Excellent <i>Minor Limitations</i> (★★★)	Appropriate <i>Few Limitations</i> (★★☆)	Limited <i>Several Limitations</i> (★☆☆)	Questionable <i>Many/Severe Limitations</i> (☆☆☆)	
The limitations of this study are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Implications				Quality Rating:	★ ☆ ☆
	Excellent (★★★)	Appropriate (★★☆)	Limited (★☆☆)	Questionable (☆☆☆)	
The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications					
Overall Quality Rating					★ ★ ☆

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