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discipline in context:
families' disciplinary practices for children aged under five

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UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disciplinary practices in families is a controversial topic which has been debated for centuries, and they are known to have a lifelong effect on the wellbeing of children. This report provides a snapshot of the views, experiences and practices of a sample of 100 New Zealand families, relating to the discipline of their pre-school children. Parents and caregivers were asked what they believed about discipline, how they disciplined their children and the type of support and stress that they experienced with parenting. The study also looked at the effect of child and family characteristics and context, over time, on discipline.

Method

The study used a multi-method approach, involving semi-structured parent interviews, parents keeping diaries of disciplinary events over three days in a two-week period, and a standardised tool, the Parenting Daily Hassles scale. The national sample comprised 117 caregivers – 98 mothers, 16 fathers, one grandfather and two grandmothers. Interviews were audio-taped, coded numerically and selectively transcribed for particular themes. The percentage of agreement between independent coders of the interview data was 91.54 percent. Around half of the participants returned a diary record of disciplinary incidents.

Beliefs about discipline and influences on beliefs

Most parents believed that discipline means socialising children so that their behaviour falls within acceptable boundaries. Some parents associated discipline with the use of punishment to achieve control. The majority of parents said their approach was warm but firm, or a mixture of positive and negative sanctions, and very few parents said they used a purely authoritarian or permissive approach. Upbringing was a major influence on parenting, but written material, current family, the media and friends were also influential. One in three parents mentioned professionals (such as doctors) or their own professional education as important.

Disciplinary practices

Parents said that they commonly use positive reinforcement (rewards, praise and reasoning),

structuring the situation (distraction) and punishment (time out, withdrawal of privileges, smacking and shouting) to control their children's behaviour. Positive methods were, on the whole, thought to be effective for changing behaviour. More parents thought that time out was more effective than other forms of punishment, though withdrawal of privileges was also seen to be relatively effective. Only a small number of parents thought that smacking or shouting were effective disciplinary techniques, and most of those who did think smacking was effective used it infrequently and as a last resort (this was true of other punitive methods too).

Diary records showed that parents commonly used structuring the situation (verbal instruction, distraction and removal of objects) positive reinforcement (rewards and praise), and reasoning to guide their children's behaviour. About two-thirds of parents gave verbal warnings and a third ignored inappropriate behaviour. The most common punishments were time out, verbal reprimands and withdrawal of privileges. Punishments were only used by about one in four parents over the diary periods, and positive methods were about three times as likely to be used. Very low levels of physical punishment were recorded in the diaries.

Child and family characteristics

Very few differences in disciplinary techniques or parenting hassles were associated with child and family characteristics. Older pre-school children were more likely to experience negative sanctions from parents than younger ones; parents on lower incomes had slightly more frequent and intense parenting hassles than those on higher incomes; single parents experienced more frequent and intense parenting hassles than parents in intact families; and larger families tended to use more negative and less neutral methods to control their children.

Stresses and context

Just over half of parents said they used the same disciplinary approaches in different contexts, but many participants found it difficult to maintain a consistent approach in different situations. Having a public audience (for example, when going to the supermarket) made it hard for parents to stay calm and consistent.

Over three-quarters of parents raised issues that they considered to have affected their parenting; tiredness and workload were the most common. A large proportion of families are experiencing an above-average frequency of potential 'hassles' and the frequency of parenting hassles was higher among those reporting more experiences of stress. The intensity of parenting hassles was also higher – particularly among those who reported three or more stresses. The number of stresses showed no significant difference between the positive or negative discipline scores.

Support

Most parents in the study had at least three sources of support, including (most prominently) family, early childhood teachers and centres, friends and partners. Other professionals, such as Plunket nurses and doctors, played a role for about a third of parents. Books and written material were also mentioned by about a third of parents, and a further third had attended parenting courses. Parents who had more support used more positive disciplinary techniques, and parents who had less support used more negative techniques.

Conclusions and implications

The study suggests a more favourable picture of New Zealand parents' disciplinary practice than previous research, showing that the majority of parents took an authoritative (firm but warm) approach. Parents reported that they predominantly used positive disciplinary methods such as praise and rewards, and while punitive methods such as smacking or shouting were used, they were much more infrequent. It may be that recent changes in the law, and public campaigns against family violence, are beginning to change the attitudes and practices of parents. Despite the strong influence of their own upbringing on parenting, there were various other important influences and sources of support and advice for parenting in most families. About one in 10 families lacked support, and could have benefited from more social contact and responsive services. Professionals who work with parents (such as early childhood teachers) would benefit from specific professional development programmes focused on discipline, and future media campaigns could help to continue to change attitudes towards more effective parenting and more rewarding family life.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

This project is an empirical study (combining qualitative and quantitative methods) focusing on how families with young children approach the task of disciplining their children, the factors which influence their approach to discipline and the effect of past and current life contexts.

Research questions

1. What do New Zealand families with children under five believe about appropriate Disciplinary practices for children?

2. What are the range and typical uses of discipline in New Zealand families?

3. How are families' disciplinary practices influenced by their children's age and other characteristics, their ethnicity, religion, income and family structure?

4. How are families' disciplinary practices influenced by context and events over time?

5. What type of support (if any) do families receive for parenting their young children, and if they do get support, does it meet their needs?

1.2 Background

Definition

"Discipline is guidance of children's moral, emotional and physical development, enabling them to take responsibility for themselves when they are older" (Smith, Gollop, Taylor, & Marshall, 2005, p. 2). Discipline helps children become aware of the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and teaches them cultural norms and values for relating to the world around them. While discipline is often thought to be the same as punishment, it is not. Punishment is just one aspect of discipline, since good discipline emphasises instruction about what is valuable and the consequences of actions (Holden, 2002).

1.2.1 Rationale for study

Disciplinary practices within families can have a lifelong effect on children's wellbeing (Straus, 1994), and are a particular concern in the context of worsening figures on child maltreatment and deaths in New Zealand (Kiro, 2005). The passing into law of the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2007 on 21 June 2007 made New Zealand the first English-speaking country in the world to abolish the use of force for the purpose of correcting children. This legal change has accelerated the demands for the support and education of parents in the use of alternative approaches to family discipline. Knowing more about the demands, constraints and nature of current family practices will provide useful information to assist with supporting families.

While the issue of physical punishment as a disciplinary technique generates a great deal of controversy, the issue of family discipline and the focus of this research is wider. This project looks at broader issues of how families with young children approach the task of guiding young children to behave appropriately, the challenges they face in doing so and what works most effectively for them within everyday family life. The focus is not just on physical punishment, but on the variety of disciplinary approaches that New Zealand families use. Previous research has relied on broad survey data, has lacked observational contextualised data and has had a narrow focus on physical punishment (Smith et al, 2005). An understanding of family life in context is more likely to provide a better basis for policy or intervention work, and help to inform professional development programmes for professionals who work with families in New Zealand. The study will also build theoretical understanding of the ecological context which frames family discipline practices (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

1.2.2 Previous research

Research conducted over three decades by James and Jane Ritchie (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1970, 1978, 1981, 1993, 1997), most of which has focused on the use of physical punishment, suggests that New Zealand parents are inclined towards negative methods of child discipline, such as scolding, shouting and smacking. Little change was apparent in a 1988 survey from the one undertaken in 1981 (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1993), and in the late 1990s more than half of both mothers and fathers continued to hit their children once a week or more, which was unchanged since the previous decade (Ritchie, 2002). Many parents, though, were not happy with the effectiveness of physical punishment, and said that they used it

because they did not know what else to do. Maxwell (1995) also found that most parents (88 percent) were in favour of physical punishment. Almost one in five parents (17 percent and 16 percent) thought that it was acceptable to hit a teenage son or daughter. About a third (36 percent) had smacked their pre-school child with the hand in the past week, but only one percent had used an implement such as a stick. Maxwell found that younger, more affluent and better-educated parents were less likely to approve of corporal punishment, and that the use of more positive approaches was increasing.

Only 10 percent of adolescents in the Christchurch longitudinal study (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1997) reported never being physically punished. A large proportion (78 percent) said that their parents had seldom used physical punishment, and less than one in 10 (eight percent) reported the regular use of physical punishment. In contrast, a more recent study of children's perspectives on discipline (Dobbs, 2005; Dobbs, Smith, & Taylor, 2006) showed that 92 percent of children reported experiencing physical punishment, and that harsh punishment, including the use of implements, was not uncommon. Children described parents as being angry when they used physical punishment and inconsistent in its application. They also said that it was often the first parental response to misbehaviour, rather than a last resort.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner; (Wood, 2008) carried out a survey of public attitudes to physical punishment in 2007. More than half (58 percent) of participants agreed with a statement that it was acceptable to use physical punishment in certain circumstances, 20 percent disagreed and 20 percent were unsure. Another question asked whether participants agreed that physical punishment should be part of disciplining children. In contrast to their response to the first question, less than a third (30 percent) agreed with this statement, while over a third (37 percent) disagreed and a third (32 percent) were unsure. Another survey question asked whether participants agreed that children were entitled to the same protection from assault as adults, and the responses indicated overwhelming agreement (89 percent when it was asked first, and 84 percent when asked later in the same survey). In response to a question about agreement with the law change prohibiting the use of physical punishment, 43 percent

were supportive of the law change, 28 percent were opposed and 26 percent were unsure. The survey suggests that the public was not particularly supportive of physical punishment, but that a sizeable proportion of them wanted to retain the option to use it. There were also diverse views amongst the people surveyed, with no one view dominating.

Another recent study suggests that attitudes to the use of physical punishment have changed in New Zealand since the 1980s and 1990s. A Ministry of Health survey (2008) of 17,000 New Zealanders, A Portrait of Health (carried out at the same time as the current study from 2006 to 2007), included a section on the use of physical punishment. When they were asked the type of discipline they had used in the last four weeks, two out of three parents said that they had used explanation or discussion, but only one out of 22 parents had used physical punishment. Verbal reprimands were used by almost two out of three parents, and isolation by almost one in two parents. Fewer than one in three parents (29.8 percent) who had used physical punishment in the last four weeks considered it effective. Pacific boys were more than twice as likely to have been physically punished in the previous four weeks as other children. The prevalence for Māori (14 percent) was in between the prevalence for European (9.6 percent) and Pacific (16.9 percent), while the lowest prevalence of all was for Asians (six percent).

Wilkestedt (2005) has shown that the attitudes and practices of New Zealand parents are in sharp contrast to those of Swedish parents, who are more likely to use distraction and reasoning when disciplining children, while New Zealand parents were more likely to use physical punishment and coercive verbal control. New Zealand parents valued parental rights more than children's rights, while Swedish parents valued children's rights and showed more warmth and concern towards their children. Wilkestedt also showed that attitudes towards violence and values regarding parental rights, warmth and knowledge of children's development, all related to the level of use of physical punishment. Wilkestedt suggested that parents would be less likely to use physical punishment if they received information about its unacceptability.

A recent study (Lawrence & Smith, 2009) suggests that family discipline is a central concern for professionals in family support, child health, early childhood teaching

and social work roles. These professionals reported that New Zealand parents regularly sought advice from them about family discipline. They said that most parents acknowledged that they used physical punishment, but many expressed the wish to learn about more positive approaches to discipline. Professionals believed that in the event of a law change (which later took place), parents would need additional support in the use of alternative approaches, and that this would make their professional role more demanding. Very few professionals had been trained to assist parents with discipline issues, suggesting a need for more resources and training for professionals working with families.

1.2.3 Theoretical framework

This study is concerned with the interaction between context and family discipline, so an ecological perspective is appropriate, since it places the family within a framework of community, culture and society. The nature of the discipline used in families is clearly influenced by the context of risk or support within communities (Garbarino, 2001). Poverty, parental mental illness and unemployment, for example, are all factors which adversely affect how families interact with their children, and these factors are influenced by the policies, institutions, laws and values of the wider society.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) portrays the individual family as a microsystem influenced by social and economic factors which support or undermine the capacity of the family to nurture their children. The macrosystem refers to consistent patterns of organisation and beliefs within cultures or subcultures, which are shared by other members of the society or group. The macrosystem around violence, including its use within families, is very important in how parents discipline their children. In Sweden, for example, there is a very low tolerance and generally negative attitude towards the use of physical punishment, which is reflected in their laws and other social policies (such as the provision of support and education for parents) (Durrant, 2003). In Sweden the macrosystem of laws and public education have changed the way that parents think about their relationship and interactions with their children. A positive statement about children's entitlement to respect and a good upbringing (and not to be subjected to physical punishment) is

included in Sweden's Civil Code rather than its Penal Code (Durrant, 2004).

In contrast, New Zealand's law about the use of physical punishment is part of the Crimes Act and is focused on what parents are not permitted to do rather than what children are entitled to. The introduction of the law was not accompanied by an education campaign, although some efforts (such as the SKIP[1] project) were introduced to help parents use positive approaches to discipline. The SKIP project probably reached a relatively small number of parents because of limitations of funding and difficulties with accessing low socio-economic families. It might be argued that the equivocal support for a change in the law in New Zealand has led to the avoidance of a public education media campaign to help parents understand why and how the law changed, and what parents are now not permitted to do (Taylor & Smith, 2008). The macrosystem is therefore a key consideration for the issue of discipline. Not only does it influence how parents control their children's behaviour, but it also influences their expectations of what is appropriate for children's behaviour, at different ages.

Exosystems are another part of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. They refer to settings which influence children indirectly, such as parental employment or support networks of families, friends or professionals (such as Plunket nurses or early childhood teachers). Mesosytems are links between different settings that control the child, such as the school or early childhood centre and the home. Where parents have a warm relationship with teachers (or other professionals) and feel comfortable with them and able to communicate with them, this is likely to have a positive influence on their approaches to family discipline. Douglas Powell argues that Bronfenbrenner has had a powerful influence on thinking about the best way to intervene in families:

> Among his most often cited conclusions is the call for 'ecological intervention' that enables a family to function as an optimal child-rearing system. These supports include health care, nutrition, housing, employment, and 'opportunity and status for parenthood' (Powell, 1997, p. 9).

Belsky's (1984) ecological model of parenting emphasises other important factors in influencing

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[1]SKIP – Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents

parent-child interactions, namely the forces emanating from the individual parent or child. The characteristics of the child are not just an outcome of parenting, but they influence how parents interact with them – a fact which many parents are familiar with, through having had children who were very different. Temperament is one factor (Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). A child who is happy, smiling and responsive from infancy is likely to evoke quite different reactions from parents, from a child who is withdrawn or irritable. Previous research (Gollop, 2005) has shown that parents are more likely to physically punish boys than girls, and that the peak use of parental punishment is for children between the age of three and five years. A recent Ministry of Health (2008) survey showed peak use of physical punishment between two and four years. Although there was no difference across all age ranges between the physical punishment of boys and girls, boys in the two- to four-year-old group were more likely to be physically punished. Parents' characteristics, such as psychological 'make-up' or educational levels, also have a major impact on their parenting (Gollop, 2005). Parents' childhood history is a particularly potent influence, and there is widespread evidence that parents tend to use similar disciplinary practices to those they experienced as children. It is important to note, however, that childhood history does not predetermine parental discipline practices, as there is evidence that parents can and do reject the practices of their own parents (Gollop, 2005; Russell, 1996).

Baumrind (1991) distinguished three main types of parental practice – authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Authoritarian parents use power-assertive, prohibitive and punitive strategies (such as rejection and control) which emphasise absolute obedience. The use of physical punishment tends to be part of the power-assertive repertoire of authoritarian parents. Authoritative parents are described as warm and responsive, using supportive and inductive techniques (reasoning and guidance), and providing firm boundaries. They are sensitive to children and have reasonable expectations for their behaviour. The focus of authoritative parenting is less on strict adherence to rules, than on explaining the rules and helping children understand the reasons behind them. Permissive parents are responsive, warm and accepting and are non-demanding, but do not carefully monitor and control their children's behaviour. We asked parents in this study about their style of parenting, and classified their responses according to Baumrind's categories.

2. METHOD

This research uses a multi-method approach, combining semi-structured interviews, parental diaries and a standardised measurement tool, the Parenting Daily Hassles scale. Both interviews and diaries provided data which were later analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The Parenting Daily Hassles scale was a quantitative source of data, which enabled comparison with norms indicating the degree of stress being felt by samples of parents in the United Kingdom and the United States. This multi-method approach allows cross-validation and cross-fertilisation of research procedures, which add to the validity and richness of the research (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). The quantitative data were useful for providing the overall picture of the data, using descriptive statistics to look at central tendency and variation, and inferential statistics to look at the relationship between variables, and comparisons between subgroups within the sample. The qualitative data, on the other hand, focused on the meaning and perspectives of the parents who participated in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000). It sought to understand how parents made sense of their lives and experiences (Duncan, Bowden, & Smith, 2005) and to study in detail the processes and settings in which they participated, in order to understand their approach to family discipline (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Very few studies have gone beyond one-off reports from parents of remembered past events to access data on family discipline (Smith & Brooks-Gunn, 1997), so there are considerable methodological limitations with many previous studies (Benjet & Kazdin, 2003; Locke & Prinz, 2002; Pitzer, 1997). This study is more ecologically valid than many previous studies in this area, because parents provided us with immediate data in context and over time in the diaries, rather than relying completely on retrospective responses. In addition, the study provides triangulation (and helps to establish the validity of the research) by using different types of data – interview, diary and a standardised scale.

2.1 The sample

We chose to focus on the parents or whānau of under-five-year-old children in this research, since previous research has suggested that it is during the pre-school years that many families find discipline problematic (and are more inclined to use physical methods of discipline). Toddlers and pre-schoolers provide a particular challenge to effective parental control (Nobes & Smith, 1997; Wissow, 2002). Durrant, Ensom, and Wingert (2003) suggest that younger children's high activity, exploration, drive for independence, negativism and impulsivity make their behaviour particularly hard to control. While all of the target children in the study were under five years of age, parents often referred to issues with their older children. The study aimed to interview 'ordinary' families with no known history of child abuse and neglect. Parents, or extended family or whānau members with significant childcare roles, were interviewed.

Parents and carers of children under five years of age were recruited through methods including posters and flyers displayed in public places (doctors' surgeries, early childhood centres, supermarkets); press releases in local and community newspapers throughout New Zealand; and popular internet sites for parents such as Little Treasures and the Trade Me community pages. Our previous work (Lawrence & Smith, 2009) with focus group interviews of professionals working with families gave us valuable networks from which to recruit a sample. Professionals who worked with families with young children distributed information on the study to parents who used their service. An information pamphlet about the project was given or sent to any parents who expressed interest in the project. When they telephoned to express interest, we mailed out further information about the project and a consent form. Once we had received the signed consent form, we contacted the parents to arrange an interview time.

The sample consisted of caregivers from 100 families. In 17 cases two caregivers from the family were interviewed, bringing the total sample size of parents to 117. In the majority of cases, the primary caregiver was interviewed, usually the mother (but in 18 cases the father, one grandfather and two grandmothers). Table 1 provides demographic information about the sample, showing the numbers and percentages of parents according to gender, age, household income, region, family structure and educational background. The table suggests that the majority of the sample (just over half) were in their thirties, had a household income somewhat above average and were in an intact family.

Despite strenuous efforts to recruit Māori and Pasifika parents, we were not as successful as we had hoped in achieving this. Three-quarters of the sample were European. The percentage of Māori in the sample was almost one in 10 – slightly lower than the population percentage, but not too far away. Unfortunately only three Pacific Island parents participated in the study, but 10 parents were of 'other ethnicity'. Three participants did not state their ethnicity. Over a quarter of the main carers were wage earners – either part-time or full-time. The median family income range was $50,000–60,000.

TABLE 1: Demographic information about families

Gender	N	Percent
Male	19	16.2
Female	98	83.8
Age of parent/caregiver		
Under 20	5	4.3
21–30	28	23.9
31–40	60	51.3
41–50	21	18
51–60	2	1.8
61+	1	.9
Household income	**N**	**Percent**
No response	5	5
Under $10k	2	2
$10k–$20k	5	5
$20,001–$30k	4	4
$30,001–$40k	11	11
$40,001–$50k	11	11
$50,001–$60k	16	16
$60,001–$70k	13	13
$70,001–$80k	11	11
$80,001–$90k	6	6
Over $90k	16	16
Region		
North Island	39	39
South Island	61	61
Family structure		
Single parent	19	16
Educational qualification	**Mean**	**SD**
None	5	4.3
Secondary	39	33.3
Tertiary	70	59.8
Missing	3	2.6

Table 2 shows the geographical spread of the study sample. Over half (61 percent) of the families lived in the South Island, with one in five (20 percent) living within the Dunedin city boundary. Fifteen percent of participating families lived in rural areas – nine in the South Island and six in the North Island.

TABLE 2: Geographical spread of participating families
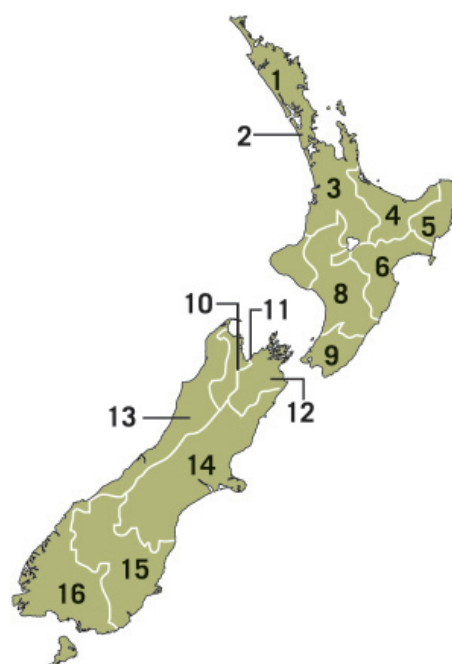
Map key	Regional	Participants
1	Northland	4
2	Auckland	7
3	Waikato	4
4	Bay of Plenty	
5	East Cape	
6	Hawke's Bay	4
7	Taranaki	
8	Manawatu-Wanganui	7
9	Wellington	13
10	Tasman	
11	Nelson	2
12	Marlborough	
13	West Coast	
14	Canterbury	8
15	Otago	36 (Dunedin = 20)
16	Southland	15

TABLE 3: Number of children in the family

Number of children	% Children all ages	% Children under 5
One	27	52
Two	49	43
Three	19	5
Four	4	0
Six	1	0

2.2 Ethics

An application for ethical approval was made to the University of Otago Ethics Committee in September 2006, and approval was received in the same month. The ethical procedures of the study included informed consent, assurance of confidentiality, right to withdraw at any stage, secure storage of data and an offer of support where necessary if the interview caused distress or anxiety. Participants were advised that if any information came to light which concerned their safety (or the child's safety) the researchers would have to contact Child, Youth and Family. While no such safety issues did arise, the interviews did reveal many parents who would have benefited from the provision of further resources and support. When this was indicated, the researchers provided the parents with written information (specifically a brief report, Smith, Gollop, Taylor & Marshall, 2004, funded by the Commissioner for Children's Office and designed to give parents guidance on disciplinary issues), or suggested sources of professional support such as parenting programmes.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Demographic questionnaire

The parents were sent a simple one-page demographic questionnaire before the interview. It collected information about the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, income and educational qualification level. The questionnaires were picked up when the interview took place. If the parent had not completed them (or had lost their copies) the interviewer went through them with the parent and filled in the form with them at the end of the interview.

2.3.2 The semi-structured interview

The interview schedule was developed by the two researchers in consultation with colleagues at the Children's Issues Centre. Early drafts of the interview were piloted with four parents, who made suggestions for further editing of the questions. The interview schedule is included in Appendix A. It began with an introduction and clarification of confidentiality issues by the researcher, followed by the interviewer ascertaining consent. (In the vast majority of cases, written consent had been obtained before the interview, but if the consent form had not been returned it was picked up at the interview.) The interview was focused on a particular child, always a pre-schooler and usually the older pre-schooler if there was more than one. While an outline of the questions was given in the interview schedule, the schedule was used flexibly (without following the exact wording), with the interviewer spontaneously prompting if an interesting line of discussion emerged. The research approach was to allow the parents to use their own voice and experiences, rather than be constrained by the interview questions. The questions traversed approaches to discipline, what had worked for parents and where they received information and support. The interviewer avoided asking the participants to choose from a list of fixed options, and encouraged them to give their own views, unhindered by a highly structured interview schedule. For example, instead of presenting a list of possible approaches (praise, physical punishment etc) and asking parents if they used them or not, the interviewer asked "Can you tell me the disciplinary techniques you have used with [child's name]?" This report focuses on the parts of the interview which relate to the research questions set out earlier.

Interviews were coded using a coding schedule. The coder listened to the taped interview, and coded a series of issues numerically. For example, when parents were asked who had provided them with background information about discipline, we coded a number of options (current family members, own experience as a child, friends, books/magazines, own education, TV, internet, church, professionals, cultural background and other) as either one or zero. Thirty-three issues were coded numerically in this way. In addition, rather than fully transcribing the tape, we flagged five themes for full transcription: approach to discipline; what works and what doesn't; what influenced them; types of stress experienced; and types of support experienced.

Reliability of coding was ascertained by randomly selecting coding sheets for 10 participants (8.6 percent of the total) and having two people independently code them. Agreements and disagreements for the 33 codes were then counted. The percentage of agreement was calculated by the following formula:

Percent agreement = [agreements/agreements + disagreements] X 100.

The percentage agreement was calculated to be 91.54 percent for the 10 cases selected, indicating an acceptable level of consistency between coders.

2.3.3 The diary

In order to look at disciplinary practices over time and in context, families were given a diary form (Appendix B) about disciplinary practices after the interview. Parents were asked to complete the diary sheet for three different days during the following two weeks – two on weekdays and one on a weekend. For each day, parents filled out three rating scales (rating the child's behaviour and their disciplinary encounters) and a checklist of 21 possible disciplinary techniques (such as withdrawal of privilege). They were also asked to briefly describe two disciplinary incidents for each day (two examples were given as models). Although it was designed to be simple, fast and user-friendly, not all parents returned the diaries. The total number of diaries returned was 51.

2.3.4 The Parenting Daily Hassles scale

The Parenting Daily Hassles scale was developed to measure routine challenges and everyday caregiving demands for parents (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). The emphasis on context fitted in with our interest in how everyday events influence parents' approaches to discipline. Most parents are well aware of the daily hassles of being a parent, but few research studies explore how these common everyday events challenge parents' disciplinary skills (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). The survey instrument, the Parenting Daily Hassles scale (PDH) (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), was used to establish which situations caused parenting difficulties, and the intensity of those difficulties. The measure was completed by the main carer, and referred to the pre-school child about whom the parent was interviewed.

The scale is a simple one-page rating scale of 20 different potential parenting hassles, and the parent rates all 20 items for both frequency and intensity. The frequency of occurrences over the previous six-month period is rated on a four-point scale (rarely, sometimes, a lot, constantly) and the intensity of each hassle on a five-point scale from one (low) to five (high). Examples of the items are continually cleaning up messes of toys or food and difficulties in getting children ready for outings and leaving on time. A high score on either frequency or intensity indicates a high level of hassle for the parent. The scale has good internal consistency – $\alpha.81$ for frequency, .9 for intensity (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). The PDH scale questionnaires were sent out in advance and collected at the interview. Where the interviews were conducted by telephone the participant was provided with a prepaid envelope. We received 113 completed PDH scales.

2.4 Procedure

The interviews took place between December 2006 and July 2008, with 69 families interviewed at home and 31 by telephone. Parents and extended family members with significant childcare roles were interviewed. Family members chose to be interviewed together or separately. Families completed a demographic questionnaire and a PDH questionnaire, which had been sent to them before the interview. Researchers re-contacted the families at least twice if they did not return the diary.

2.5 Data analysis

Qualitative analysis of the five issues transcribed from the recorded interviews was derived from thematic analysis and research questions. The computer program SPSS was used to analyse quantitative data, including descriptive and inferential statistics. Dependent variables included scores on coded interview and diary data and the PDH scores, and independent variables included the demographic variables listed in Table 1. Analysis of variance was used to compare means of discrete groups (gender, single or couple), and correlation to compare more continuous variables (such as number of children and income).

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Parents' beliefs about discipline

3.1.1 The meaning of discipline

TABLE 4: Meaning of the term *discipline*

Meaning	N	Percent
Socialisation	91	77.8
Other punishment	23	19.7
Physical punishment	22	18.8
Positive	8	6.8
Other	7	6

The first section of the interview was concerned with the meaning and origins of parents' beliefs about discipline. First we asked parents what the term *discipline* meant to them. Table 4 shows that the majority of parents (77.8 percent) saw discipline as socialisation (guiding children's behaviour to meet expectations). The following are examples of socialisation responses:

> Just making sure that they are following what is expected behaviours … trying to get appropriate behaviour on track. (Participant 60)

> Setting boundaries and enforcing boundaries. Setting expectations making sure [that there are] boundaries and consequences. (Participant 59)

> What you do to teach your child the right way to go about things and it also means having discipline; having self-control. Being able to monitor yourself. (Participant 100)

Discipline was identified by about a fifth of the sample with physical punishment, and by another fifth with other punishment:

> When I hear the term discipline I think of standing in the corner and anger and the strap and fear. (Participant 89)

> Discipline can range from anything in this house. We have spanking offences, well-documented offences like unclicking your safety belt is a spanking offence. Time out, yelling, there are other forms of discipline... (Participant 54)

> Punishment is the first thing that comes to mind. (Participant 67)

> The naughty corner. Supernanny was my first thought. (Participant 72)

Only a very small number of parents (six percent) saw discipline totally in terms of doing something positive. This is exemplified by the following response:

> For me gentle guidance. I think of it as a positive thing. I don't use any kind of punishment at this stage. (Participant 83)

A small number of responses were unclassifiable into the other four categories:

> When I think of discipline, I think of kids that don't have it. All I can think of is those kids, those little kids you see at the restaurant or the supermarket running around. (Participant 5)

3.1.2 Parenting styles

TABLE 5: Parenting approach

Parenting approach	N	Percent
Authoritative	45	38.5
Authoritarian	4	3.4
Permissive	12	10.3
Mixture	44	37.6
Other	1	.9
Missing data	11	9.4

An authoritative parenting approach is characterised by warmth, responsiveness, involvement and reasoning, combined with firm boundaries, while authoritarian approaches involve power-assertion and demands for complete obedience without reasoning. Permissive styles are characterised by warmth, but low monitoring and expectations (Smith et al, 2005). Table 5 shows that parents were most likely to describe their approach as authoritative (38.5 percent) or as a mixture of approaches (37.6 percent). They were unlikely to describe themselves as permissive (10.3 percent) or authoritarian (3.4 percent). (They did not use these words but we categorised the responses according to our definitions above.) Below are examples of different responses.

Authoritative response

I am ordered and organised, not easy-going. I am very routine-orientated. It is settling for me and them that we know what we are doing. We always have something to do with the kids and I share that with them so they know. There are no surprises. Lots of hugs and cuddles. Very physical and loving and happy. (Participant 28)

I am easy-going but I want him to know where he stands as well and things that are right. I want to be someone he can trust; when he is older he can come to me when he has problems. Have the confidence to tell me rather than hide it and not tell me … gotta stick to it or he is going to think if I go on long enough Mummy will buy them for me. (Participant 90)

Authoritarian responses

Spare the rod and spoil the child. I would rather smack my child's backside for lighting a match than having the fire department here for burning down a house. (Participant 56)

When Mum's away [referring to partner] I get on top of them hard and fast, not violently. I'm in charge. Mum's away. I am the one you are taking notice of and after 30 minutes they will start taking heed of it. K [mother] is too easy with J [child]; especially I would give J a bit more of a decent hiding. I would straighten them out a bit. We are advocates of a smacked bum. (Participant 6)

Permissive response

I think I am quite relaxed. Promote her self-esteem and to help her make her own choices. I have no problems with what she wears during the day as long as she is clean and warm. We don't have a set bedtime. I don't have many rules. I am fully into negotiating. (Participant 73)

Mixed response

I am firm on some behaviour. I am really strict on the physical behaviour. I am easy-going on a lot of other things. I always make sure I have time on my side and I have a big philosophy of it ... it doesn't matter in the big picture of things. I am not ever going to scrap over food. If you don't want to eat I don't care. I am firm on bedtime. I am firm on specific things. (Participant 95)

3.1.3 Influences on parenting
TABLE 6: Influences on parenting

Influences	N	Percent
Own experience as a child	93	79.5
Books/magazines	68	58.1
Current family members	48	41
TV/radio	43	36.8
Current friends	41	35
Professionals	36	30.8
Own professional education	36	30.8
Other	30	25.6
Religion	19	16.2
Internet	18	15.4
Cultural background	11	9.4

Table 6 shows responses to a question about who had influenced parents or provided them with information about parenting. Parents often made responses in several categories. More than three-quarters (79.5 percent) of parents felt that they had been influenced by the way they had been brought up as a child. More than half (58.1 percent) said that books and magazines had been an influence. Other influences mentioned by more than a third of parents were current family members (41 percent), TV and radio (36.8 percent), and current friends (35 percent). Almost a third (30.8 percent) of parents mentioned their own professional education as a factor – a less powerful influence than family. The same proportion mentioned other professionals had provided information and influenced them, so professionals did have an input for one in three of these parents. The large proportion of people citing TV and radio as an influence is probably a result of programmes like Little Angels and Supernanny, which were often mentioned by parents. It is interesting that parents were more likely to mention their family (past and present) as being influential, but that religion, the internet and cultural background were mentioned by only a small proportion of parents. Below are examples of influences on parents.

Own upbringing

Seeing and hearing what happens around your own personal experience when you were growing up,

how your parents disciplined you and whether you think that's right or wrong, and decide to go with it or [get rid of it] if need be. (Participant 27)

I was raised with morals and raised to treat people as you would want to be treated. (Participant 35)

Probably just the example of my parents. We were just expected to behave. There was no question about that. My Mother would have been the main disciplinarian because my Dad often wasn't there. (Participant 51)

Written information

P: Handout – Arohamowai – Born to Learn – Family Start. And it's a brilliant handout. I'm finding it interesting.

I: Do they have any influence on what you do with your own children?

P: Oh big influence, yup, small things. (Participant 34)

When my first son was born I did a lot of reading, being at home and no job to go to, and so yeah I did struggle in those first years of being at home ... so I spent a lot of time reading around the subject of parenting. (Participant 37)

I read that Christopher Green book and one thing that really stuck out to me: he draws an analogy to being one of those American preachers in the pulpit. This is the way it is gonna be brothers. Yep, this is the way it is gonna be. And I do that a lot. I keep that in my mind. I am boss. (Participant 95)

Current family members

If I'm looking for assistance from family I've got an aunty who works with autistic kids and I'll talk to her. I tend to prefer if I'm getting it from people, peers, that I respect and I like the way they are bringing up children. (Participant 2)

So through watching my sisters raise their children and things like that. (Participant 30)

TV and radio

I guess one useful thing I picked up from those TV programmes was the idea of just using time out for really serious stuff rather than resorting to it for every little thing, so that way I've still got it for really

serious things ... and it gives a really clear message. (Participant 43)

We watch Supernanny. I dunno, most things I kind of know about from that programme but I suppose it reiterates things to you that you think God, yeah I must keep doing that, like we both know that we give [child] too many warnings … we should just warn and then act. (Participant 85)

Friends

P: Oh, yeah we love talking about our kids. All we do is talk about our kids.

I: So you would talk about problems?

P: Yeah, a lot of us have similar parenting skills. If I saw a friend hit her child I would most probably open my big mouth. (Participant 34)

From [friend] and Playcentre. Very supportive and hopefully I am able to impart some tips to others now. I remember someone saying to me when [child] was having a tantrum, someone said, this is when you walk away because I was trying to engage him because I was embarrassed. That was just a supporting gentle way of giving me a bit of a hint and it worked. (Participant 84)

Professionals

And there was one time when she [early childhood teacher] put me onto someone else who was actually a supervisor at the childcare centre … so she just came up to visit me. I asked for help with [child] for behaviour management for [child], and her philosophy was different to mine but I still found it really helpful. (Participant 7)

I did ask the Plunket nurse a couple of times, but it's a bit hard for them to do a lot cos they're not really in the situation, a bit distant … when I've talked to the Plunket nurse about it, she says it sounds like you are doing the right things, are on the right track. (Participant 85)

Own professional education

I: I guess you used your training as a teacher?

I think so, and you know I had eight years in the classroom before I had [child] so lots of experiences and lots of professional development on behaviour with young, and you never think you're going to

have to use that on your own kids but you do. (Participant 13)

Despite the strong influence of their own upbringing for many parents, there were several examples of parents stating that they deliberately did not use the same method as their parents had, because they wanted to bring up their children differently:

> I don't use smacking and physical punishment but I find it difficult because that is the way that I was disciplined as a kid ... and so the best thing I do is just learn from friends and the way I did it is maybe lots of treats and raise my voice quite a bit. (Participant 16)

> We were sort of brought up with the whack, you know, so we sort of lived off the wooden spoon and the jandal… I think I'm just trying to just sort of flush that away a bit … like considering how big I am. One swipe and I could probably kill him. (Participant 47)

> We are bringing up our children quite differently from our parents. A general move away from smacking children. More time out. Sometimes I think my parents are secretly thinking that [child] needs a good hiding and we have had discussions around that. (Participant 84)

To sum up this section, the majority of parents believed that discipline meant socialising children – that is, teaching, controlling and guiding their behaviour so that their behaviour fell within acceptable boundaries. About one in five parents associated discipline with the use of either physical or other punishment as a means of achieving control. Only a very small number of parents saw discipline as positive. On the other hand, when asked about their own approach to discipline, very few said that they used power-assertive and authoritarian approaches. The majority said their approach was warm but firm, or a mixture of positive and negative. Only about one in 10 parents said they used a permissive approach. Their own experiences as a child were mentioned by eight out of 10 parents as an influence on their own parenting. Written material, current family members, the media and friends were listed by more than a third of parents as influences. Just under a third mentioned professionals and their own professional education as having influenced them. Religion, the internet and cultural background were only identified as influences by a minority of parents.

3.2 The range, typical uses and effectiveness of disciplinary techniques

There were two sources of data on the question of what type of disciplinary practices parents used – the interview and the diary. We begin by presenting the interview data, some of which has been written up previously (Lawrence & Smith, 2008). Selected sections of this previously published article have been included in this report (with the publisher's permission). The first interview question relevant to typical uses was: "Can you tell me about the different disciplinary techniques you have used with [child]?" Table 7 summarises parents' responses to this question, and to two other questions: "What have you found to be the most effective form of discipline with [child's name]?" and "Could you give me examples of approaches you had used in the past which have not worked?" The source of the diary data was a checklist, which is described below.

3.2.1 Effective form of discipline

Table 7 (column headed Effective) collates parents' answers to the interview question "What have you found to be the most effective form of discipline with [child's name]?" No checklist was used, so parents' free responses were categorised (it should be noted that this asked for 'most effective', so the approach could be ineffective at other times). All parents considered more than one technique to be effective, and the type of discipline often depended on the behaviour displayed by the child and the context. It should also be noted that people who had not previously reported using the technique could still respond on its effectiveness (or ineffectiveness):

> Different things for different behaviours and, possibly also, how I'm feeling as to what's effective, how much energy I'm prepared to put into that behaviour. (Participant 77)

According to their interview responses, the most commonly used methods (by more than three-quarters of parents) were time out, distraction and reward systems. More than half of parents used reasoning, withdrawal of privileges and praise. Just under half (41 percent) smacked or shouted and only about a third ignored the child or used hugs and smiles. The least-commonly used technique (18 percent) was making children apologise, though it was more often used together with time out or reasoning. These data do not provide an indication of the frequency of usage for

particular families, but indicate how many families used the technique.

TABLE 7: Use and effectiveness of disciplinary techniques

Techniques	Use (%)	Effective	Ineffective
Time out	82	43	20
Distraction	77	27	9
Reward system	76	24	15
Praise	69	11	3
Withdrawal of privileges	60	30	10
Reasoning	58	10	6
Smack	41	9	34
Shout	41	5	26
Ignore	38	5	8
Hugs and smiles	31	9	1
Make children apologise	18	2	-

Time out, distraction, the withdrawal of privileges and reward systems were the three techniques considered to be the most effective, reflecting the order of how commonly they were used (Table 7). Time out was reported to be effective by the largest percentage of parents (43 percent). Parents use time out in a variety of ways, often adapting the method to suit the situation in which the misbehaviour is taking place. Many parents reported that they used one minute per year of age as the duration for time out. Time out occurred in various places, including the laundry, bedroom, bathroom, corners, steps, chairs and even in the car:

> Time out definitely gives a very strong message that we didn't like what he did and I mean the fact that we haven't used it lately possibly means that it did work and it did get the message across. (Participant 43)

> Sit him down in a certain area and explain to him why he is there. Get him to sit there and do his time on his little spot. A minute for each year he is born. He sits there for three minutes. I go back to him and talk to him and he apologises and then carries on … it gives him time to think about what he has done. (Participant 58)

> …It [time out] can get used in the shopping mall, on the aeroplane, it gets used in the car. (Participant 78)

Time out was used with all ages, including children as young as one year:

> I give him one warning. I tell him not to go near the steps. If he does it again I find him a naughty corner. He stays for a minute which is good cos he doesn't need any more. A minute's long enough. (Participant 90)

Various adaptations of time out were common. The 'thinking mat' was used by one family:

> We use a thinking mat, not a naughty spot like Supernanny does … it can be anywhere, it used to be [a mat] but now it can be anywhere … it can be the car, the trolley, anywhere, I just say I'm putting you on the thinking mat because ... and so it's not always naughtiness, it's just thoughtlessness, so it's training them for later to think about their actions, and we started doing it, yeah, when he was less than a year old even though Supernanny says no, they don't understand, well he certainly did, and he wouldn't get off, people say well how did you get him to stay on and I can't remember. But it's a really nice method because you don't need to raise your voice. (Participant 78)

Some parents found it difficult to be consistent with time out:

> …And I am supposed in theory to warn him if he carries on doing it but generally if he is really silly with his brother I put him straight on, which I really shouldn't do. He has to say sorry or he stays there. (Participant 79)

Just over one in four parents found distraction to be an effective approach:

> If they are playing up like … 'look at that big bird flying past,' and they are like 'where?'... And suddenly forget why they are crying. (Participant 54)

Reward systems were mentioned as effective by one in four parents. Star or sticker charts were the most common form of rewards, and had diverse formats, rewards and behavioural goals:

> We did it [star charts] for toilet training and it worked a treat. (Participant 97)

> We have the black witch and the red star on the fridge. They hate the black witch. Every red star is 10 cents and the black witch is 10 cents off. There is nothing to show for it [with gold stars] when I put up a black witch. What a howl! It is working – it is great. (Participant 6)

Withdrawal of privileges was considered to be effective by 30 percent of parents. The most common privileges taken away were toys and TV programmes:

> At the moment my big focus is on tidying his room, like I'll help him if he decides to do it, and if he decides he doesn't want to do it we take his toys away, anything that's on the floor gets taken away, but yeah, just taking away privileges. (Participant 85)

Praise was considered to be an effective technique by 11 percent of parents. As the following quotes illustrate, praise was used in various situations. The first example shows how this parent used praise with her three-year-old's toilet training:

> We shared the excitement with everyone. Let's phone grandma [about] doing poos on the toilet. There's only so much praise two people can give, but if you phone grandparents and friends ... a talk on the phone too. (Participant 73)

> …A lot of it's positive reinforcement in terms of compliments and really specific compliments … so it's like 'good crossing the road', 'nice walking beside mum', just really specific praise. (Participant 2)

> Lots of praise, so we've used praise to sort of try and shape his behaviour. Lots and lots of praise, particularly if he's been regularly doing something not right and if he does it well catching him and 'that's brilliant' and giving him a kiss or a cuddle. He loves doing the right thing – you can tell. (Participant 82)

Although 31 percent of parents gave examples during the interview of using kisses and hugs with their children to recognise good behaviour, many did not see this as discipline. A minority (10 percent) said that it was effective:

> I asked him to do something and he did it straight away, and so I said '[child's name], come here, you know how Mummy asked you to do that, you did it straight away, what a good boy!' and gave him a kiss and a hug. (Participant 85)

Less than one in 10 (nine percent) of families found smacking to be an effective discipline technique. Here are examples of parents who did think that smacking was effective:

> With K [child], a smack is the most effective. If she is sitting on M [brother] she will be told to get off. She will be given the count of three to get off,

she will be removed from him. She goes back and does it again, she will have her backside smacked. That works. One, two, three, then they know what's coming and she prepares herself and that's worse than the actual smack. I use the count on its own sometimes … come on get ready … one, two, three. (Participant 56)

> Personally I think that a child having a smack, sometimes it seems to be the only thing that works, and I don't agree in violence against children at all but I think a short sharp smack can be a useful tool to have, that's my honest opinion, I had that and I haven't had any lasting trauma from it or anything like that. (Participant 22)

Often, parents who saw smacking as effective did not use it frequently, and saw it as a last resort:

> Sometimes when you've tried everything else a short sharp tap does wonders I believe. (Participant 22)

> For me the hand-slapping is incredibly effective, only I think because I almost never use it. I think if it were to become more common then he would develop a tolerance to it, but it is so shocking to him that it corrects whatever it is immediately. (Participant 38)

> I do use smacking, I always said that I wouldn't, but one of the children responds to that reasonably well, and it's very much a last resort and I would never use an object. (Participant 77)

While 41 percent of parents shouted at children when they misbehaved, it was only considered to be effective by five percent, and examples of its effectiveness were hard to find:

> I do yell at them. Certainly brings them to a quick halt. (Participant 54)

Making children apologise was mentioned by only two percent of parents as an effective technique on its own. A parent who was dealing with her four-year-old biting a younger sibling said:

> We would actually show N [child] what he had done to L [brother] and explained to him that it was really naughty and we don't bite people. When he saw L [brother] crying and in as much pain as he was, that is doing more damage to N [child] than putting him in his room … he has to say sorry and give L [brother] a cuddle. (Participant 14)

3.2.2 Ineffective techniques

Parents were asked for examples of approaches they had used in the past which had not worked. Their answers have been collated in Table 7, p. 19 (the right-hand column). As with the previous question about effective techniques, parents usually mentioned more than one technique that had not worked for them. Over a third (34 percent) considered that smacking does not work as a discipline technique. Various reasons led parents to this conclusion, including their child's reaction (or lack of reaction):

> And I'd smack his hand but it wouldn't do anything, and my hand would be tingling and he wouldn't be crying, so he has got a high pain threshold. I thought 'this isn't right'. (Participant 78)

> We have tried smacking in the past and it didn't do anything at all. I smack on the legs because I think bottoms are not very good. We've threatened a lot with it, and it happens sometimes but not all that often, as an absolute last resort. (Participant 85)

What children seemed to learn from being smacked was that it is okay to hit when you are angry:

> We tried slapping him on the hand when he ran across the road without looking, no, he just started slapping us on the hand, so it had quite a negative effect cos he thought that's how you react when you get angry ... smack somebody on the hand. (Participant 29)

A quarter of parents found that shouting did not work as a discipline technique:

> I once believed that if I shouted enough that something would happen. Nothing happened! (Participant 72)

As the following examples show, some parents found that shouting did not work because of their child's personality and reaction to shouting:

> Her personality being the way it is, I have realised that a lot of yelling and shouting is not something that really works with her. It's getting to her level and talking to her about what she needs to do in order for her to listen to me. (Participant 35)

> Just scolding N [child] just makes him more defiant. N [child] will take me head-on. If I am shouting and scolding at him, unless I become an adult he will be shouting and scolding back too and that's when I have to back off and say, 'Okay N [child], let's re-talk this over.' Definitely just scolding

him does not work with N [child], he is far more defiant. (Participant 9)

Some parents felt uncomfortable and guilty when they resorted to shouting:

> I just get louder and start shouting more, that's been my downfall. When I was teaching it was my main aim, to keep my voice low, and not raise my voice, but of course when you've got your own kids it just creeps up again. (Participant 85)

Time out was the most popular punishment method used (by 82 percent) to discipline children, but it was described as ineffective for 20 percent of the families interviewed:

> I've tried the naughty step, time out, stuff like that. It sort of works with the little one – she is too young to understand – but I am trying to force it on her when she is young. But with E [child] it's too late. I put her in the hallway on a chair and she smashes that door with the chair and runs up and down. (Participant 96)

> T [child] doesn't deal with time out very well. I spent four hours one time trying to get her to sit on the chair. Never works. I don't care what the books say … you can't put her in her room because she won't stay there. I quite often have to sit and hold her to get her to calm down. I'll sit and wait for her to take her through. (Participant 1)

Despite saying that time out did not work, many of these parents still continue to use it to discipline their children. These findings suggest that parents could use assistance with using time out more effectively.

Fifteen percent of parents found reward systems ineffective. The main reason that most parents did not find the reward system worked was due to the way it was set up – they tried to cover too many objectives, or they had difficulty in keeping up the momentum and it took too long for the child to see a reward:

> It hasn't been entirely successful because there were too many things on it. I was reading about trying to concentrate on one thing for two weeks. When he got to 10 he could get a lolly. When he filled them all up he could choose a block. But it didn't get to that stage. (Participant 97)

Ten percent of families said that withdrawal of privileges did not work. The main examples given by the interviewees to illustrate the technique not working showed parents not carrying through with the withdrawal:

I've threatened to take things away from her and if I've done that it still hasn't resolved the issue because it's not related. (Participant 61)

I say 'Stop doing that. If you don't tidy your room I am taking the TV away. Or turn it off.' He's like 'Okay Mum, I'll do it.' [Then she says he just sits there and doesn't do it!] (Participant 42)

In summary, interviews showed that parents commonly use positive reinforcement (rewards, praise and reasoning), structuring the situation (distraction) and punishment (time out, withdrawal of privileges, smacking and shouting) to control children's behaviour. While positive methods were not always seen as discipline, they were on the whole thought to be effective ways of changing behaviour. More parents thought that time out was more effective than other forms of discipline, though withdrawal of privileges was also seen to be relatively effective. Only a small number of parents thought that smacking or shouting were effective disciplinary techniques, and most of those who did think smacking was effective used it infrequently and as a last resort (this was true of other punitive methods too).

Diary data

Parents[1] filled in the diary over three separate days (two weekdays and one weekend day). They first filled out three five-point Likert rating scales on how good the child's behaviour was, how positive their disciplinary encounters had been and how they felt about the way they dealt with their child's behaviour. They also noted whether the child had had a typical day or not. They then ticked off from a checklist which of 21 strategies they had used. Fifty-one people filled in the first day of the diary, 50 filled in the second day but only 39 completed the third day. These diary data provide a more immediate record of parents' usual disciplinary procedures than the interview data, despite the smaller numbers of participants compared to the interviews. Parents were asked to return the diary by mail but only just over half did so.

On day one, 84.3 percent (N=43) of parents described the day as typical, while on day two, 74.5 percent said it was typical and on day three, 64.7 percent said it was a typical day. On average three-quarters (74.5 percent) of parents described their diary days as typical. (Parents were given a yes/no question about whether the day was typical on the diary forms – Appendix B.)

Table 8 presents the mean ratings from the three rating scales (see Appendix B for the rating scales: parents were asked to fill in three of these for each of the diary days – how good the child's behaviour was, how they felt about 'disciplinary encounters' and how they felt about their own actions). The table shows the ratings said, on average, that the children's behaviour was towards the good end (just over two for each day) of the one-to-five (very good to very naughty) scale, that the encounters were towards the positive end of the scale and they were reasonably satisfied with how they dealt with discipline.

TABLE 8: Mean ratings of days

	Child behaviour	Discipline encounters	How they dealt with discipline
Day 1			
Mean	2.43	2.39	2.43
S.D.	.86	.86	1.01
Day 2			
Mean	2.30	2.22	2.22
S.D.	.93	.8	.92
Day 3			
Mean	2.41	2.22	2.36
S.D.	.95	.8	.93

Table 9 tabulates the diary-rating scales (Appendix B) which parents filled out for three days over two weeks. It shows that the majority of parents on each day rated the child's behaviour as good, their feelings about the day as good and their satisfaction with the way they dealt with the behaviour as good. The diary ratings do not show a great deal of unhappiness with parents' disciplinary issues, although there was a minority (on average 9.4 percent bad or very bad ratings over the three days) who were unhappy. It can be seen from Table 9 that there were variations over diary days in the parents' views about how naughty children were or how well they had dealt with discipline. For example, on day one 57 percent of parents rated children's behaviour as good or very good, compared to 63 percent on day two and 43 percent on day three. Similarly, there was a drop off in how good they felt about how they dealt with discipline from day one (63 percent felt good or very good) to day three (47 percent felt good or very good).

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[1] A Likert scale allows participants to specify their of agreement to a statement.

TABLE 9: Agreement with rating scales

	Child behaviour		Discipline encounters		How they dealt with discipline	
	V.Good 1 Naughty 5		+ve 1 -ve 5		V.Good 1 Bad 5	
Day 1						
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
1	6	11.8	4	7.8	7	13.7
2	23	45.1	30	58.8	25	49
3	16	31.4	11	21.6	11	21.6
4	6	11.8	5	9.8	6	11.8
5	0	0	1	2	2	3.9
Day 2						
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
1	9	17.6	8	15.7	10	19.6
2	23	45.1	25	49	20	39.2
3	13	25.5	13	25.5	13	25.5
4	4	7.8	3	5.9	5	9.8
5	1	2	0	0	0	0
Day 3						
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
1	7	13.7	5	9.8	6	11.8
2	15	29.4	24	47.1	18	35.3
3	15	29.4	9	17.6	11	21.6
4	3	5.9	1	2	3	5.9
5	1	2	0	2	1	2

Table 10 presents the data from the diary checklists of possible disciplinary techniques. Interestingly, over the three days, the disciplinary technique most commonly used (on average by 76.6 percent of parents) was verbal instruction – that is, telling children to do something or not to do something. Praise was used by an average of over half (59.5 percent) of parents; just under half (45.1 percent) used distraction,

reward (42.5 percent) and explanation (41.8 percent). Only about one in five parents (21.6 percent) said that they negotiated with children. The most commonly used negative discipline was a verbal warning (58.8 percent), followed by time out (28.2 percent) and withdrawal of a privilege (25.5 percent). Ignoring was quite a frequent technique, with just under a third (32.7 percent) using it. More severe punishment, such as smacking, was used by less than three percent of the sample. While the interview data suggest that 41 percent of parents used physical punishment at some time, the diary data show very few parents used this technique on the diary days (2.6 percent smacked the child's bottom, two percent smacked on the hand and two percent smacking elsewhere).

These diary data support the proposition that the majority of parents use authoritative approaches to discipline, combining clear direction, warmth, positive rewards and structuring the situation. If they used punishment, they most often used verbal warnings, followed by time out and withdrawal of privileges. Parents tended to use positive consequences for good behaviour, ignore bad behaviour and use mild punishment. Physical punishment was very infrequent.

In summary, the diaries showed that parents commonly used structuring of the situation (verbal instruction, distraction and removal of objects), positive reinforcement (rewards and praise) and reasoning to guide children's behaviour. Almost two-thirds of parents gave verbal warnings, and a third ignored inappropriate behaviour. The most common punishments were time out, verbal reprimands and withdrawal of privileges. Even these punishments were only used by about one in four parents over the diary periods. Positive methods were at least two or three times as likely to be used as negative methods. Very low levels of physical punishment were recorded in the diaries.

TABLE 10: Diary records over three days of use of disciplinary techniques

Discipline technique	Day 1 N=51		Day 2 N=50		Day 3 N=39		Ave %
	Freq	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	
Reward	25	49	24	47.1	16	31.4	**42.5**
Ignore	23	45.1	13	25.5	14	27.5	**32.7**
Verbal instruction	45	88.2	44	86.3	28	54.9	**76.6**
Verbal warning	33	64.7	27	52.9	30	58.8	**58.8**
Smacking bottom	2	3.9	1	2	1	2	**2.6**

Distraction	29	56.9	25	49	15	29.4	**45.1**
Verbal reprimand	36	29.4	15	29.4	14	27.5	**28.8**
Threat punishment	7	13.7	7	13.7	5	9.8	**12.4**
Time out	15	29.4	14	27.5	14	27.5	**28.2**
Shouting	9	17.6	10	19.6	6	11.8	**16.3**
Physically restrain	3	5.9	3	5.9	1	2	**4.6**
Withdraw privilege	5	9.8	6	11.8	2	3.9	**25.5**
Threat tell	2	3.9	3	5.9	1	2	**3.9**
Smacking hand	0	0	2	3.9	1	2	**2**
Promise reward	10	19.6	6	11.8	4	7.8	**13.1**
Smacking other	1	2	1	2	1	2	**2**
Grounding	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Removing objects	13	25.5	12	23.5	6	11.8	**20.2**
Negotiation	16	31.4	8	15.7	9	17.6	**21.6**
Explanation	22	43	25	49	17	33.3	**41.8**
Praise	31	60.8	33	64.7	27	52.9	**59.5**

3.3 Influences of child and family characteristics on disciplinary approaches

There were three sources of data for the following statistical analyses: interview responses; diary responses; and Parenting Daily Hassles scores. In order to compare the typical disciplinary approaches of parents in different subgroups, the data were transformed. A total positive interview score was derived from the sum of all of the positive disciplinary methods used (praise, rewards, hugs and smiles, reasoning and distraction), and a negative interview score from the sum of the negative disciplinary methods used (time out, smacking, shouting, withdrawal of privileges and overcorrection). Three diary scores were also derived from diary data. The total positive diary score consisted of the sum of (check-marks against each category for each diary day for) a reward, promise of a reward, praise, negotiation, distraction and explanation; the total negative diary score consisted of the sum of smacking the bottom, smacking a hand, other smacking, time out, verbal reprimand, threat of punishment, withdrawal of privileges, physical restraint, grounding; the total neutral diary score consisted of ignoring, verbal instruction and removing objects. The dependent variables for this analysis were as follows:

> total positive interview

> total negative interview

> total positive diary

> total negative diary

> total neutral diary

> frequency parenting hassles

> frequency events #3 or #4 (events were more of a hassle than average)

> frequency events over #4 (high hassle score)

> total Parenting Daily Hassles score

3.3.1 Child characteristics

Age

The following data relate to the oldest pre-school child, who was the focus of the interview in most cases. Pearson product-moment correlations between age in months and the above dependent variables were all non-significant, except one. There was a significant correlation (r=.45, N=45, p=.002) between the age of the oldest pre-school child in months, and the total negative diary score. In other words, the older the child, the more likely it was that parents reported using negative disciplinary methods (time out, verbal reprimand, threat of punishment, withdrawal of privileges, physical restraint, grounding, physical punishment). This is not surprising, given that older pre-school children are more likely to be testing parents' boundaries in many areas. It is interesting that

this only showed up in the diary scores, so is likely to reflect the actual methods recently used by parents who filled in diaries.

Gender

One-way analyses of variance were used to compare the oldest pre-school boy and girl on the dependent variables. There were no significant differences between boys and girls on any of the dependent variables.

3.3.2 Family characteristics

Age of parent

The parents were divided into five age groups to compare means, collapsing across a group with low numbers (the over 50s). The groups were under 20s, 20s, 30s, 40s and over 50s. There were no significant differences on any of the dependent variables according to parents' age.

Gender of parent

Comparing the 94 females and 19 males showed no significant differences on any of the interview scores or the Parenting Daily Hassles scores. Because of the small number of fathers (three) and much larger number of mothers (45) who filled in the diaries, it was not meaningful to compare their mean scores on dependent variables.

Ethnicity

There were no significant differences on any of the dependent variables when means of different ethnic groups were compared.

Family income

Parents indicated on the demographic questionnaire which of 10 possible total family income levels they fell into (Appendix A). Most of the correlations between the dependent variables and income level were not significant, but there was a modest but positive correlation ($r=.21$, $p<.05$) between family income and total positive interview score, and modest negative correlations between family income and frequency of parent hassles ($r=-.21$, $p<.05$) and intensity of parenting hassles (measured by above-average ratings) ($r=.25$, $p<.05$). Parents on higher incomes were slightly more likely to say that they used positive discipline techniques than parents on lower incomes. Parents with more frequent and intense parenting hassles were slightly more likely to be on lower incomes.

Family structure

A comparison between the scores of single parents and couples on the dependent variables showed that none of the diary or interview scores differed according to family structure, but that single parents reported more frequent parenting hassles ($t=2.31$, $df=111$, $p<.05$) and more intense parenting hassles ($t=2.37$, $df=111$, $p<.05$). Figure 1 shows these differences.

FIGURE 1: Frequency and intensity of parenting hassles
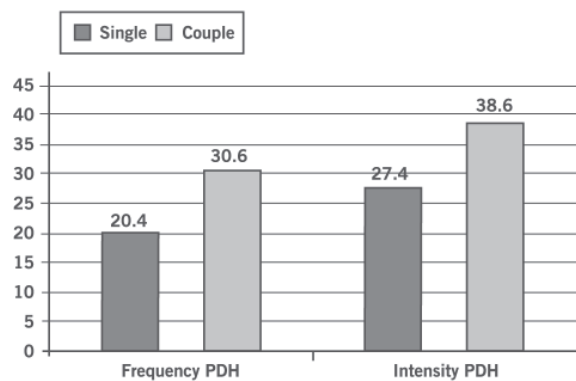
Family size

Correlational analyses between the total number of children in the family and dependent variables were carried out. Most of the correlations were non-significant, but there was a significant positive correlation ($r=.32$, $p=.001$) between number of children and the total negative interview scores, and a significant negative correlation ($r=-.33$, $p=.025$) between number of children and total neutral diary score. In other words, the more children in the family, the more likely it was that parents reported using negative methods (time out, verbal reprimand, threat of punishment, withdrawal of privileges, physical restraint, grounding, physical punishment), and the less likely it was that they used neutral methods (ignoring, verbal instruction and removing objects).

Analysis of variance was carried out comparing means for families with one, two or three or more children. This showed that there were significant differences according to family size in total neutral diary ($F=3.93$, $p<.05$) and total negative interview scores ($F=7.75$, $p<.001$). Parents with one child used more neutral methods than parents with two or three or more children (the differences for positive total interview score approached significance and were in the same direction as total neutral). Parents with two children and

three or more children said in the interview that they used more negative methods than parents with one child. Figures 2 and 3 show the mean differences.

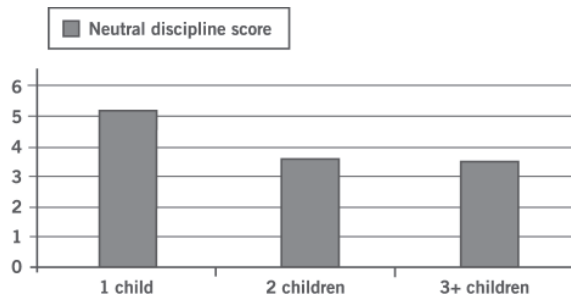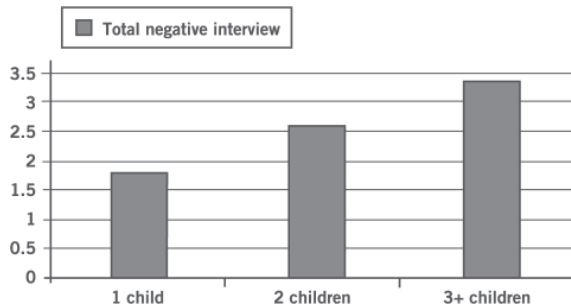**FIGURE 2: Neutral disciplinary scores and family size**

FIGURE 3: Total negative interview scores and family size

There were no significant differences according to family size in the frequency or intensity of parenting hassles.

In summary, the quantitative data show very few differences in disciplinary techniques used or parenting hassles experienced according to child and family characteristics. Older pre-school children were more likely to experience negative sanctions from parents than younger ones; there was a very slight tendency for parents on lower incomes to experience more frequent and intense parenting hassles than those on higher incomes; single parents experienced more frequent and intense parenting hassles than parents in intact families; and larger families tended to use more negative and less neutral methods to control their children.

3.4 Events and context over time

The sources of data which give insight into how families manage discipline and the contextual circumstances that challenge parents' disciplinary skills are the Parenting Daily Hassles scale, the interview responses and the subsequent diary responses.

3.4.1 Discipline techniques in different circumstances

When asked "Do you use the same discipline techniques in different circumstances?" just over half (53 percent) of parents said they did. There is no significant difference in the family size of those using different techniques in different circumstances and those not. A similar picture results from comparing the number of children under five years in the families.

Despite often being described as difficult, the necessity of remaining calm and maintaining a consistent approach to discipline in different situations was emphasised frequently by parents who said they used the same discipline techniques in different circumstances:

> I waited two hours in a coffee shop with [child] throwing a tantrum on the floor outside it. I ignored it, you just have to let her work through it. (Participant 54)

> Sometimes they run this way and that and grab things. If they keep doing it I'll make them sit on the floor of the aisle and make them sit there. 'If you are going to act like a baby you can sit like a baby and stay there until I have finished.' At friends' I make them sit out on the deck or in the corner. (Participant 53)

> Absolutely [the same techniques], I have sat them down at friends' or anywhere. When at the supermarket it's just dreadful, but I know other people have experienced this. I know that people are looking when you are dealing with a misbehaving child and that makes me more resolved that I have to be calm. This is my child, I have to stick to my guns. It is horrible in a public situation when a child loses it. I have trust that other people have been through this and they know what's happening and it's all okay. (Participant 71)

> People are far too easy to criticise ... whatever happened or whatever approach you took I think people would still turn around and judge you. I don't care because you have to have the same rules and boundaries when you're out as when you are at home. So yeah, same approach regardless of what happens. (Participant 15)

> Yes, anywhere indoors. I'm not embarrassed by a kid crying in public. (Participant 61)

Among the 47 percent of parents who said they did not use the same techniques in different situations, public disciplinary interactions were particularly difficult

to deal with and in particular the reaction (real or perceived) of onlookers (known or unknown). The following excerpts from the interview and diary entries illustrate that having an 'audience' often led parents to alter their usual response to their child's behaviour.

> At the supermarket it's a nightmare. I have used the naughty spot at the supermarket. It is time-consuming and it doesn't work straight away. It's embarrassing. I can't stand it, it is just too hard. (Participant 67)

> At the supermarket, it's about 4.00 or 5.00 pm. I give him whatever he jolly well wants, the lolly or the chocolate or whatever and the ride on the car and then I am out of there. People give us the filthy eye. He swears. I try to ignore it. I feel I am expected to respond by other parents that are shopping. (Participant 49).

> I find it [shopping] really, really difficult and stressful, and I probably use, resort to bribes which I don't believe in. I don't think that bribes are good but I resort to bribes. (Participant 62)

> At friends' houses quite often we would put them in time out but in town or the supermarket I find you are trapped, and I find quite a lot of strategies are designed for people who have the time to go home and then turn around and come out later to do the supermarket shop... I don't have time. (Participant 44)

> Voice probably wouldn't be as loud if I was in public. (Participant 13)

Embarrassment caused by their child's crying or screaming was particularly difficult for some parents. This mother was frustrated by her four-year-old's 'very challenging behaviour' at a music group:

> She kept trying to climb on top of me and would plonk herself down hard on me and cling to my neck. I was feeling frustrated ... all the children were sitting down and she called out in a loud demanding voice 'Mum, get me a biscuit!' I felt so embarrassed and a bit shocked. Several people looked round. As I did not know immediately what to do, I did nothing. My friend called out there were no biscuits left. (Participant 7)

One reaction was to remove their child from the area; this was usually more in an effort to save themselves from further embarrassment than to discipline their child:

> [Child] and I were at [supermarket] grocery shopping. [Child] started reaching for things off the shelf and putting them in the trolley. When I put them back on the shelf he started shrieking. I was feeling totally embarrassed and asked him to quieten down, which he wouldn't. So I left the trolley, still full, pulled him out of the trolley, put him in the car and came home. I still had to go back later but just wanted to get [child's] shrieking away from disapproving others. (Participant 36 – diary entry)

> Yep, I leave. I do leave because I actually don't like it. I can't handle that happening in front of all the people. (Participant 34)

> We went on a trip to the public library – which is always interesting with three preschoolers. [Child] started to cry. I warned him to stop or we would go home. He continued so I warned him again. He continued, so back to the car! I was so embarrassed by his behaviour but I guess they are used to it in the children's section. (Participant 13 – diary entry)

As the examples in this section show, shopping with children was commonly described as a difficult activity, and some parents came to dread the experience. Negative comments and 'looks' from onlookers were seen as particularly unhelpful:

> People do look at people who can't control their children. Once we got on the bus and a lady said 'If you don't shut that child up, I will.' The bus driver said 'Yeah, yeah, shut your kid up I don't need that on my bus.' (Participant 67)

> ...and people aren't shy about telling you that she needs a good hiding. (Participant 10)

> They both just sit there [in shopping trolley]. [Child] gets sick of it and wants out. I put up with lots of screaming. It annoys everyone else. People say 'She is tired' and I just say 'Yeah, she is.' I was at the supermarket with my sister and her girl was having a right tantrum and she just let her go for it and she got looks and that made her angry and she said 'Haven't you ever seen a child cry before?' She dragged her out in the end. I do worry what people think. (Participant 22)

> I don't want everyone to be like … 'Look at that kid.' (Participant 58)

Positive comments from onlookers regarding parents' responses to their children's behaviour were infrequent but they were gratefully received!

The only time I have had someone say something to me was a man. It was great, he came up to me in the supermarket car park and he said I just want to congratulate you, that was really great that you stuck to your guns. (Participant 44)

Visits to family and friends were situations that the majority of parents described as easier places to use the same techniques as when at home:

I use the naughty spot. He's usually good if there are other kids there. (Participant 16)

For some parents, however, discipline encounters around friends did cause some anguish:

The number one issue for me, and it's not a [child] one, it's a social one, is how to reconcile the level of behaviour you want from your own kid when there are [others] around. You know in a social situation it's a fine line between not offending parents around you. If there's a [child] and two others doing exactly the same thing when you pull your kid up the inference is that their kids are not that well behaved. We've had a couple of discussions about it and it's hard. (Participant 5)

Some parents felt that they had to be more strict with their children than usual:

We use the same but it's a bit harder when there's another child there. Usually he'll have to sit on my knee for a couple of minutes or something like that. (Participant 57)

I guess I might be a bit more strict at friends'. (Participant 33)

Parents who had a consistent approach to discipline gave examples of adapting techniques to suit the situations outside the home:

We went to [place] to watch the kids play hockey ...[child] was very ratty and demanding. We gave her time out in the truck. (Participant 10)

Yes, definitely the same. It can be anywhere, it used to be a mat but now it can be anywhere ...it can be the car, the trolley, anywhere. I just say 'I am putting you on the thinking mat because ...' (Participant 89)

Embarrassed? Oh, I just don't make eye contact. (Participant 2)

Always the same. At the supermarket with [child] and [baby brother], [child] had a tantrum ... firstly

I explained why it had to be scanned then I said he had a choice, he could put it on the conveyor belt himself or I would. He chose to put it on himself. I said 'Good choice buddy.' I like the 'choice' one because either way I win but he feels like he has some say. (Participant 5)

For a minority of parents, public places made them think more carefully about the strategies they employed:

I think it makes a difference if you feel you're being watched. You stop a bit more, because most of the time the only reason that you lose it is because you're not thinking. So because people are watching you, you do, you take your time. (Participant 11)

And for other parents, it even led to their avoiding the use of negative techniques:

I try not to hit him, it is hard because there is no other way to stop him. Now he is realising that in public he can do it because he knows nothing will happen. I just know what everyone would think if I gave him a slap in public. It depends who we are in front of cos' I know it is wrong. You shouldn't really hit your kids. (Participant 58)

I tend to [use the same techniques] apart from shouting. (Participant 66)

I'm probably a lot better when I'm out because I know that people laugh and are watching. (Participant 11)

Summary

Just over half of parents were consistent in their use of discipline techniques in different circumstances. The difficulty of maintaining a consistent approach with regards to discipline in different situations was acknowledged by many parents – even those who managed to do it. It was difficult to remain consistent when there was a real or imagined public audience (particularly at the supermarket).

3.4.2 Disciplinary technique with other children

The 74 families with more than one child were asked "Do you use the same disciplinary technique with your other children?" Nearly a third of these parents said they did, while the remaining 50 were asked the reason for using different techniques with other children in the family. The results are shown in Figure 4 (sometimes more than one reason was given).

FIGURE 4: Reasons for using different discipline techniques with other children
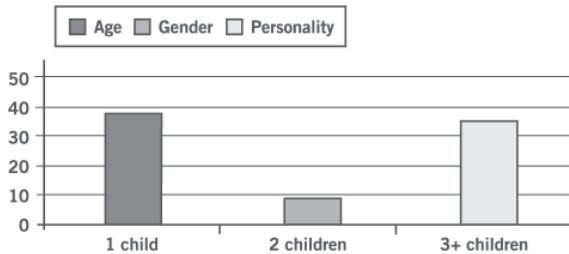
Over three-quarters (78 percent) of parents asked gave 'age' as the reason for using different techniques with their other children; a similar number said 'personality' (72 percent). Only eight parents gave 'gender' (16 percent) as a reason.

Personality

> I guess I do basically, but they're different people so I have different ways of coping with the behaviour. (Participant 89)

> No, they are probably very different. [Child 1] doesn't really argue with you so you just have to raise your voice. It's different with the others. (Participant 1)

> Yeah, quite different. One's sort of laid back, sort of easy-going and the other is much more determined. (Participant 15)

> I think my frustrations with [Child 1] were because all the things that worked with [Child 2], most of them didn't work with [Child 1]. They are different personalities ... also you have different expectations as they get older. (Participant 33)

Age

> Sometimes the oldest says 'How come you don't do that with [Child 1] and [Child 2]?' I just say, 'Look, you are eight and should know better,' and you've got to remember they are four and they push the boundaries a bit more than she does. (Participant 19)

Gender

> I have the same expectations basically, except with the boys. They were harder work – more energetic and harder to tone down. She's a lot easier, but I try to use very similar things. (Participant 55)

In summary, two-thirds of the parents who had more than one child said their use of discipline

techniques varied between their children. Over three-quarters considered the difference in age or personality to be the reason for difference, while only one in six said gender.

3.4.3 Stressful events affecting parenting

The way people bring up their children is often affected by things going on in their lives, such as illness or workload. Parents were asked for examples of events they had experienced. No list was provided, and their answers were coded thematically.

FIGURE 5: Total number of stresses experienced by parents
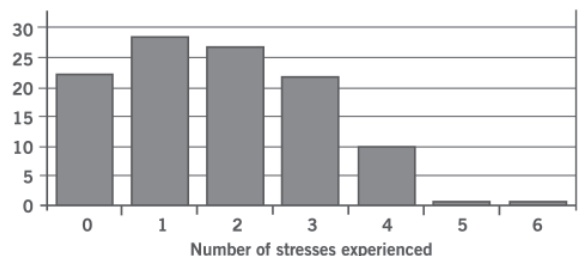
Over three-quarters (77 percent) of parents said they had experienced at least one event that they considered had affected their parenting. As shown in Figure 5 above, only one in five parents said they had experienced none; nearly half (47 percent) of parents named one or two stresses and over a quarter (27 percent) had experienced three or four stresses that had affected their parenting.

The types of events described by parents are shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: Stresses parents experienced
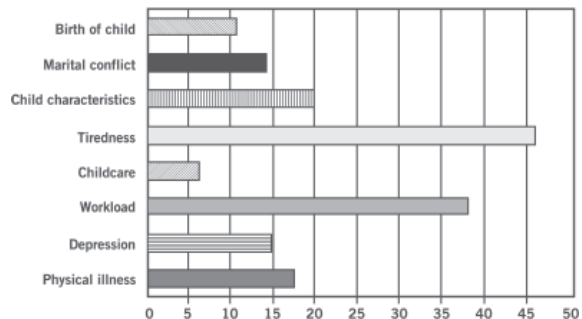
Tiredness was considered by 46 percent to affect their parenting, and was often discussed in conjunction with other issues such as financial worries, pregnancy, child's illness, workload or general parenting tasks:

I think I tend to shout more if I've had a lack of sleep. When [youngest child] was born and I was getting no sleep 'cos she was quite sick and stuff like that, I think [child] got shouted at more than he should have 'cos I was just really, really tired and sort of little things wound me up whereas they wouldn't usually. (Participant 29)

I find it more frustrating when I am tired. At the end of the day you can't be bothered with a performance; you just want a quiet time. (Participant 69)

A third of those interviewed said 'workload' affected the way they parented – this was paid or unpaid, their own or their partners' workload:

Workload definitely. Sometimes what [child] wants and needs is put over here because I am busy. That happens quite a lot. (Participant 58)

I used to work part-time and I found it too stressful with [child] being at nursery. That's why I gave up work… (Participant 72)

As a person who is at home all day, having been working and now at home, it brings about its own difficulties. Very demanding, very challenging. I find it quite hard. 24 hours a day demanding. Some days unfulfilling… I love my children but I had a life and sometimes I feel pretty low … having less money. That limits what you can do when you want to do lots. (Participant 71)

We are both working parents, though I work at school and I get holidays off. Being a working parent you do find you get very tired and sometimes you don't have as much patience as you would like. (Participant 62)

A chronic family illness (in a child or parent) was cited by 18 parents.

Child

With [child] it gets a bit frustrating as the poor boy can't always hear us. His hearing is difficult to deal with, it drives us crazy. It's repetitive, you are continually saying the same thing 20 times. Frustrating and takes time. (Participant 53)

She has asthma. She has had ongoing health problems since she was five months old. [When she was ill] when she was very tiny, I was going, there is something wrong with the kid. She would scream all day. I can remember [husband] coming home at 11 past 5 instead of 5 past 5 and … I am sick of her, have her! That was stressful, that was horrible. (Participant 73)

Parent

[Father] broke his back in 1991, he's upstairs sleeping 'cos his back is giving him hell, so there are times when I don't get much help because he's too tired. Whenever I think things are getting a bit much I just think – right, this is what I really wanted. If it gets too much you just deal with the little bits you can deal with. (Participant 54)

I am always exhausted [from iron deficiency] so I tend to want to snap very quickly, so I have to remember to take time for myself. One will go outside, one will go in the bedroom, one will stay in here and play and I will shut myself in the bedroom if only for five minutes. On a good day maybe once, sometimes three or four times. Sometimes I can go for three weeks without. (Participant 56)

I had postnatal depression. With my first-born it was quite severe. (Participant 74)

Ten percent considered pregnancy or the birth of another child to affect the way they parented:

I know my temper is that much shorter [when pregnant] and I tolerate a lot less, so I just chuck him in the buggy and go for a walk and get some fresh air. (Participant 64)

I get quite sick when I am pregnant. From the time when he was two I couldn't look after him for that year. (Participant 79)

Nearly one in five parents said they found their children's characteristics influenced their ability to parent, while a smaller number said marital conflict (12 percent) and lack of childcare (six percent) did.

Figure 7 shows that the frequency of parenting hassles rose when a higher number of stressful experiences were reported. Parents with three or more parenting stresses had higher scores on the PDH total events scale (F=3.085, p=0.05, df=2,104).

FIGURE 7: PHD total events scores by level of stress
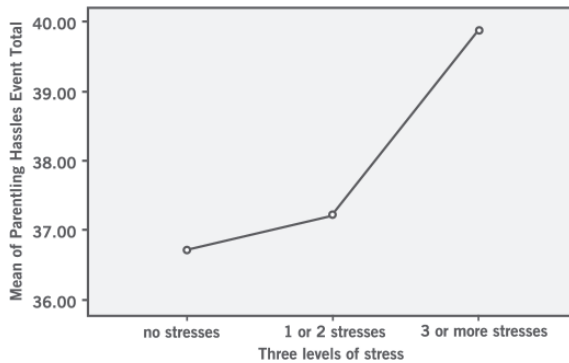
The intensity of parenting hassles was higher among those parents who reported three or more stresses compared to those with one or two stresses or no stresses (F=3.782, p=0.026, df=2,104).

FIGURE 8: PDH event scores over 4 by levels of stress

There was no significant difference between the positive or negative discipline scores of the parents with no stresses, one or two stresses or three or more stresses, although Figure 8 shows that the mean was higher when there were three or more stresses.
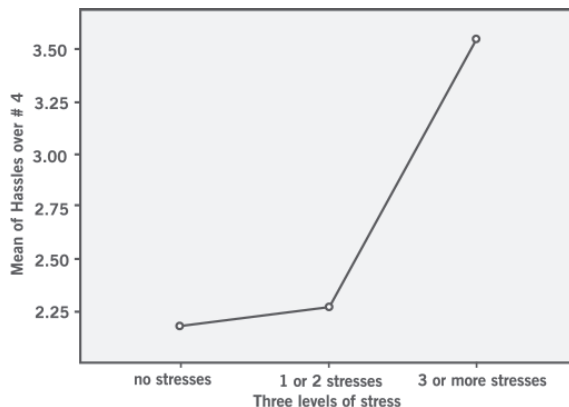
In summary, over three-quarters of parents named issues in their lives that they considered affected their parenting; tiredness and workload were the most common. The frequency of parenting hassles was higher among those reporting more experiences of stress. The intensity of parenting hassles was also higher – particularly among those who reported three or more stresses. The number of stresses showed no significant difference between the positive or negative discipline scores.

3.4.4 Parenting hassles

The Parenting Daily Hassles scale assesses the frequency and intensity or impact of 20 common everyday experiences in parenting that parents can perceive as a 'hassle'. The 20 events on the PDH are not ones that would be immediately recognised as being associated with parenting stress, as they are ordinary daily events when living with children under five years (Crnic & Acevedo, 1995).

TABLE 11: Parenting tasks and challenging child behaviour factors

Parenting task factor	Challenging child behaviour factor
Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food	Being nagged, whined at, complained to
The kids' schedules interfere with meeting your own household needs	The kids won't listen or do what they are asked without being nagged
Sibling arguments or fights require a 'referee'	The kids demand that you entertain them or play with them
The kids are constantly underfoot, interfering with other chores	The kids resist or struggle with you over bed-time
Having to change your plans because of unprecedented child needs	The need to keep a constant eye on where the kids are and what they are doing
The kids get dirty several times a day, requiring changes of clothing	The kids interrupt adult conversations or interactions
Difficulties getting kids ready for outings on time	The kids are hard to manage in public (eg, grocery store, shopping centre)
Having to run extra errands to meet the kids' needs	The kids have difficulties with friends (eg, fighting, trouble getting along, no friends)
	Meal-time difficulties with picky eaters, complaining etc
	Difficulties in getting privacy (eg, in the bathroom)
	Difficulties in leaving kids for a night out or at daycare

From the PDH measure two scores were created – the frequency of PDH events and the perceived intensity or impact of each parenting hassle. A high score on either the frequency or intensity indicates a high level of 'hassle' experienced with the child.

Frequency of event

The frequency of hassles score gives an objective marker of how often an event occurs and indicates the presence of stressors. It is obtained from ratings given to each individual item on a four-point scale (rarely to constantly). A score of above three for any event indicates an above-average frequency.

Table 12 shows the pattern of above-average frequency (>3) scores among respondents. All but two respondents experienced at least one event with above-average frequency. The largest percentage of parents (18 percent) scored above-average frequency on four events, and more than half (66 percent) rated an above-average frequency on between three and seven events. This suggests that a large proportion of families are experiencing an above-average frequency of potential 'hassle' events.

TABLE 12: Number of average frequency score

Number of respondents	1.5% (2)	11% (12)	8% (9)	13% (15)	18% (20)	12.5% (14)	12.5% (13)	10% (11)	7% (8)	0.5% (1)	5.5% (6)	0.5% (1)
Number of events scoring <3	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

The 20 'daily hassle' events are listed in Table 13 with the number of participants who rated them with above-average frequency (columns 2 and 3) and intensity (columns 3 and 4). The most frequent hassles for the families in this study are parenting tasks like cleaning up and child supervision (Table 11, column 1). 'Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food' occurred with a higher-than-average frequency in nearly three-quarters (70 percent) of families, and 42 percent of parents felt they needed to 'keep a constant eye on where the kids are and what they are doing' with above-average frequency.

TABLE 13: Above-average scores for PDH events

Parenting Daily Hassle	Frequency >3		'Hassle' >4	
	Number	%	Number	%
Continually cleaning up messes of toys or food	82	70.1	21	18
The need to keep a constant eye on where the kids are and what they are doing	50	42.8	9	7.7
Difficulties in getting privacy (eg, in the bathroom)	46	39.3	4	3.4
The kids interrupt adult conversations or interactions	41	35	19	16.2
The kids demand that you entertain them or play with them	39	33.3	11	9.4
Babysitters are hard to find	37	31.7	21	18
The kids get dirty several times a day requiring changes of clothing	32	27.3	3	2.6
Being nagged, whined at, complained to	29	24.8	39	33.3
Difficulties in getting kids ready for outings and leaving on time	28	24	25	21.3

The kids won't listen or do what they are asked without being nagged	27	23.1	27	23
Meal-time difficulties with picky eaters, complaining etc	25	21	16	13.7
The kids resist or struggle with you over bed-time	22	18.8	21	17.9
Sibling arguments or fights require a 'referee'	20	17.1	17	14.6
Difficulties in leaving kids for a night out or at daycare	8	6.6	10	8.5
The kids' schedules interfere with meeting your own household needs	14	11.9	6	4.1
The kids are constantly underfoot, interfering with other chores	11	9.4	5	4.3
The kids are hard to manage in public (eg, grocery store, shopping centre)	9	7.7	19	16.3
Having to run extra errands to meet the kids' needs	9	7.7	3	2.6
Having to change your plans because of unprecedented child needs	4	3.4	7	6
The kids have difficulties with friends (eg, fighting, trouble getting along, no friends)	3	2.6	6	5.2

Intensity score

The intensity score assesses how much of a hassle the event is to parents, and is rated on a five-point scale (low hassle to high hassle) with a total range of 0–100. Table 14 shows how many events respondents rated with very high (>4) intensity or impact of hassles.

TABLE 14: Above-average intensity scores

Number of respondents	24% (27)	14% (16)	18% (20)	13% (15)	16% (18)	3.5% (4)	5% (6)	2.5% (3)	2% (2)	0% (0)	1% (1)	1% (1)
Number of events scoring <4	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

The largest percentage of parents – nearly a quarter – did not rate any events as above-average intensity. Of those who did, nearly two-thirds (61 percent) scored <4 (above-average intensity) on between one and four events. Only 15 percent experienced high-intensity hassle for more than four events.

Looking at columns 3 and 4 of Table 13, it is clear that unlike the frequency of events where parenting tasks were rated higher, it is those events concerning challenging behaviour by children (Table 11, column 2) that cause more hassle. 'Being nagged, whined at and complained to' was rated by a third (33.3 percent) as an above-average hassle by parents.

Events which occurred with high frequency were often rated as low on intensity. For example, 'difficulties in getting privacy' was scored as above-average in frequency by nearly half (46 percent) of parents, yet it was only considered above-average in intensity by four parents (3.4 percent).

In summary, the PDH score included ordinary daily events which would be common in families with children under five years. A large proportion of families are experiencing an above-average frequency of potential parenting hassles, particularly with events considered to be typical parenting tasks, such as bathing, dressing, cleaning and meal times. In terms of impact and intensity, it is the children's behaviour that causes more hassle.

3.5 Support with parenting

Quantitative data

TABLE 15: Sources of support for parenting[2]

Sources of support	Number	Percent
Family	63	51.8
Early childhood teacher	55	47
Friends	51	43.6
Partner	41	35
Books/written material	37	31.6
Plunket	29	24.8
GP	16	13.7
Parent group	4	3.4
Midwife	4	3.4
Neighbours	2	1.7
Other	20	17.1

Table 15 shows the sources of support parents named in response to the question "Who would you ask advice from?" As might be expected, the largest number of parents (just over half) mentioned their families as sources of advice and support. More surprising is that the next most frequent source of support, mentioned by almost half of parents (47 percent), was the early childhood teacher. Around a third mentioned their partner (35 percent) and written material (31.6 percent) as sources of support. About a quarter said that the Plunket nurse was a source of support, while the GP was mentioned by one in seven (13.7 percent). All of the other sources of support (except 'other') were mentioned by less than four percent of the sample.

TABLE 16: Who gave the most useful advice[3]

Sources of support	Number	Percent
Early childhood teacher	34	29.1
Family	30	25.6
Books/written material	30	25.6
Friends	23	19.7
Plunket	20	17.1
TV	13	11.1
GP	9	7.7
Parent group	5	4.5
Midwife	1	.9
Neighbours	1	.9
Other	15	12.8

Table 16 shows parents' responses to the question "Who gave you the most useful advice?" Early childhood teachers were mentioned by the largest number of parents – almost a third (29.1 percent) –

as the most useful source of advice. Both family and books or written material were mentioned by a quarter of parents as the most useful, while about one in five parents listed friends. Plunket was the most useful source of support for one in seven parents, while TV programmes were for one in 10.
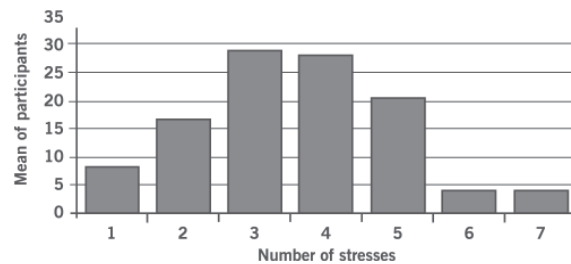
FIGURE 9: Number of sources of support

Figure 9 shows the frequencies for the number of sources of support that parents named. Almost half (48.7 percent) of parents who responded to this question named two or three sources of support. Only 6.8 percent (N=8) said that they had only one source of support.

Figure 10 shows that total positive diary scores rose as the level of support that parents received increased. When parents had only one or two sources of support they used less positive disciplinary strategies than when they had three or four or more (a score of two), or five or more (a score of three). Although the analysis of variance did not reach significance (F=2.899, p=.066, df = 2,44), the trend shown in the means is interesting. (The smaller N for the diary scores would have reduced the chance of a significant F.)

FIGURE 10: Total positive diary scores by levels of support

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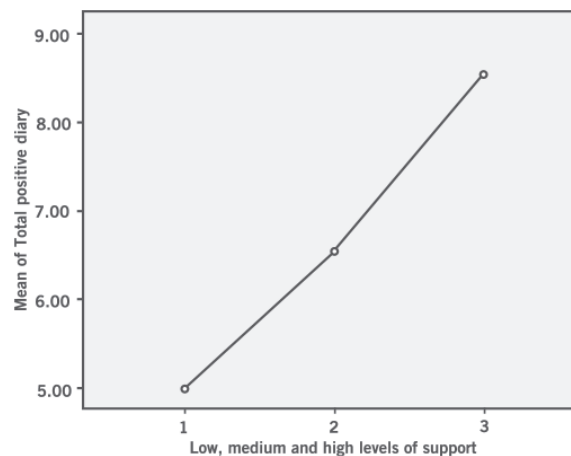
[2] Parents often named more than one source of support (and advice) so the numbers do not add up to 117.

[3] Parents often named more than one source of advice (and support) so the numbers do not add up to 117.

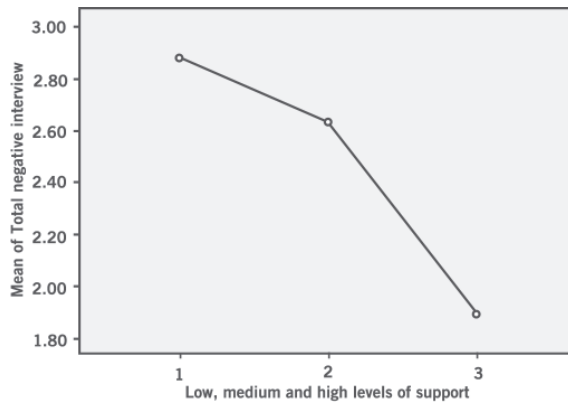**FIGURE 11: Total negative interview score by level of support**

Figure 11 shows that the number of negative disciplinary methods named by parents in the interview decreased as the number of sources of support increased (F=4.8, p=0.01, df = 2, 108). Parents with two or fewer sources of support used more negative disciplinary techniques than parents with three or four sources of support, while parents with five or more sources of support used the least negative disciplinary techniques.

More than a third (39.3 percent) of parents said that they had attended a parenting course (some had attended more than one) but only a small number of these named the specific course they attended. The courses named by more than five parents included Plunket, Barnardos and SKIP courses.

Qualitative data

Below are some quotes from parents about different sources of support and advice.

Family

L's [Father] parents come through maybe once a month on average and they stay and that's really nice, good for them and us and they can't get enough of the kids, and my Mum is usually through once every two weeks, every three weeks so we'll take those opportunities. And we often go through too, and leave them there and have a night out or something. (Participant 5)

Mum is a great source of help and advice and I take a lot of what she says on board 'cos she has been there and raised me and my brother. There

are similarities. My brother is 20 minutes away. (Participant 92)

My Mum is a sprightly 78 and she participates with the family. I call on her sometimes to help with the caregiving. (Participant 100)

Early childhood teacher

When you've got people like the kindy teachers, I feel bad asking them because it's not their job (well I kind of think it is). At least it is somewhere to go and they don't mind. (Participant 18)

When I talked to L [early childhood teacher] she put a good perspective on it. She said you just have to remember to pick your fights and it is probably not worth fighting over clothes and she's absolutely right. (Participant 33)

Liking them as people, but also they work with children all day ... so if anybody knows then they will know. We have quite a good relationship and it's nice too. (Participant 43)

I talk to mums at Playcentre who have more than one child and try to talk to mums who have a child the same age as J [child] so they might be going through the same thing, and then ones who have a child one or two years older than J [child] and they go 'Yes, this is what I felt or did.' (Participant 69)

Kindy has been a massive help. She goes four afternoons a week. Four hours a day and it's bliss. (Participant 96)

Friends

There's a couple [friends] that I went through antenatal with and we still keep in touch and compare stories and bounce ideas off each other. (Participant 36)

I just don't do it all the time but my girlfriend in T [town], all I gotta do is ring her. If I rang her now and said you know, 'Can you take the kids?', she would be here in the afternoon. (Participant 45)

I had a friend who put a note in the library that said any other mums who are new and have children and want to get together. There are only four of us but we are really good friends now. I came here with no friends. (Participant 83)

Partner

> My husband and I talk about it. We have to work out how we are going to do it together. (Participant 94)

> My husband just, he just takes over basically when he comes home and yeah, we usually do things together in the weekend. (Participant 19)

Plunket nurse

> She said to give her choices. She has tantrums. The Plunket nurse said to give choices. B [child] is jumping on the couch and she told me to say … 'We don't jump on the couch, we sit on the couch.' Tell them what to do rather than what not to do. (Participant 83)

> Plunket. Having a baby in another country and then coming to New Zealand, and the support that Plunket gives you. If you need it you can go there. It's great to get an idea of where your child is at … developmental stages. (Participant 35)

TV

> I think that, that Little Angels. I think that's quite a powerful way of getting messages across to parents. (Participant 37)

> After a number of shows I could see the Supernanny was facing the same sort of stuff. Lack of boundaries, lack of discipline, communicating with parents and I got bored with it. Supernanny has a no-nonsense old-fashioned approach. (Participant 15)

Books and written information

> They've got that sheet thing [SKIP] and it's got lots and lots of different little booklets about how to handle different situations. I looked at that. (Participant 1)

> I wouldn't ask anyone. I don't think I have ever asked anyone about discipline. Not really, because I probably trust the books more than the people because I realise that people have got all sorts of different directions that they come from. (Participant 37)

The qualitative responses give some indication of why parents seek support from particular sources. Being available, comfortable, trusting and having a warm and close relationship with people encourages parents to seek support, be it from family, early childhood teachers, friends or the Plunket nurse. Early childhood teachers are often mentioned as sources of support, but for different reasons. For some parents the participation of their child in an early childhood centre gives them a valued break from their parenting responsibilities (in the same way, grandparents are often a source of relief when they take over the care of children for periods of time). Other parents feel that early childhood teachers are well qualified to advise them, because they know their child well, and also that they have a lot of experience with other children. On the other hand, one parent expressed unsureness about whether it was part of the early childhood teacher's job to support and advise parents. She nevertheless did ask for advice from her son's early childhood teacher. Having a group of friends to talk to informally was clearly valued by many parents. Friends were more likely to be seen as someone to talk to, rather than someone to take over care of the child, although one parent mentioned calling on her friend in an emergency.

Some parents preferred getting their information from other sources besides people they knew. A considerable number of parents mentioned books or other sources of written information (such as SKIP pamphlets). They sometimes trusted the advice of experts more than that of friends or family. The television series about parenting issues (Supernanny and Little Angels) were obviously a source of information and ideas for many parents.

Lack of support

A small number of parents felt very unsupported. The following parent was alienated from her own mother and did not feel she could ask her in-laws about parenting issues:

> About three doors down, I have my mother-in-law and father-in-law. My mother-in-law is up the road and you can't ask her those sorts of questions and my family situation is quite hard so I don't have support. My mother hasn't spoken to me for years. I wouldn't take my problems to my family. (Participant 89)

Moving house, especially into a community where you do not feel accepted, can make parenting a lonely business, as in the following example:

There is not anyone here I can ask. I drive. I wouldn't be able to cope on buses. It is not the smallest place. I have made friends but they are not my friends. One of those areas where everyone knows everyone and was brought up with everyone. It's hard if you're not from here. If you are not from round here and you live here it is not easy. (Participant 98)

This father felt very alone, partly because it was unusual to be a stay-at-home dad:

Being an at-home dad, I haven't had a lot of support. There are days when I will sit down and cry with loneliness... I find it really hard to meet people. I find it impossible to go to a day with other at-home dads or mums. I have got mates from university days who are much more open-minded. It is still not easy to say that you are an at-home dad. You get a funny reaction. (Participant 97)

Single parents often rely on their parents, but they may not be readily available. One young single mother's own mother did not support her:

I am on my own but I do have a partner at the moment, but he doesn't live with me... I never really got a good start. Mum always had that thing like you have decided to have kids, you deal with them. Most young girls live with their parents. I wasn't in the right frame of mind and Mum has just thrown me in the deep end. I would have been able to handle it a lot more if I had been able to have Mum's support. But I have done it myself completely. (Participant 96)

When asked what other sources of support would be helpful, a parent (referring to one of the television parenting series) suggested that only hands-on intervention could really be helpful and that talking was not particularly useful.

Probably doing what that woman does, which is coming into your home and actually seeing him in action, because you can talk about it till you're blue in the face but they don't really know what it's about until they see him doing it. But I mean of course it would need to be for at least a couple of days, which nobody could, the public system can't support that, so you'd have to pay for it yourself … 'cos talking doesn't really help. I mean they can suggest all the ideas you already know. I don't really think it helps to resolve much. (Participant 85)

In summary, the majority of parents in the study had at least three sources of people support, including (most prominently) family, early childhood teachers and centres, friends and partners. Other professionals, such as Plunket nurses and doctors, played a role, but were less often named. Books and written material were seen by many parents (almost a third) to be useful. It may have been that these sources are seen as less biased and more authoritative than family influences. A surprisingly large proportion (over a third) had attended parenting courses, though these were not often mentioned as a major source of support. The amount of support parents received was related to the type of discipline used, with parents who had more support using more positive disciplinary techniques, and parents who had less support using more negative techniques.

4. DISCUSSION

This project has explored the discipline-related beliefs and practices of a sample of parents in Aotearoa New Zealand, the influence of child and family characteristics and the effect of context on these family disciplinary practices. Most parents in the sample viewed discipline as a means of teaching children about the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, though about a third identified discipline with punishment. The majority of parents were authoritative in their approach to parenting, combining warmth with firm boundaries. About one in 10 parents described themselves as taking a permissive approach and an even smaller minority (3.4 percent) said they used authoritarian methods (demanding obedience without explanation).

Parents reported that they predominantly used positive discipline methods such as rewards, praise and reasoning, and structuring the situation. More punitive methods such as smacking and shouting were used, but much less frequently than positive methods. While more than a third of parents interviewed said that they smacked, our diary data suggest that this use was very infrequent. Parents' diaries showed a predominance of positive disciplinary methods (praise, reward and distraction), and only about seven percent of parents recorded using any kind of physical punishment. The diaries indicated that the most common way that parents controlled their children's behaviour was through verbal instruction and explanation – telling them what to do or what not to do, explaining why, and backing this up with positive reinforcement and occasional use of mild punishment (the most common being time out). These findings agree with other recent research (Ministry of Health, 2008; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2008) suggesting that only a minority of parents favour the use of physical punishment, and that explanation and discussion are a very common approach.

Research (Smith et al, 2005) has suggested that the most effective form of discipline is an authoritative approach, which combines warmth, good communication, reasoning, appropriate expectations and clear boundaries, with the avoidance of harsh punishment. Although past research (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1997) has showed that New Zealand parents were inclined towards using negative methods of discipline,

this study presents a more favourable picture of New Zealand families. The study suggests that while just over a third of parents do physically punish, this is a relatively rare approach, and that parents on the whole use positive disciplinary methods. It seems that in the 21st century there is movement away from the use of violence to control children's behaviour within the family, towards alternative more positive methods for guiding them towards adopting the values and norms of their society. It is likely that the increasing publicity given to the devastating effects of physical abuse on children has heightened public awareness of the dangers of physical punishment, and provided more information about alternative approaches. The influence of TV programmes such as Supernanny could also have contributed to changes. It is likely that the debate surrounding the change in the law to make it illegal to physically punish children has moved public opinion (despite the lack of a public campaign explaining the reasons for and consequences of the law change). It may be that New Zealand, like Sweden (Durrant, 2004) and more recently Germany (Bussman, 2004), is seeing a change in thinking, and moving away from Victorian approaches to childrearing.

Child and family characteristics did not show strong association with parents' reports of their use of discipline. Surprisingly given previous research (Gollop, 2005), the child's gender did not influence parental disciplinary approach. Older pre-schoolers were a little more likely to be punished, according to the parents, perhaps because of the setting up of boundaries in many areas for children of this age, and the unsuitability of certain techniques (such as time out) for younger children (Wissow, 2002). Income had a small effect – lower-income families used more negative sanctions and experienced more hassles. Single-parent families and larger families also tended to have more hassles and use more negative methods. Marital status and income have previously been found to be related to physical punishment (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Wissow, 2001). Nevertheless, the small differences between groups, and the small size of the subgroups in this study, caution against overgeneralisation from these data.

The strongest influence on parents' disciplinary approach (for more than three-quarters of the sample) was their own experience of parenting during childhood, while over a third thought that written

material, current family, TV and radio and friends had influenced them. Almost one in three described their own professional education as an important influence, and a further third said that professionals (such as the Plunket nurse or doctor) were. Most parents in this study received some advice or support from family, early childhood centre teachers, friends and partners. On average parents had between three and four sources of support. Perhaps the most interesting and unexpected finding about support was that early childhood teachers were regarded by the second-largest number (almost half) as important and by the largest number of parents (29 percent) as giving them the most useful advice. More than a third of parents sought information and advice from written material and just under a third asked the Plunket nurse. This study suggests that parents with more sources of support are more likely to use positive disciplinary methods and less likely to use negative disciplinary methods.

It is not surprising that parents' own experience of being brought up is a powerful influence on their own child-rearing approach. Previous research (Lopez Stewart et al, 2000) suggests that parents get most of their information about health from other family members. Although some parents consciously reject some of their own parents' approaches, this is not easy to do. It is likely that many of the previous generation of parents are also being influenced by the current change in climate about appropriate parenting, so practices are not static between generations. Most parents in this sample had support from family, friends and professionals, although about one in 10 had very little support.

Support and advice are important in influencing parents away from negative and towards positive approaches to discipline. These influences may be direct, through, for example, making suggestions for effective strategies. They may also be indirect, by relieving parents of the constant stress of caring for young children on their own. Both family (such as grandparents) and professionals (especially early childhood teachers) can help indirectly, by giving parents a break which can result in them having more energy and patience to interact positively with their children when they are together. The continuing and powerful role of family social capital in enabling parents to enjoy parenting, and parent effectively, is heartening. In most families

noone can so effectively provide practical help and moral support to parents as their own families. The context of intimacy, warmth and trust within families, and their willingness to provide practical help, is crucial for nurturing good parenting in the next generation. In an age of family mobility and delayed retirement, however, grandparents are not always easily available, so isolation and lack of available family support is not uncommon.

The introduction of television and radio programmes, the increasing number of books and magazine material and access to the internet has clearly been another useful resource for parents. Davis (1999) also found that parents often changed their views about discipline through ideas they had read about in books and the media. He also found that informal contacts – relatives, friends or colleagues – were influential.

According to our findings, professionals also play an important role in supporting parents. The advice and support of early childhood teachers was particularly likely to be seen as useful, and the support of Plunket nurses was also valued. Findings that professionals are often too busy and rushed, as well as not knowing enough to give good advice (Lopez Stewart et al, 2000), are not replicated in this study. Only a small number of parents expressed dissatisfaction with professional advice. New Zealand's high rates of participation in early childhood centres (Smith & May, 2006) means that many under-five-year-olds spend some time away from their parents. This means regular (often daily) contact between parents and early childhood teachers occurs when children are dropped off and collected, so that parents have relatively easy access to them. The fact that most parents know the teachers well from this daily contact, and that they trust them to educate and care for their young children, makes them a very good potential source of support. Plunket nurses are perhaps more often accessed by parents who have infants and toddlers rather than older pre-schoolers, but they are still an important source of help and advice for parents. GPs are rather less often referred to by parents as a support, though potentially they could influence parenting. Despite the relatively high take-up by these parents of parenting courses, it is likely that regular and continuing relationships between family support professionals and parents will be more effective in enabling parents to cope than parent education courses

(Duncan, Bowden, & Smith, 2006; Halpern, 1993; Powell, 1997). Duncan et al found that:

> Families tended to see informal support as putting less pressure on parents, and as more respectful of their parental rights and choices than other forms of 'organised' information-sharing activities or meetings. Interestingly most of the EC centre support that was identified by the parents as helpful was informal and incidental, and was initiated and offered through informal verbal interaction. (Duncan, et al, 2005, p. 11)

From our previous research (Lawrence & Smith, 2009), we know that many professionals do not feel well prepared to support parents when approached by them for advice about disciplinary issues. It is therefore essential that they are provided with appropriate forms of pre-service and in-service training concerning discipline. Training should be based on recent research and practicable ideas which are relevant to the everyday lives of parents. The recent law change makes the knowledge and resourcefulness of professionals who work with families even more pivotal.

The role of early childhood teachers as supporters of parents with young children, highlighted by many parents in this study, should be valued, acknowledged and catered for. Employment conditions and structural features of early childhood centres (such as ratio and group size) influence how well teachers can fulfil a family-support role. Teachers who are struggling to cope with large groups and unfavourable ratios are less likely to have the energy or time to invest in nurturing their relationships with parents, or to make themselves available to talk informally with parents. The Ministry of Education has been providing additional support for early childhood centres that offer Parent Support programmes, which is an admirable initiative. With luck this will continue and will be widened to cover all centres, since parent support is an integral part of high-quality early childhood education. The early childhood teacher's role as a parent supporter should be normative in all centres, and teachers and centres should be provided with the resources (through training, time and space) to fulfil this role. While most registered early childhood teachers have done courses on parent support, it is unlikely that many have been provided with recent professional development on effective discipline that reflects new research findings (Lawrence & Smith, 2009). Teacher education and

professional development in parent support on discipline is an area which needs attention.

The limitations to the present study are mainly due to the nature of the sample, which has a higher representation of high-income, well-educated European parents than is true of the general population. While we reached the target number of families we had wanted to recruit, we were not as successful in recruiting Māori, Pasifika or Asian families as we would have wished. The nature of the recruitment process, which required families to volunteer in response to advertising and through networks of professionals, may have solicited a better-educated and more Pākehā sample than the general population. Professionals were, however, mostly community-based with strong networks among parents, including those from low socio-economic groups (such as Family Start).

The statistical analyses were correlational and did not allow causal relationships to be inferred. Had we been able to gather data longitudinally this would have added strength to the study by allowing more sophisticated statistical analyses and establishing the stability of attitudes and behaviour over time.

There are limitations with self-report data because of memory lapses or wanting to appear a good parent to the interviewer. Asking parents face-to-face about sensitive topics such as their disciplinary practices with young children (especially given the recent law change) may have made parents less likely to answer honestly if they did use physical punishment, for fear of action being taken against them. The timing of this study, over the period during which there was a debate about a controversial law change, is likely to have influenced the parents' responses. Most (but not all) were aware of the debate and had seen some of the extensive media coverage. It is difficult to speculate how the timing of the study would have influenced their responses, however. It could have made them more determined to stand up for their 'parental rights to use physical punishment', or it could have made them more aware of the harmful effects of physical punishment on children.

Nevertheless, the study has many strengths, particularly its combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, allowing us to gain an overview of attitudes and practices amongst parents (and subgroups within them), as well as to explore the interpretation and meanings that parents attributed to

their experiences. The use of the diary method provided more ecologically valid data about disciplinary practices in the context of everyday family life than much previous research in this area. Unfortunately, we could only obtain diary records from about half of the families interviewed, probably because of the demands of family life on parents with young children. The parents who completed the diary could have chosen days that were less stressful – when they felt less tired and had less workload – which may have influenced the disciplinary practices reported in the diary. On the other hand, they could have remembered and recorded particularly difficult days. The data we did obtain were helpful in giving us a perspective on the interactions which occur daily between parents and children. Future analysis of the qualitative data will add to our knowledge of the nature of the interactions. While the diary data draw on a smaller sample than the interview data, they probably provide a more realistic picture of everyday disciplinary encounters. It also provided a useful way of triangulating the data, in combination with the interviews and the standardised Parenting Daily Hassles scale data.

To return to the theoretical perspective introduced at the beginning of this report, we have examined a number of levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model. Firstly we have explored the microsystem of the family and the reciprocal interactions which take place between parents and children, especially those used to guide and support children towards behaving within the boundaries of normative behaviour for their culture. The study suggests that on the whole families use warmth, clear communication of rules and boundaries, and reasoning rather than punishment or demands for obedience without explanation. Most families, however, have to use mild punishment on occasion to back up their demands, but they use negative sanctions less often than positive consequences. Bronfenbrenner (1979) places particular importance on reciprocity, warmth and balance of power within the interpersonal structures of the family. He argues that the momentum developed through reciprocal interactions within joint activities carries over to other times and places, and that such interactions contribute to both social and cognitive development.

At another level of the ecological system of the family, the exosystem, we have looked at factors that support

or constrain the capacity of the microsystem to function optimally. The capacity of the family to nurture human development is dependent "on the presence and participation of third parties, such as spouses, relatives, friends and neighbours" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 5) which, like a three-legged stool, is more likely to fall over if one leg is broken or shorter than the others. (He also refers to these systems as "N+2 systems".) We have shown that relatives, spouses, friends and early childhood teachers do have an influence on the type of disciplinary approach that parents use. Also, the media and written material are referred to by many parents when they are deciding how to discipline their children. Other professionals such as Plunket nurses, midwives and doctors also played a role in influencing parents. Interestingly, neighbours were very rarely mentioned as agents of support for families. In the same way, stresses from outside the family (such as a high workload) can diminish families' capacity to use positive discipline and to cope. Tiredness and workload were the most commonly experienced stresses reported by parents as having an effect on their parenting ability in this study.

Mesosystem linkages are another important influence on family functioning. New Zealand pre-school children often spend time both in early childhood centres and homes, and they move between these two systems, so early childhood teachers and centres are a potentially powerful source of support. Professionals need to be knowledgeable about disciplinary principles, but they also need to be able to communicate information informally rather than passing it on from an 'expert' position. Informal communication between parents and teachers or other professionals is the best way for knowledge and attitudes to be shared because this involves reciprocity, warmth and balance of power, which nurture supportive connections between systems.

Finally, at the level of the macrosystem within Aotearoa New Zealand, a change seems to be occurring, so that violence against children within the family is much less tolerated than it used to be. There were only a very few participants in our study who were positive about the use of physical punishment. Recent law changes such as the introduction of the Child Discipline Bill in 2007, and a recent media campaign against family violence, are initiatives at the government level which may be helping to turn the tide. Judging by the media

interest in the Children's Issues Centre literature review work (Smith et al, 2005), widespread distribution of summaries of the research (Smith et al, 2004), and attendance of professionals at national seminars and conference presentations on this work, scientific research about the dangers to health of physical punishment is being disseminated widely. This may contribute to increased professional knowledge about research on family discipline.

Such findings are likely to be disseminated to families if society has a strong infrastructure of support for families. Joan Durrant (2004, p. 25) has described the powerful infrastructure support for families in Sweden, "where social policy places children's physical and social health at the centre". There are many factors in our health, education and social development policies that we can be proud of in New Zealand. Our early childhood education and children's health systems are admired and adopted around the world. There are, however, gaps in infrastructure support for building

positive family interactions over discipline. The Swedish model (Durrant, 2004) provides for such supports as sickness insurance so parents can take time off to be with sick children, generous parental leave and delivery of parenting information through community-based well-baby clinics and parent groups. Parenting education in Sweden has focused on helping parents to eliminate physical punishment from their parenting repertoire.

While we do have many parenting programmes in New Zealand, there is a gap in access to good professional development programmes for many professionals who provide them. This was a finding from an earlier phase of the family discipline study (Lawrence & Smith, 2009) and is to some extent reflected in the findings of the current study. Especially in the context of additional stresses from the current economic recession, it is vital that we retain and strengthen our commitment to the development of high-quality support services for children and families.

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[1] The term *parents* will be used in the article from now on, although it should be noted that this did include carers such as grandparents.

[2] Percentages do not add up to 100 in this section, since parents were able to respond in more than one category.

[3] A score of 1 was given when parents named one or two sources of support, 2 when parents named three or four sources of support, and 3 when they named five or more sources of support.

APPENDIX A:

Parents interview

This interview will mainly focus on [child's name] but you may want to bring in examples which are about other children. If we can start with you telling me about your family and the childcare roles they play. [*Prompts: Who lives here with you?; Who besides you plays a major role in caring for your children?*]

> This interview is mainly concerning [child's name] so can you tell me a little about CHILD'S NAME? What sort of child is s/he?

> I would like to ask about the term 'discipline' so, when you hear the word 'discipline' what comes to mind?

> We are interested in why parents use particular approaches to discipline. What has shaped your approach? [*Prompts: Experience with older child or other family members; as a child; family; friend; professionals; books/ magazines/TV*]

> Where do you find information on disciplining your child/ren?

Family members – who? what?
Friend – who? what?
Professionals – who? what?
Books/Magazines/TV – which? what?
Church - which? what?
Anywhere else – who? what?

> Do you look for information on family discipline when specific problems occur?

> Can you tell me about any courses you have attended in which you received information about family discipline? If interviewee has attended a parenting support programme. [*Prompt: Organisation course run by; referral; length; content.*]

>> How did you find the course? Did it make any difference to you?

>> Can you give me an example?

Now the questions move on to how you guide your child/ren's behaviour.

> What is your approach to bringing up children? (strict; easy going)

> Can you tell me about any beliefs that influence the way you discipline your child? Prompts: religion; cultural; generational

>> Do you discipline your children in the same way you were disciplined?

> *Ask If there is a partner*

Is your partner's approach the same as yours?

>> If different, does this cause any difficulties? for [child's name]?; for you?; for your partner?

> Does anyone else have a role in caring for [child's name]?

>> Do you and [name of other adults] have similar approaches to discipline?

>> If different, does this cause any difficulties? for [child's name]?; for you?; for other adult?

> *Ask If there are differences in approaches*

>> Can you give me an example?

> Can you tell me about the different discipline techniques you have used with [child's name]? [*Prompt: reward system; praise; distraction. If parent only gives examples of punishment, ask if they use rewards or incentives.*]

> Do you use the same discipline techniques in different circumstances? [*Prompt shopping; at friends; at home.*]

> Do you use the same disciplinary approach with other children? (only ask this if there are siblings)

> What have you found to be the most effective form of discipline with CHILD'S NAME?

>> Can you give me an example of how this has worked?

> Can you give me an example of an issue that used to be a problem but has now been resolved?

> What sort of behavioural issues are you facing at present with [child's name]?

>> What approaches have you taken?

>> Why do you think they have not been successful?

> Can you give me any examples of approaches you have used in the past that you feel have not worked? Why do you think they have not been successful?

> What sorts of issues do you find difficult to deal with?

> The way people bring up their children is often affected by things going on in their lives like illness or workload. Have you experienced this and if so, can you give me an example?

>> I'd like to find out about any support or advice you might have had in parenting [child's name] so the next set of questions will be in relation to this.

> What support do you get with parenting? [*Prompt babysitting; transport*]

>> Is there anyone else you seek advice from? – who? what? [professional or family]

> If you were concerned about [child's name] behaviour, who would you be most likely to ask for advice from and why?

> Is there anyone else you seek advice from?
Family members – who? what?;
Friend – who? what?
Professionals – who? what?;
Books/Magazines/TV – which? what?
Anywhere else – who? what?

> Can you give me an example of an incident where you have talked to someone about a discipline concern?

> Can you tell me about any advice you have been given which you have used and found useful? What?; who?; changes?

> Have you had any advice which contradicted your own beliefs. If yes, please explain.

> Have you ever been advised against particular practices?
What?; Who?

> Have you found the advice/support you have been offered in this area useful?

>> Do you think any other source of advice or support would have been useful to you?

>> What sort of things do you think would help you most to be a good parent?

Other questions

> There is currently some discussion about changing the law about parental discipline of children. Can you tell me what you know about this and what your views are?

APPENDIX B:

Diary

DATE _____

Overall how would you rate your child's behaviour today?

Very good		**OK**		**Very naughty**
1	2	3	4	5

Overall, how would you rate the discipline encounters with your child today?

Very positive	**Positive**	**OK**	**Negative**	**Very negative**
1	2	3	4	5

Overall, how do you feel about the way you dealt with your child's behaviour today?

Very good		**OK**		**Not very good**
1	2	3	4	5

Was the way your child behaved today typical? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Were there any factors that had an impact on you or your child's day? (eg: sick; tired; work commitments).

On the table below, please tick next to any discipline strategies you have used with your child today. Use the blank lines to list any strategies you used today that are not listed. In the comments column please tell us more about the strategies you used.

Strategies	Tick	Comments
Reward		
Not speaking/ignoring		
Verbal instruction		
Verbal warning		
Smacking/spanking on the bottom		
Distraction		
Verbal reprimand		
Threatening with punishment		
Time-out		
Shouting/yelling		
Physically restraint		
Withdrawal of a privilege		
Threatening to tell someone else about child's behaviour		
Smacking/spanking hand		
Promise of reward		
Smacking/spanking other		
Grounding		
Removing things from child's reach		
Negotiation		
Explanation/reasoning		
Praise		
Physically restraint		

Thinking about the discipline strategies you used with your child today and, using the following questions as a guide, please tell us about **up to two different** situations.

Question Guide

Before

> What were you doing? where were you and your child? Was anyone else there?

> How were you feeling?

Incident

> What did your child do?

> How did you feel?

> What did you do?

After

> Did it work? What did your child's do?

> How did you feel?

> Would you use the same approach again?

Blue Skies Research

1/06   *Les Familles et Whānau sans Frontières: New Zealand and transnational family obligation,* Lunt with McPherson & Browning, March 2006.

2/06   *Two Parents, Two Households: New Zealand data collections, language and complex parenting,* Calister & Birks, March 2006.

3/06   *Grandfathers – Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions,* Wilton & Davey, March 2006.

4/06   *Neighbourhood Environments that Support Families,* Witten, Penney, Faalau, & Jensen, May 2006.

5/06   *New Communication Technologies and Family Life,* Weatherall & Ramsay, May 2006.

6/06   *Families and Heavy Drinking: Impacts on children's wellbeing,* Systematic Review, Girling, Huakau, Casswell, & Conway, June 2005.

7/06   *Beyond Demography: History, ritual and families in the twenty-first century,* Pryor, June 2005.

8/06   *Whānau is Whānau,* Walker, Ngāti Porou, July 2006.

9/06   *Supervised Contact: The views of parents and staff at three Barnardos Contact Centres in the southern region of New Zealand,* Gibbs & McKenzie, August 2006.

10/06   *New Zealanders' Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting,* Robertson, August 2006.

11/06   *Korean Migrant Families in Christchurch: Expectations and experiences,* Chang, Morris, & Vokes, October 2006.

12/06   *The Role of Whānau in the Lives of Māori with Physical Disabilities,* Collins & Hickey, September 2006.

13/06   *New Spaces and Possibilities: The adjustment to parenthood for new migrant mothers,* DeSouza, November 2006.

14/06   *New Zealand Cultural Norms of Parenting and Childcare and How These Relate to Labour Force Participation Decisions and Requirements,* McPherson, November 2006.

15/06   *Towards a Statistical Typology of New Zealand Households and Families: The efficacy of the family life cycle model and alternatives,* Crothers & McCormack, December 2006.

16/07   *The Family Court, Families and the Public Gaze,* Cheer, Caldwell, & Tully, April 2007.

17/07   *Fairness, Forgiveness and Families,* Evans, Yamaguchi, Raskauskas, & Harvey, April 2007.

18/07   *Managing Multiple Sclerosis and Motherhood: Women's stories,* Payne, McPherson, & Crerar, May 2007.

19/07   *Diverse Forms of Pacific Families and their Financial Decision-making Approaches,* Koloto & Katoanga, September 2007.

20/07   *Lifelines: Young New Zealanders imagine family, friends and relationships across their life-course,* Patterson, Peace, Campbell, & Parker, September 2007.

21/07   *Older Adults' Experience of Family Life: Linked lives and independent living,* Breheney & Stephens, November 2007.

22/08   *Whānau Socialisation Through Everyday Talk: A pilot study,* Tomlins-Jahnke & Durie, January 2008.

23/08   *Strengthening Rural Families: An exploration of industry transformation, community and social capital,* Goodrich & Sampson, April 2008.

24/08   *Grandparents in Rural Families: Young people's perspectives,* Keeling, Glasgow, & Morris, July 2008.

25/09   *Settling in: Parent-adolescent family dynamics in the acculturation process,* Stuart, Jose, & Ward, February 2009.

26/09   *Sent Home: The impact on the family of a child's exclusion from school,* Smith, March 2009.

27/09   *An Exploration of the Family Partnership Model in New Zealand,* Wilson & Huntington, May 2009.

28/09   *Who Cares for People with Schizophrenia: Family carers' health, circumstances and adjustment,* Collings, August 2009.

29/09   *We're a Family: A study of how lesbians and gay men are creating and maintaining family in New Zealand,* Gunn & Surtees, August 2009.

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