

# research in brief

## **Who's Listening to the Experts**

A recent study found that parents do, indeed, use published child care materials. Of the parents responding to the questionnaire, over 95% reported using some written child care material while rearing their children. The most common reason for consulting material was to obtain general information about child development and child care. A little over 25% of the respondents had consulted the written material to gain information about specific problems they were having with their children.

Most of the reasons given, however, for consulting the writings of the "experts" were preventative in nature; in other words, they were using the information to prevent problems from occurring. Eight out of 10 parents indicated the information had been helpful, while over 50% noted the reading material had influenced them to change their behavior toward their children.

Younger parents had done the most reading about child rearing. Some of the hypothesized reasons for the younger parents being more active in searching outside information might be the gradual decline in the availability of traditional sources of child-rearing information (grandparents and other relatives). These significant others aren't as readily available as they once were because of age segregation and geographic mobility of our society. Still another factor might be the general trend to consult "experts" in all of our endeavors.

These findings have some potential implications for Extension professionals:

1. With the increased tendency of parents to consult child care and parenting "experts," we as Extension "experts" need to be sure the information we provide our clientele is both accurate and timely. Parents are entitled to material that's scientifically sound, not just merely based on a belief or personal opinion.
2. As the cost of travel continues to escalate, written materials may become an even more viable and important teaching tool.

3. The current trend of more and more mothers joining the work force has left Extension's primary audience dealing with family-related matters much less accessible. The written word could become a great asset to the working parent.
4. Traditionally, Extension child care information hasn't been disseminated to fathers. It was the mothers who attended the workshops, seminars, and study groups. The written word could provide us with access to the father for family life related material.
5. This study indicates that parents will and do use written information. This raises a more important question: Are we, as Extension "experts," providing enough written information to those we serve?

"Who Is Listening to the 'Experts'? The Use of Child Care Materials by Parents." Michael J. Geboy. *Family Relations*, XXX (April, 1981), 205-10.

*Glen Jenson*