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MMPI DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LDS PARENTS OF DISTURBED AND NONDISTURBED CHILDREN

A. Dean Byrd Ph.D.*

Much of the underlying theoretical rationale of childhood psychopathology has pointed to parents as causal agents (Lowitt, 1975). The hypothesis that parental attitudes and behaviors play a major role in the shaping of personality and in the development of emotional disturbances in children is a primary assumption underlying most diagnostic and prognostic formulations in child clinical settings (Karson and Markenson, 1973). This view has been primarily supported by clinical evidence such as case histories and psychiatric interviews (Liverant, 1959). What little experimental research that has been done relating parental factors to emotional disturbance in children has been inconclusive and frequently contradictory (Frank, 1965). Although there is a relatively large amount of research which points towards the importance of parental attitudes and personalities upon child behavior, the current author is not aware of any studies that directly investigate the differences between parents of disturbed and nondisturbed children using an objective instrument.

The need for research and effective treatment and educational procedures is evidenced by the growing number of concerns of school personnel and parents, as well as the prevalence of journal articles dealing with the emotionally disturbed child (Walton, 1975). In developing effective treatment procedures, it is necessary to first consider the conditions that are conducive to the development of difficulties. These conditions, in turn, must be related to the conditions of helping (Carkhuff, 1970). It is in this light that the current research was undertaken.

Subjects and Method of Data Collection

The subjects were selected from the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) residing in the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. The area ecclesiastical leaders were contacted and furnished with applications for participation in a research project dealing with special-needs children. The population consisted of those LDS parents of emotionally disturbed children whose applications were returned and accepted based upon specified

qualifications. Thirty-seven applicants qualified. Each of these parents was required to have a child who had been diagnosed as emotionally disturbed by a certified school psychologist. The Child had to be between the ages of 6 and 17. Fifteen sets of parents of emotionally disturbed children were randomly selected from the population of thirty-seven applicants. This comprised the experimental group. The area ecclesiastical leader of each experimental set of parents provided information concerning all the parents of non-disturbed children residing within his jurisdiction. From this information, fifteen control couples were selected and matched with the parents in the experimental group based on age, socioeconomic status, educational level and number of children. Age was allowed to vary by one year, socioeconomic status was based on \$5,000 increments, educational level was allowed to vary by one year and number of children was allowed to vary by one. In addition, each couple in the control group had a child comparable in age to the emotionally disturbed child of the experimental couple.

Both control and experimental parents were invited to attend an orientation prior to the beginning of an advertised parenting course. They were informed by letter and by phone that the orientation would take approximately two hours and would be given on three consecutive days, one of which they were to select. The earlier day was encouraged. During the course of this orientation, each parent was provided with a packet containing the MMPI, biographical information and parent surveys. The parents were required to complete the forms in one sitting and under classroom conditions. The MMPI was the first in the packet to be completed. The time taken to complete the forms varied and ranged from one hour and thirty-seven minutes to two hours and fifty-one minutes. The forms were collected and prepared for analysis. The parents were allowed to select one of four parent education groups held at various times. Both control and experimental groups utilized the "Parent Education Course" format designed by LDS Social Services and lasted approximately ten weeks, two hours weekly. It should be noted that the parent education course was offered as an incentive or reward and in this sense was not actually a part of the research. It was necessary to schedule an additional day for those parents who missed the earlier orientations. The same procedure was carefully followed.

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Results

LDS parents of emotionally disturbed children scored significantly higher than LDS parents of nondisturbed children on the following scales of the MMPI: the K scale (Test-taking Attitude) at the .05 level, on the HS scale (Hypochondriasis) at the .01 level, on the D scale (Depression) at the .05 level, on the HY scale (Hysteria) at the .01 level, on the PA scale (Paranoia) at the .05 level, on the PT scale (Psychasthenia) at the .01 level, on the SC scale (Schizophrenia) at the .01 level and on the MA scale (Hypomania) at the .01 level (See Table 1). Significant mean differences between fathers and mothers were noted on the MF scale of the MMPI with the mothers having the lower scores. This difference was noted at the .01 level and applied to both control and experimental groups. No other significant mean differences were noted between the mothers and fathers on the MMPI (See Table 2).

Table 1

Means, F Ratios and Level of Significance Associated with Analysis of Variance of MMPI Scale Scores of Parents of Emotionally Disturbed Children and Parents of Nondisturbed Children

Scale	Means		F	P
	Disturbed	Nondisturbed		
L	52.90	51.00	0.796	NS
F	55.60	55.33	2.95	NS
K	61.86	56.80	6.82	.05
HS	56.03	49.36	14.57	.01
D	54.73	50.66	6.39	.05
HY	62.73	54.53	24.57	.01
PD	68.00	54.50	33.37	.01
MF	54.50	51.60	1.65	NS
PA	59.83	52.93	10.58	.05
PT	56.26	51.00	9.10	.01
SC	57.63	51.10	11.89	.01
MA	56.10	49.56	9.45	.01
SI	51.36	51.10	1.08	NS
ES	53.90	55.90	2.00	NS
AI	46.23	48.70	.66	NS

Table 2

Means, F Ratios and Level of Significance Associated with Analysis of Variance of MMPI Scale Scores of Fathers and Mothers

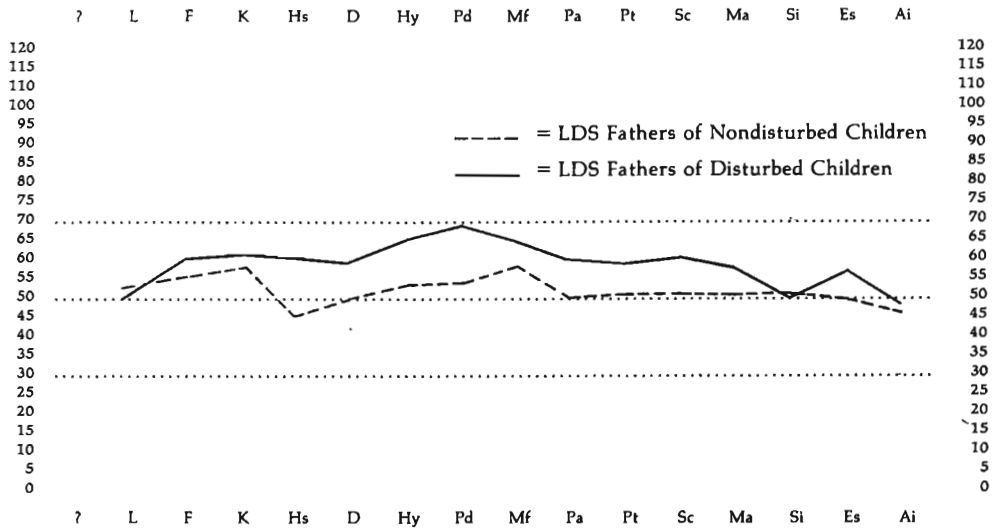
Scale	Means		F	P
	Fathers	Mothers		
L	51.20	52.70	0.49	NS
F	56.93	54.00	3.57	NS
K	59.16	59.50	2.95	NS
HS	54.00	51.40	2.21	NS
D	54.10	51.30	3.02	NS
HY	59.50	57.76	1.09	NS
PD	61.03	61.46	3.43	NS
MF	62.40	43.70	6.86	.01
PA	55.43	57.33	0.67	NS
PT	54.83	52.43	1.89	NS
SC	55.93	52.80	2.73	NS
MA	54.66	51.00	2.97	NS
SI	50.96	54.03	1.98	NS
ES	54.80	55.00	2.00	NS
AI	49.13	45.80	1.22	NS

Discussion

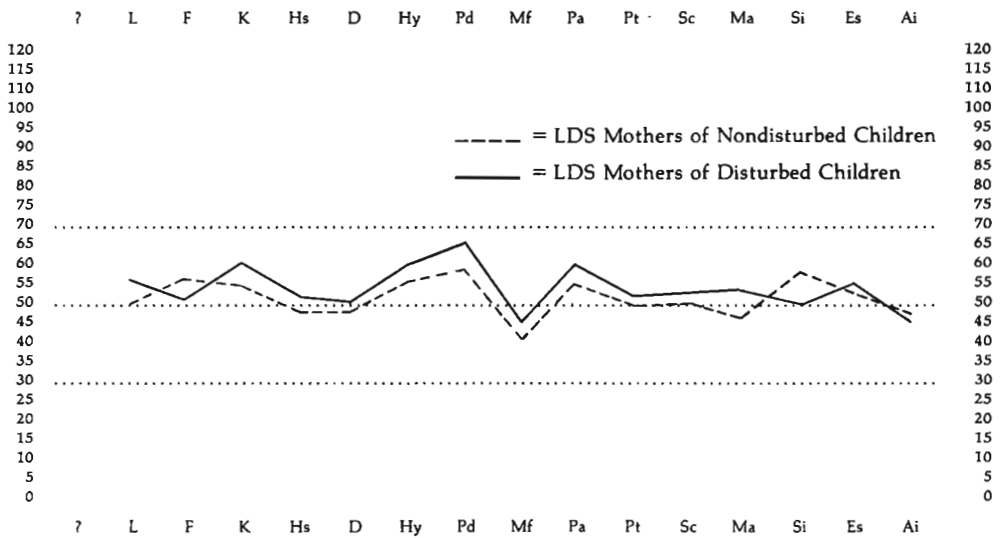
Before interpreting these results, it should be mentioned that the selection of the matching technique with all of its potential hazards, such as reducing the degrees of freedom, requiring a greater F ratio, possibility of statistical regressions toward the mean, and introduction of experimenter bias, was used in an attempt to exercise some control over certain intervening or possible contaminating variables mentioned in previous research. Particularly noted is the research by Welsh and Dahlstrom in 1956 and Goodstein in 1954. These researchers concluded that various MMPI scales did indeed differ as a function of certain demographic and socioeconomic variables.

In general, the results do lend support to the hypothesis that LDS parents of disturbed children are more disturbed than LDS parents of nondisturbed children as measured by the MMPI. This study does not, of course, focus on causation. The elevated scores of the experimental group may be related to the parents themselves, the disturbances of their children or a combination of both of these factors.

Pattern analysis (Graph 1 and Graph 2) reveal some interesting information in terms of the mothers and fathers of the disturbed children. The profile of the LDS fathers of the disturbed children is more elevated than that of the LDS mothers of disturbed children. The 4-3 MMPI profile which characterized both the LDS father and mother of disturbed children (again the father's profile is more elevated), according to Dahlstrom (1971) reflects problems in impulse control and social conformity. Persons with this configuration, although inhibited and moderate, episodically express their aggressive feelings directly and intensively. They are characterized by chronic hostility and aggressive feeling. This pattern was further described by Black and Gough, the latter of whom expanded a table published by Fred T. Tyler, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1951. Individuals who were characterized by this pattern were viewed as irresponsible, undependable, impulsive, egocentric, defiant, asocial, individualistic, tactless, improvident, deficient in ability to calculate own stimulus value, shallowness of affect, looks charming, no learning from experience, rebelliousness to authority, nonconformist and unable to accept pattern or routine. It should be mentioned that the profiles, though elevated for the experimental fathers, less elevated for the experimental mothers, is not marked for either. Therefore, the profiles are suggestive of trends in the direction of the above characteristics. Because of the large within-group variance on any one of the MMPI scales, the attributing of psychologically incapacitating characteristics to the experimental parents on the basis of the mean scores is at best indicative of certain group trends and does not necessarily apply to any individual within the group.



Graph 1
MMPI LDS Fathers' Profile



Graph 2
MMPI LDS Mothers' Profile

concluded on pg. 23

continued from pg. 16

Essentially, the present study failed to establish any definitive relationships between parental pathology and the kinds of behavior problems exhibited by their children. This may be a function of the inapplicability of the MMPI for such fine discriminations, the lack of within group homogeneity, the small size of the groups, or any combinations of the above factors.

Summary

The MMPI was used to compare fifteen sets of LDS parents of disturbed children (experimental group) with fifteen sets of LDS parents of nondisturbed children (control group). The mean differences between the experimental and control groups supported the general clinical impression that both LDS fathers and LDS mothers of disturbed children are themselves more maladjusted than the LDS fathers and mothers of nondisturbed children. However, pattern analysis and visual comparison with typical norms for psychiatrically disturbed adults indicated that the experimental parents are more like "normal" parents than they are like adults who seek psychiatric help for themselves.

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