

Towards a Canon of child and adolescent development and upbringing

What adults know and understand about the development and upbringing of children and adolescents

A summary of a research report¹

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SUMMARY

This is a summary in English of a report that is the first in a series of three based on large-scale research conducted by the Kenniscentrum Jeugd en Opvoeding (The Knowledge Centre for Youth and Childrearing) of The Hague University of Applied Sciences, and commissioned by the Municipality of The Hague. The objective of the project is to work towards developing a 'Canon of child and adolescent development and upbringing.'

A Canon is a collection of topics that addresses the core issues of child and adolescent development and upbringing. These issues are described in such a way that they are understandable and accessible to the public, as well as to those with a scientific background. A Canon is not meant to dictate what people should know or how they should act. Rather, it is a way of increasing knowledge and understanding, and promoting effective rearing practices. Compared to other adults with less knowledge, parents and non-parental caregivers with a certain amount of knowhow regarding child and adolescent development and upbringing are more likely to interact with children and adolescents in ways that stimulate their development, and decrease or prevent the chance of developmental problems.

A study into what adults and parents in particular know about the development and rearing of children and adolescents, and what the gaps in their knowledge are, was conducted as a first step towards creating a Canon.

This summary provides an overview of this study's objectives and its most important findings. A report, which is still to be published, discusses the results of a similar study among professionals such as elementary and secondary schoolteachers, childcare providers, and others. The third and final report will present the Canon itself, as well as describe methods to circulate the Canon effectively and stimulate parents and non-parental caregivers to use it.

Introduction

In recent decades, a vast amount of science-based data has been collected within various disciplines on child and adolescent development and upbringing practices.³ It is science-based in the sense that the data is not merely an expression of traditions or attitudes toward development and child-rearing practices, but rather takes into account scientific research that has been conducted according to an established set of research criteria. Most of the data is not relevant merely from a scientific point of view – it also has practical implications. These practical implications are of great importance for the daily care which parents and other adults provide.

The question arises whether this science-based data is known and available to those with an influence on development and child-rearing practices. It is quite remarkable that virtually no research has been conducted on this issue to date. The result is that the question as to what gaps exist in people's knowledge about development and upbringing practices remains unanswered. Consequently, there is also uncertainty about how to increase knowledge about children and their development and whether the best way to disseminate this knowledge is through measures supported by government, social institutions or through the media.

The few results available seem to indicate that there are considerable gaps in knowledge about important issues concerning development and child-rearing practices. In 2001, a triad of non-governmental organisations published the results of a study entitled *What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey*. Three thousand American adults participated in this study, including over 1000 parents with children between zero and six years of age. The aim of the study was to assess American adults' level of knowledge of child development and rearing practices, with a special focus on the intellectual, social and emotional development of young children. An additional goal was to acquire an adequate understanding of how the American public in general feels about public policies that affect children and families.⁴

The results of the American study indicate that adults are well informed about a number of child development issues. However, results also show some important gaps in knowledge. There was a lack of adequate knowledge concerning child development in the following areas, among others:

- 1) American parents often underestimate children's ability to sense what is going on around them. Children already have the ability to sense tensions in adult relationships at a very young age and are able to sense when a parent is depressed. Parents who are not aware that children are capable of this at a young age also do not know the detrimental effects depression or tensions in adult relationship can have on a child's development.
- 2) American parents often ascribe motives to or have expectations of children that are not realistic. Many parents believed that one-year-olds are capable of revenge-orientated

motivations while, in fact, one-year-olds have not yet developed the ability to engage in behaviour based on revenge. Additionally, many of those interviewed expected children to be capable of understanding the consequences of their actions at an age at which they were not yet able to do so.

- 3) As far as behavioural discipline is concerned, American parents lack information about adequate rearing practices, which often leads to the decision not to comfort or devote attention to their children as they think this will spoil them. Additionally, there is a lack of adequate knowledge about how to discipline a child; many parents underestimate the negative effects of physical punishment on children, such as spanking.

The results of the American study also show differences in the level of knowledge of child development and attitudes toward rearing practices of subgroups within the adult American population. American fathers were generally less knowledgeable than mothers. Future parents, those who do not yet have children but who plan to have children in the future, turned out to have the most gaps in knowledge of all the subgroups in the study. Furthermore, results indicated differences between generations; grandparents often judged rearing practices differently than younger generations. Grandparents labelled rearing practices that were regarded as normal by younger generations as 'spoiling'. Results from other research conducted recently in the United States show that grandparents, specifically those who have not raised children for a while, would benefit from an update concerning recent child development and parenting information. Moreover, it has been found that (foster) grandparents are less able than parents to discern and anticipate the psycho-emotional needs of children. When it comes to childrearing, American (foster) grandparents are more focused on discipline and obedience than on communicating, and consider it a sign of disrespect if a child has a differing opinion.⁵

Findings such as those above can be useful in deciding which information on development and adequate rearing practices is relevant to provide to adults, specifically (future) parents. It is also useful for deciding towards which societal groups child development information and childrearing courses should be geared.

The assumption here is that greater knowledge of development and child-rearing practices among adults improves their relationships with children and adolescents and has a positive influence on their development. Nevertheless, both professionals and the general public regard this assumption with considerable scepticism. The reason for this scepticism is the disastrous consequences of traditional childrearing theories and ideologies, which were widely supported although not based on scientific evidence. There is also scepticism about the use of knowledge in general. Many adults believe that childrearing is first and foremost based on love and intuition. Of course, both are essential for childrearing. Yet both can fail as parents and other adults can lovingly raise their children in an incorrect manner. As a renowned scientist put it: 'all we need is love' does not apply here – there is more to childrearing.⁶

Scientific evidence indicates that this 'more' can have a beneficial effect. Parents equipped with adequate knowledge and skills in development and upbringing influence their children and adolescents positively in both the short and long term. This applies to both biological and step parents.⁷

The specific relationship between knowledge and practice was investigated in a study that assessed mothers' level of child development knowledge and their relationship with their children. In a representative sample of over 10,000 American mothers⁸, it was found that mothers with a low level of child development knowledge (almost one-third) had less favourable relationships with their children and provided less stimulation for the child's cognitive development than mothers with a high level of child development knowledge. Additionally, there is a clear relationship between knowledge of child development and appropriate disciplining⁹. In other words, adequate knowledge of development and appropriate rearing practices has a significant effect.

Considering the importance of the issue at hand, the Municipality of The Hague, in the context of its action programme for youth, and the Lectoraat Jeugd en Opvoeding of The Hague University of Applied Sciences, have taken the initiative to conduct the first research project in the Netherlands on what adults, specifically (future) parents and grandparents, know and understand about child and adolescent development and appropriate rearing practices.

The present study differs from the aforementioned American Benchmark Study *'What Grown-Ups Understand about Child Development'* in that it is not limited to knowledge about early child development (zero to six years) but also focuses on adolescents. The present research therefore focuses on knowledge of development and rearing practices of children and adolescents between zero and 17 years of age. The present study partially replicates and partially modifies and extends the American study. The modification and extension are based on new scientific evidence in the field of child and adolescent development. Although the data was collected from a sample of over 1000 residents of the city of The Hague, there is reason to assume that the results have widespread implications.

Background and aims of the study

A number of preliminary studies were conducted in the Hague prior to commencing with the present study. Results from these preliminary studies indicate that, among a group of parents with children between the ages of zero and six, a group of grandparents, a random sample of adults, and a group of secondary school teachers¹⁰, willingness to participate was strong. Additionally, participants showed a keen interest in the correct answers to the questions. Moreover, numerous participants brought the research to the attention of others and/or signed up others to participate in the study.

In general, the survey used in these preliminary studies indicated high comprehensibility, feasibility, manageability and reliability. Additionally, the results of the studies were

indicative of the results of the American Benchmark Study: adults are knowledgeable about a number of areas of child development. However, there are also numerous, important gaps in their knowledge. Consequently, in the beginning of 2008, the Municipality of The Hague decided to carry out the planned research within the framework of a project entitled 'Towards a canon of child and adolescent development and upbringing'

The project has five objectives. These are:

- 1) To assess the level of knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development and appropriate rearing practices among adults living in the City of The Hague, with a main focus on (aspects of) emotional, social and cognitive development;
- 2) To determine possible differences between subgroups, namely:
 - parents (distinguishing between fathers and mothers, and two-parent and one-parent households)
 - future parents (adults who do not have children but who plan to have children in the future)
 - grandparents
 - adults who are not parents and who do not plan on any having children
 - men/women
- 3) To assess the level of knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development and appropriate rearing practices among professional and semi-professional child and adolescent educators, such as elementary and secondary school teachers, childcare providers and social workers.
- 4) To increase awareness of the importance of improving one's knowledge of child and adolescent development and appropriate rearing practices among adults, specifically, (future) parents and other adults involved in the development of children and adolescents. In practical terms, this is done by developing a canon of child and adolescent development and rearing, which is partly, but not solely, based on the data collected in the present study. This canon will be made available through various media, including the internet. In addition to providing adults with an opportunity to inform themselves on development issues, they can repeatedly quiz themselves on their level of knowledge of development and appropriate rearing practices.
- 5) To develop methods to increase familiarity, acceptance and use of a canon of child and adolescent development and rearing among diverse groups of the population.

This report, the first of three, covers the first two objectives and explains the design, execution and results of the study of what residents of The Hague know and understand about the development of children and adolescents and appropriate child-rearing practices (objectives 1 & 2).

The second report, which is still to be published, will describe the results of similar research amongst professional and semi-professional child and adolescent educators (objective 3). The third and final report will present the Canon of child and adolescent development and rearing. It will also provide methods for effectively circulating the Canon and stimulating parents and other adults who provide care for children and adolescents to use it (objectives 4 & 5).



What is a canon?

A canon is a manual aimed to increase knowledge, improve understanding and provide support for effective childrearing. In doing so, it addresses the factors necessary for a canon to be successful: scientific basis, general accessibility, widespread familiarity, suitable for the needs of the general public with respect to knowledge and lack of knowledge of development and child-rearing.

Summary of research methods and findings

The results presented in this report are derived from the results of interviews conducted with over 1000 residents of the City of The Hague. As in the American study, these interviews were conducted by telephone. Approximately three quarters of the participants were parents. This group is a representative sample of all parents residing in The Hague. Future parents, those between the ages of 18 to 39 years who do not yet have children but plan to have them in the future, were also interviewed, as were those who are not parents and did not plan to have any children. The survey also assessed the level of knowledge and understanding of a group of grandparents. The representativeness of these groups can be considered satisfactory. Representativeness cannot be claimed for the group of non-Dutch participants, because only those who spoke and understood the Dutch language adequately participated in the study. The interviews were administered in Dutch. The interview consisted of 87 questions, of which 58 were so-called 'knowledge questions', which related to knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development and appropriate rearing practices. The remaining questions were partly concerned with demographics such as sex, marital status, occupation, education, nationality and number of children, and with topics such as childrearing goals, confidence in one's ability to raise one's child(ren), information about childrearing and development requested and used, as well as knowledge about children's rights.

The 58 'knowledge questions' covered seven child and adolescent development areas, namely:

- phases in the development of infants and young children (zero to four years of age)
- growing up and health
- rules, boundaries and punishment
- the influence of parents and non-parental caregivers on general development
- the influence of parents and non-parental caregivers on cognitive development and achievement at school
- parents and friends of adolescents
- childcare

The correct answers to the knowledge questions were based on recent, international scientific and professional information.

Most prominent findings

The results indicate that, in line with the results of the American study, there are a considerable number of aspects of child development and rearing on which adults are adequately informed. However, gaps in knowledge about important development issues exist. These gaps can have significant consequences for how adults interact with and influence children and adolescents.

On average, the participants in the present study answered 32 of the 58 'canon' questions correctly – equivalent to 56% of the questions. However, this means of course that they did not know the correct answer to 44% of the questions. The result indicates that there is considerable room for improvement of knowledge and understanding of development and appropriate rearing practices.

There were significant differences between subgroups in the sample. Men and fathers appear to be less knowledgeable than women and mothers. There is a clear relationship to education: participants who completed a higher level of education were more knowledgeable than those who completed a lower level of education. There was also a 'generation effect'. In general, younger generations, specifically mothers with young children, appear to be better informed. Older generations, such as grandparents, are less knowledgeable. Despite these differences, it is striking that the areas on which participants are relatively knowledgeable, and less knowledgeable, are the same within all subgroups.

Specific findings: on which areas of the 'canon' questionnaire were those interviewed knowledgeable or well informed?

This section covers the areas on which most adults and parents were knowledgeable or well informed. For each area, a number of examples are discussed about issues for which mostly correct answers were given.

Development

Most adults and parents are well informed about a number of issues concerning normal development. The majority of participants knows it is normal for a two-to-three-month-old to cry for approximately 1 hour each day, at what age a child will say his or her first word, that a one-year-old does not understand or exhibit feelings of revenge, at what age children are most frequently physically aggressive, and that one cannot expect a three-year-old to sit quietly for one hour.

Motivation of a one-year-old

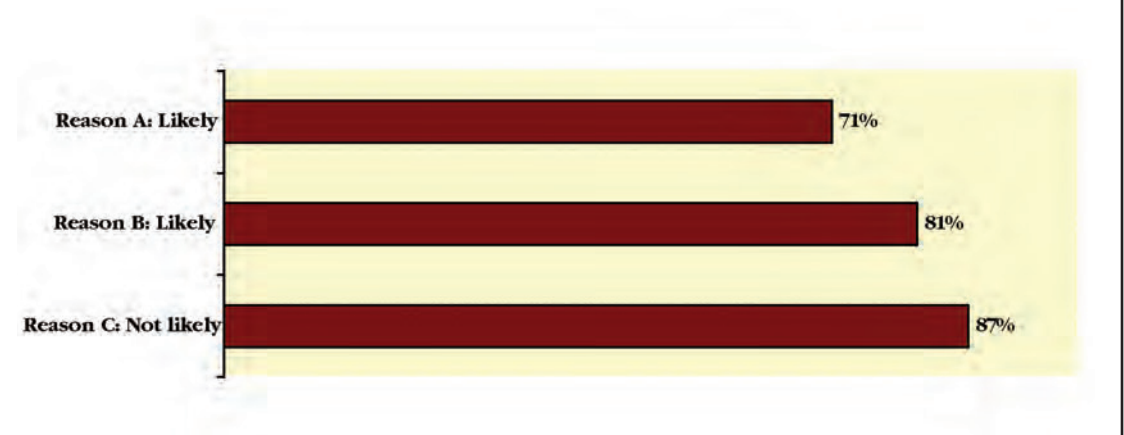
Adults often think that young children behave inappropriately rather than consider the fact that young children are curious and want to explore and take in the world around them. This matter was researched by presenting participants with the following situation, which was adapted from the American Benchmark Survey.

“Suppose a 12-month-old walks up to the TV and begins to turn the TV on and off repeatedly while her parents are trying to watch it. It is impossible to know exactly why the child is doing this. However, for each of the following reasons, please say how likely you believe it is that the explanation is ‘very likely’, ‘somewhat likely’ or ‘not likely at all.’

- a) the child wants to get her parents' attention*
- b) the child enjoys learning about what happens when buttons are pressed*
- c) the child is angry at her parents for some reason, so she is trying to get back at them*

The most likely reason that a one-year-old is turning the TV on and off is because she wants attention from her parents and/or she wants to learn what happens when the buttons are pressed. The other option, getting back at her parents, is highly unlikely. A one-year-old is too young to understand feelings of revenge or retaliation. A large majority of parents and other adults living in The Hague are well informed about this issue.

Participants thought the three reasons for a one-year-old to turn the TV on and off were as follows:



Compared to the results of the American study, residents of The Hague are better informed. Over 40% of Americans think that one-year-olds can understand and exhibit feelings of revenge and retaliation.

Growing up and health

Most adults and parents know that specific behaviour is favourable, or harmful, to the health of children and adolescents. The majority of participants know that consuming alcohol is more harmful for the brains of a 16-year-old than for the brains of an adult, that adolescents need relatively more sleep, that frequently skipping breakfast increases the likelihood of becoming overweight in adolescents, that the use of soft drugs by adolescents increases the likelihood of the use of hard drugs in adulthood, and that frequently watching television programmes with sexual content will increase the likelihood of early sexual relations among adolescents.

Influence of parents and non-parental caregivers on development

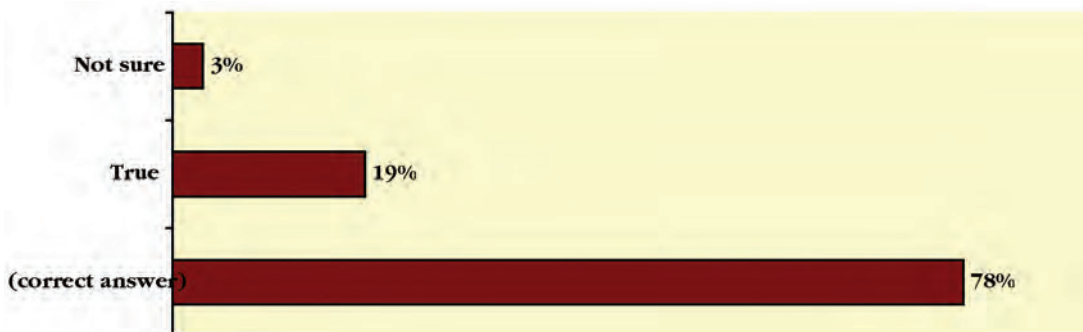
The vast majority of adults and parents knows that fathers play an important role in the development of a child's self-esteem, that divorce often has a negative influence on an adolescent's academic achievement, and that being raised by two parents of the same or different sex will not influence the development of a child's sexual identity. Adults and parents are also well-informed about issues related to language development and academic achievement.

Capacity for learning not set from birth

Participants were presented with the following statement related to the role of natural ability and the environment with respect to learning capacity, which was adapted from the American study in a slightly altered form:

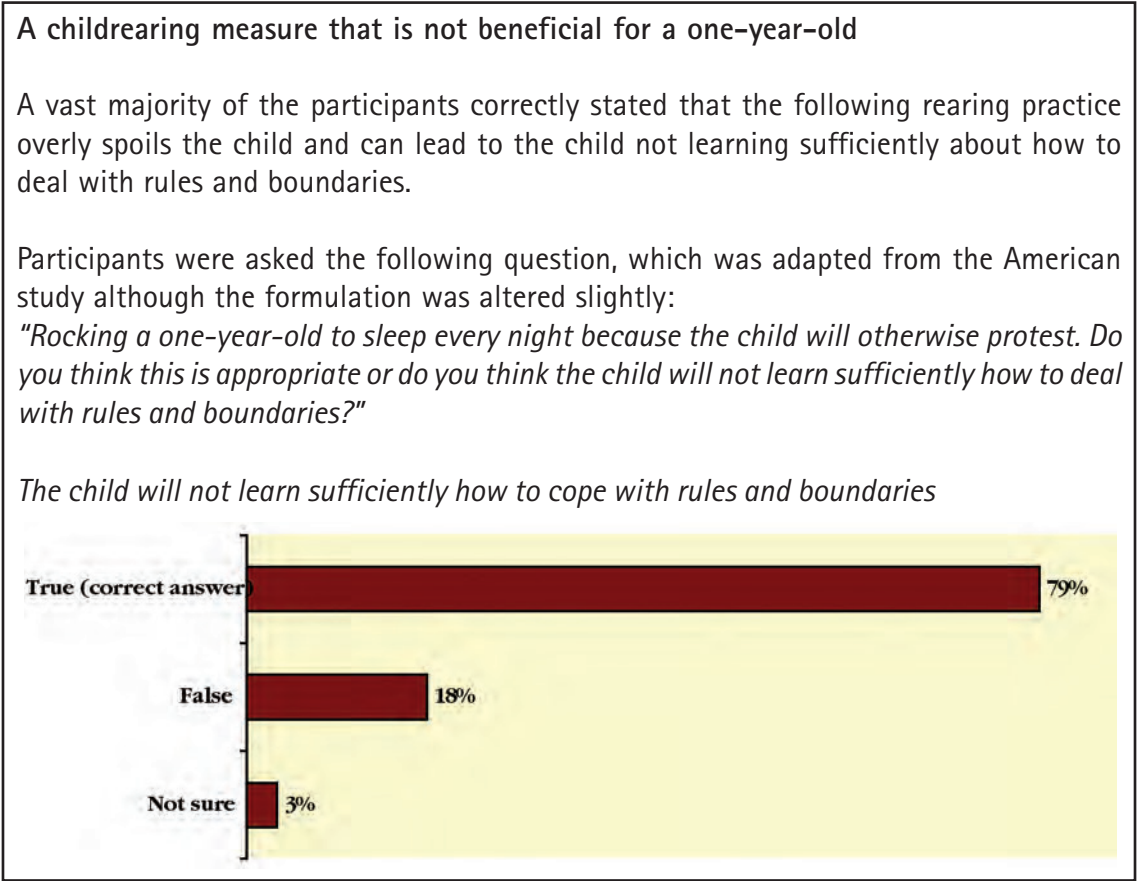
"Children's capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by how one interacts with the child."

Statement: Children's capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth



Dutch and American participants had very similar levels of knowledge concerning this issue. The majority in both research groups, 78% and 75% respectively, know that the interaction one has with the child can greatly influence his or her later capacity for learning.

The majority of participants knows at what age reading to children can have a favourable effect on the child's development. Additionally, most participants know that, as more parents become actively involved with a school, academic achievements of all children improve; that parents, will help them to better understand the material merely by listening to what children have learned at school; that direct communication is more effective for the development of young children than watching television. Additionally, the majority, although a small one, knows that it is incorrect to assume that parents who stay at home generally have a better relationship with their children than parents who work fulltime outside of the home. Finally, most parents know that some rearing practices will 'spoil' a child in the sense that the child will not effectively learn how to cope with rules and boundaries. However, most participants think that other, appropriate rearing practices will also spoil the child (see next section).



Childcare

Approximately two-thirds of adults and parents know that it is not correct to assume that care provided at home is always better for the development of a baby than childcare.

Specific findings: what gaps are there in the knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development and rearing?

This section looks at the largest gaps in knowledge and understanding of specific areas of development and rearing. The most important development issues on which adults were inadequately informed are presented for each area.

Phases in the development of infants and young children: at what age are children generally able to perform specific activities and when can they react to the world around them?

Almost nine out of 10 of the participants do not know that children, even at the very young age of one to a few months, have the ability to understand what is going on and are influenced by their parents' mood and tension in adult relationships.

The ability of a baby to take in and react to the world around him

The majority of participants (including parents of children between zero and six years of age) do not know at what age children take in and react to the world around them. While research indicates that children can already take in the world and react to it in the first days of life, participants estimate that children are able to do so between seven and eight months. Additionally, most participants do not know at what age children can sense and be influenced by their parents' or caretakers' mood. Scientific research indicates that infants sense and are influenced by their parents' or caretakers' mood in the first month of life. On average, participants estimate that a child of a year-and-a-half or older is able to sense and be affected by a parent's mood. This is a crucial issue, because when a parent or caretaker is very anxious or depressed, this can have a detrimental effect on a baby's development. The results of the Dutch study concerning the lack of knowledge of both aforementioned issues are almost identical to the results of the American study. In percentage terms, American participants scored slightly higher than Dutch participants.

It has also been found that two-thirds to three-quarters of participants do not know at what age children can generally perform certain activities, or what can normally be expected of children at different ages. This includes when a child begins smiling, when he or she can first express himself, when they begin make-believe play, when they start being able to feel embarrassed or ashamed, and when he or she begins to develop a sense of self-esteem.

When do children develop their sense of self-esteem?

Concerning the age at which children develop their sense of self-esteem, Dutch participants appear to be less knowledgeable than American participants.

Approximately 70% of American participants correctly stated that children develop their sense of self-esteem between the first and second year of life, whereas more than 70% of Dutch participants answered this question incorrectly. On average, Dutch participants estimated that children develop their sense of self-esteem when they are approximately three to five years old.

Rules, boundaries and punishment

Parents and other adults have the tendency to think that a young child can be spoiled too readily. A few examples: over two-thirds is of the opinion that picking up a three-month-old baby every time he or she cries is inappropriate because this will not adequately teach the child to cope with rules and boundaries. Furthermore, according to the majority of participants, letting a two-year-old leave the table before the rest of the family is finished with the meal inadequately teaches the child about rules and boundaries.

Many parents and adults do not know how to react appropriately to a child's troublesome behaviour. Almost 70% of participants do not know how to effectively respond to a two-to-three-year-old's temper tantrums and over 40% do not know how to effectively deal with quarrels between children at home.

It is also important to note that a large number of participants believes that punishing children by spanking them is appropriate. In reality, this type of punishment more often than not has negative consequences for children and the relationships between children and their caregivers. Almost half of the adults and half of the parents thinks it is appropriate to spank a child between the ages of one and five years of age when they deserve punishment. According to one-third of the adults and parents, this is also appropriate for a child between the ages of six and 12 years.

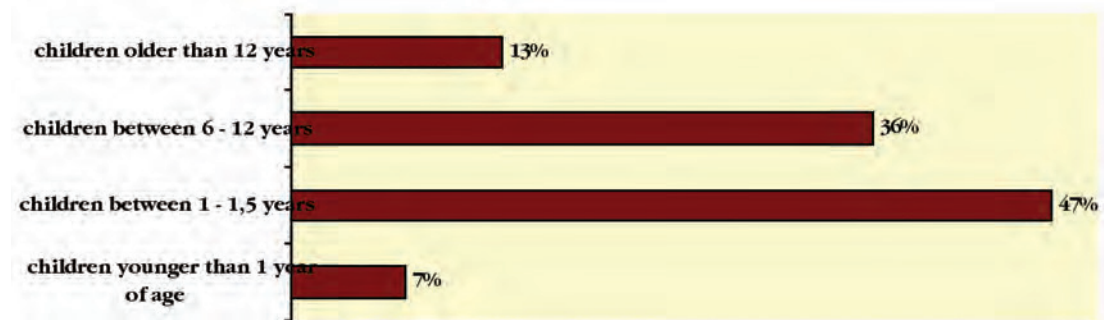
There is an important minority, one in six adults and one in 10 parents who are of the opinion or who at least do not rule out the possibility that children who regularly receive a spanking as a means of punishment will develop into parents who are better able to control themselves when disciplining their own children. This view is contrary to findings from scientific research.

What many participants do not know: spanking is not an appropriate form of punishment

One of the most important challenges for parents and other caretakers is teaching children the difference between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, safety and danger, and how to control themselves. They must instil all this without spanking or humiliating the child. In order to acquire a deeper understanding of the attitudes toward spanking, specific questions were formulated regarding the acceptance and appropriateness of spanking as a means of punishment.

"For each of the following age groups, can you indicate whether you think spanking is an appropriate form of punishment for that age group?"

Percentage of participants who think spanking is an appropriate form of punishment for children of different ages



the results of the Dutch study to the American study, it can be stated that 37% of American parents with children between zero and six years of age think that spanking is an appropriate form of punishment for children of two years and younger. It is striking that, in both studies, many participants believe that spanking is an appropriate form of punishment. The majority does not think, however, that spanking leads to a better sense of self-control later in life.

Influence of caregivers on development

The majority of adults and parents do not know or are incorrectly informed about the great influence, both positive and negative, they have on a child's development and wellbeing. For example, the majority of adults and parents is unaware of the fact that not responding to a crying two-to-three-month-old can lead to developmental problems, such as negative effects on a child's brain development. Furthermore, 60% of the participants do not know that negative influences can even effect the developing foetus during pregnancy and that

these influences can have an effect on the extent to which a child will exhibit aggressive behaviour.

Moreover, the majority of participants estimates that play becomes important for the child's development at a later age than results of scientific studies indicate. In addition, most participants underestimate the influence parents have on their adolescent children, such as their choice of friends.

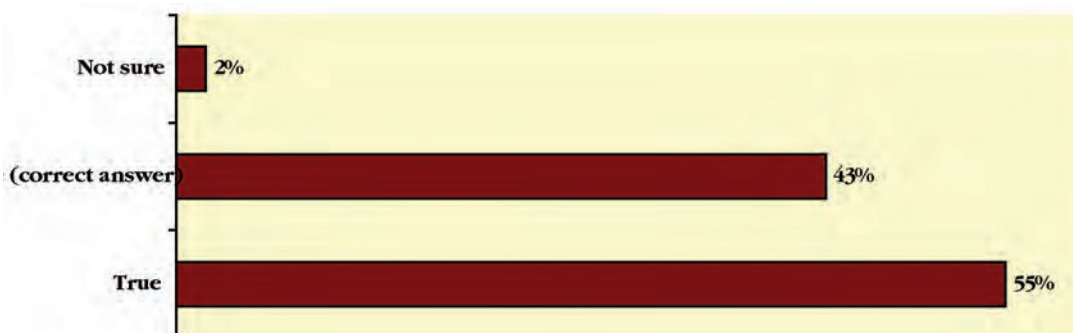
What many parents do not know: they have an influence on their teenager's choice of friends

There is widespread scientific research that indicates that parents can, both positively and negatively, influence their teenager's choice of friends – an influence they have prior to the start of adolescence. But do parents and other adults know this? The present study included the following question:

Is the following statement true or false?

"Parents rarely have an influence on their teenager's choice of friends."

Statement: Parents do not have an influence on the friends their adolescents choose



The following is worth mentioning with respect to the development and rearing issues of which a minority is not well informed. Almost 30% of the participants do not know or do not believe that witnessing domestic violence, such as seeing a father hit a mother at the age of around six months can have a negative effect on the child. This is in fact true. Additionally, approximately 40% of the participants misjudge the influence of experiences in the first year of life on intellectual development and later academic achievement. It is also worth mentioning that between the 30% and 40% of adults and parents incorrectly believe that, when a two-year-old is raised appropriately, he or she will be obedient most of the time.

Specific findings regarding the remaining areas of child and adolescent development and rearing that were investigated

Lifestyle and pregnancy

The influence on the child's development starts long before birth. This includes the mother's lifestyle, such as smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use during pregnancy. This sort of behaviour poses great risks for the child – risks that increase in severity if a combination of substances is used. How many mothers used such substances during one or more pregnancies? And what do the remaining participants know about the risks of passive smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy? Almost one in five mothers indicated having smoked once, every now and then, regularly, and even often during one or more pregnancies. There are considerable differences between the different groups of mothers concerning this issue.

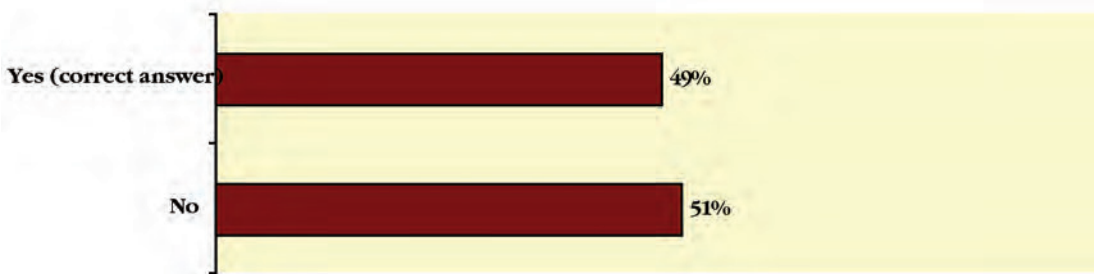
Smoking and passive smoking during pregnancy

26% of single mothers with young children indicate having smoked during their pregnancy compared to 5% of mothers who raise their young children together with a partner.

The majority of the remaining participants (adults without children, men and fathers) is informed incorrectly about the risks of passive smoking for the foetus. They were asked to give their view on the following statement:

"Smoking is not only damaging for the pregnant mother in a smoky area. So-called passive smoking is also damaging for the foetus."

Passive smoking is damaging to the foetus



Less than a quarter of the remaining participants knows that consuming one glass of alcohol a week during pregnancy presents a risk to the development of the child and should therefore be discouraged.

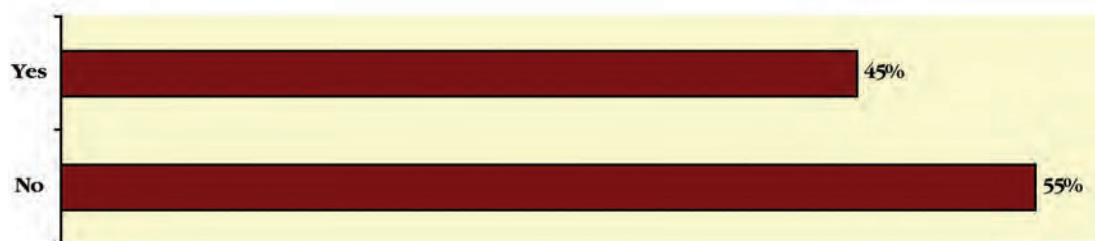
Uncertainty with respect to parenting, the information sources used and requests for information and support

It is often said that the majority of parents in this era are highly uncertain about their parenting (and that this uncertainty increases over time). This conception is not supported by the results of the present study, however. Just a small minority of parents (1.4%) is uncertain about his or her parenting. By far the majority of parents indicates that they feel mostly secure about their parenting or more secure than insecure about their parenting.

Parents were asked whether they have ever asked for or requested support regarding childrearing and development.

Information or support on childrearing requested by parents

Have you ever requested information or support regarding childrearing and development?



It is striking that more than half of the parents (55%) indicates that they have never asked advice or sought support regarding childrearing and development. This, in combination with the fact that almost all parents generally feel secure rather than insecure about their parenting, raises an intriguing question: does this sense of security about one's parenting keep parents from asking advice or seeking support in situations where this can be helpful, useful or in some cases even necessary.

Participants refer mainly to books/magazines, consultation centres and the internet when asked which sources they have used or use for information about childrearing and development. It is striking that parents make relatively less use of sources such as professionals, family, friends and acquaintances. What is additionally striking is that a very small percentage of participants, less than 1%, uses television as a source of information. The need for information was present in one in eight of the participants of the present study. One should consider that this is a momentary impression (someone who is interested in information today does not have to be interested tomorrow, and vice versa), and that there is a continuous change in the group of approximately 40,000 residents of The Hague between the ages of 18 and 65 years that is open towards and willingly seeks advice and

support regarding childrearing and development. This openness differs between groups. The largest group (in percentages) that is open towards information is included in the future parents. Additionally, the research showed that, in two-parent households, parents were mainly interested in information regarding young children and their development whereas in one-parent households this was geared toward adolescents and their development.

About whom do parents preferably want more information or support regarding childrearing and development?

Participants who indicated an interest in information, advice or help with childrearing were asked the following question:

"Where would you prefer to receive this type of information or support?"

The results indicated that schools, consultation centres, school doctors and the internet are the preferred places from which people want to receive childrearing and development information and support.

Here, the position of the school is striking. The percentage of parents that attributes a parenting role to the school, as well as the percentage of parents that indicates the school as preferred source of information and support regarding childrearing and development, is considerably higher than the percentage of parents that refers to the school as one of the sources they have used or currently use for information and support regarding childrearing problems. This suggests that there is a considerable gap between parents' views about how the school can contribute and how the school in actual fact contributes or is used as a source of information or support by parents.

The rights of the child

The present study also focused on whether adults and specifically parents are aware of the existence of the international convention on the rights of the child and its content. The convention, which was signed by the Netherlands in 1995, defines the rights of the child regarding love, care, protection, provision and development. Among other things, the convention includes regulations on the right to be raised in a non-violent and non-humiliating manner, to have a place to play, and the right to education that also devotes attention to a child's social and emotional development. The convention also covers the role and responsibilities of parents, non-parental caregivers and the government. Knowledge and understanding of this convention can form an important impetus for adults to commit to measures, provisions and activities that stimulate and support childrearing and development.

Participants were asked three questions regarding this convention: whether they have heard of the convention, whether they know the content, and whether they can mention one or more of the articles of the convention. Results show that two-thirds of the participants know about such a convention, which is also signed by the Netherlands. However, the majority of participants is not familiar with the content and cannot mention one or more of the articles in the convention. Approximately one quarter of the participants indicates knowing something about the content of the convention.

The opinion of participants about the 'Canon study'

After answering the questions about childrearing and development, participants were asked about their opinion on the Municipality of The Hague's initiative to conduct such a study. Nine out of 10 of the adults and parents in the study felt that such research is a good initiative. Approximately three quarters of the participants indicated that they wanted to be kept informed about the results of the study, specifically on information regarding the correct answers to the 'canon questions' and provided their email address. Interest among parents and future parents was especially widespread.

Conclusion

If the vast majority of the residents of the City of The Hague would, from a specific moment in time, possess accurate knowledge and understanding of all the themes investigated in the present research, would the development of children and adolescents in the city of The Hague generally improve (if compared to the current situation)?

The Canon project will eventually have to provide an answer to this question, and consequently to the question as to whether the glass of knowledge and understanding with regard to childrearing and development is full enough or if more information should be added. Nevertheless, it is already possible to provide a preliminary position on the issue.

A first consideration is that both the subgroups assessed and other researchers consider many of the issues on knowledge and understanding of childrearing and development that were investigated in this study to be relevant for how adults raise and interact with children and adolescents.

A second consideration can be derived from the reactions of participants in this study as well as from those of the participants of the preliminary studies. The participants of the preliminary studies, approximately 100 adults, 100 parents of young children, 100 grandparents and 50 secondary school teachers, as well the participants of the present study, were extremely interested in adequate information on the issues on childrearing and development assessed in this study. It is reasonable to interpret this interest as a sign, either experienced implicitly or explicitly, of the relevance of the issues investigated.

A third consideration is that this interest could provide an important opportunity to improve knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development, to promote adequate childrearing practices and to decrease the chance of development and parenting problems.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to overcome or decrease problems. First there is the so-called problem-group approach, which means focusing attention directly on people or groups who have or have a great likelihood of experiencing problems. The second approach is the public approach, which means focusing on influencing the general public. For example, one can reduce addiction by creating programmes that are specifically geared toward addicts (problem-group approach) or one can create programmes focused on decreasing the use of alcohol by people in general (public approach). If people, on average, drink less due to public campaigns and other provisions, for example, people are made aware of and have increased their knowledge and understanding of the consequences of using alcohol so that the percentage of people addicted to alcohol will decrease over time. This relationship – in which the behaviour of the average citizen determines the scope of the group of citizens with problems – is often referred to as 'Rose's Law', named after one of the founding fathers of preventive medicine, Geoffrey Rose. When applied to child and adolescent development and rearing, 'Rose's Law' infers that programmes or activities that increase knowledge and understanding among the general public will, over time, decrease the number of adults and parents, and thereby the number of families, whose knowledge and understanding is particularly low and can lead to development problems and inadequate childrearing. In short, filling up the glass through the public approach in contrast to the problem-group approach has a double impact. Besides a likely decrease in development problems and inadequate parenting, with respect to both frequency and seriousness, there will also be an increase in the average quality of development and childrearing practices among the general population, something from which both children and adolescents will benefit.

However, not only children and adolescents benefit, which brings us to the fourth and final consideration. An increase in knowledge and understanding of childrearing and development results in more than just knowledge and understanding of children and adolescents. It also means greater knowledge and understanding of one's own development and upbringing and, by implication, more knowledge and understanding of and a greater grasp on oneself. In recent decades, a large amount of psychological research has been conducted that indicates that more self-knowledge frequently means more self-determination, self-control, and more control of one's own emotions and impulses. A reasonable conclusion is that greater knowledge and understanding of child and adolescent development and rearing leads to less tension and less negative stress for adults and parents in both parenting practices and interaction with children and adolescents.

- ¹ The complete report *Naar een Canon van Opvoeding. Wat inwoners van Den Haag weten van ontwikkeling en opvoeding van kinderen en jongeren* is available from the first author. See also www.opvoedingscanon.nl
- ² Contact: R.F.W.Diekstra@hhs.nl
- ³ To make this document as accessible as possible, we will hereafter use the term 'development and upbringing practices' instead of 'child and adolescent development and upbringing practices'. Unless stated otherwise, the development and upbringing practices shall refer to both children and adolescents.
- ⁴ *What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development: A National Benchmark Survey* (2001). Danbury: DYG Inc. for Civitas Initiative, Zero to Three, Brio Corporation
- ⁵ Hayslip, B. & Kaminski, P.L. (2005). Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren: A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Practice. *The Gerontologist* 45, 2, 262-269. Britnall-Peterson, M. & Targ, D.B. (2005). Current trends, issues and concerns of grandparents raising grandchildren. Paper presented at the Annual Family Life Electronic Seminar on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Retrieved from: <http://hec.osu.edu/grg>
- ⁶ See Beck, A.T. (1989) *Love is never enough*. New York: Harper & Row.
- ⁷ See DeGarmo, D.S. & Forgatch, M.S. (2007). Efficacy of Parent Training for Stepfathers: From Playful Spectator and Polite Stranger to Effective Stepfathering. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 7(4), 331-355. DeGarmo, D.S. & Forgatch, M.S. (2005). Early Development of Delinquency Within Divorced Families: Evaluating a Randomized Preventive Intervention Trial. *Developmental Science*, 8(3), 229-239.
- ⁸ See Paradis, H., Montes, G. & Szilazy, P.G. (2008). A National Perspective on Parents' Knowledge of Child Development, its Relation to Parent-Child Interaction and Associated Parenting Characteristics. (in press, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY and Children's Institute, Rochester, NY).
- ⁹ Huang, K.Y. et al. (2007). Mother-Child Conflict Interaction in the Toddler Years: Behavior Patterns and Correlates. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 16, 219-241.
- ¹⁰ Ruiter, de, M. (2008). *What do Grandparents Know About Early Child Development: A Replication of the National Benchmark Survey – What Grown-Ups Understand About Child Development*. Individual Research Project. Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, p.84. Sichterman, J. (2008). *Secondary School Teachers' Knowledge about the Development of Children and Adolescents: a preliminary investigation*. Individual Research Project, Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, p.73. Hoekstra, C. (2008). *What Parents Know about the Social and Emotional Development of Children Aged Newborn through 6: A partial replication of the American National Benchmark Survey*. Individual Research Project. Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, 74. Does, van der, et al. (2008). *What Grown-Ups understand about Children's Development*. Research Paper, Roosevelt Academy Middelburg, Unpublished report Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, p.78.