Many Thanks to all of our Participants

We are having another great year with some new and exciting aspects of the project taking place. We would like to extend our most gracious thanks for your continued participation, and share with you what has been happening here at the CDP.

We are well into our twentieth year of data collection. For those of you who have not yet been contacted, you will be hearing from us around your birthday. You will receive a packet in the mail containing an informational letter about this year’s procedures followed by a phone call from one of our research assistants.

We would like to offer a special thanks to those of you who have kept us informed of your location. You are now at a time in your life when careers, families and a variety of different circumstances lead many of you to different places. We appreciate any type of updated information on your whereabouts.

The Child Development Project grows in importance each year. Your contributions through the information you provide during the assessment is very valuable. Inside this newsletter you can learn about new and important research findings.

What’s new at the Child Development Project

The Child Development Project has been collecting information from our participants through face-to-face interviews and assessments over the phone for almost twenty years. We now have a new and exciting opportunity to take our information collection to the next level.

So far, we have primarily collected information based on environmental factors such as parenting, relationships, and the school environment. Science is now moving in the direction of looking at the interaction of genetic and environmental influences on behavior. The Child Development Project has become interested in this area as well. In order to learn about these interactions, we are collecting saliva samples from our participants.

Sample collection is simple, and only takes about 10 minutes to complete: you spit into a tube, the tube is labeled with a number (not your name), and the sample is analyzed for DNA. As this is in addition to the assessment you normally complete, you will be compensated additionally for your participation. Just like all of the other information we collect from you, it will be completely confidential. If you have any questions or concerns about this additional part of the assessment, we have more information available. Please do not hesitate to contact us.
Recent Research about CDP Participants

We have recently been working with data from your childhood and high school years. Please be cautious when interpreting these results as our research is collected from a large number of families and does not describe individual people or families.


The central interest in this study was to see whether insecurity and violence in romantic relationships have distinct causes, and if those causes also influence romantic relationship quality. The results show that partner violence in romantic relationships was related to the experience of harsh parenting in childhood and an antisocial peer group. Insecurity in romantic relationships was related to the experience of intrusive parenting and difficulties in peer relationships.

“Trajectories of internalizing and externalizing, and grades for children who have and have not experienced their parents’ divorce or separation” by Lansford, Malone, Castellino, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates. (2006)

This study examined the effects of the occurrence and timing of parental separation or divorce on students’ grades, and mother and teacher reports of the child’s internalizing problem behaviors (eg. depression, anxiety) and externalizing problem behaviors (eg. aggression).

Results found that earlier divorce/separation was related to more problem behaviors, whereas later separation was more related to poorer grades. An important implication of these findings is that children may benefit most from interventions focused on internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, while adolescents may benefit most from interventions focused on promoting academic achievement.


This study examined the effects of positive peer relationships and peer acceptance on children who had experienced family adversity. While positive peer relationships is defined as the number of friends a child has, peer acceptance measures the degree to which children are generally well-liked by their peers. Family adversity included ecological disadvantage, violent marital conflict, and harsh discipline. Each of these factors are associated with problem behaviors in children.

This study found that an extensive friend network and being generally well-liked by peers greatly reduced the negative effects of family adversity on children.

If you are interested in reading more about these and other findings, please visit our website www.cdp.auburn.edu

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the project last?
We have funding through 2008, at which time we may reapply for more. Many of you have children close to the age you were when you began the project. We have begun to ask questions about your oldest child’s life, behavior, and development. Being able to explore the new generation and compare them to your own developmental paths is a new and exciting part of the CDP. The intergenerational component of this study enhances the importance of the CDP.

What do the researchers do with my information?
All of the information we collect is kept strictly confidential, this includes your contact information, saliva sample, and anything else you share with us. Confidentiality is a top priority, and we are very careful with your information. In addition, anything you provide us with can only be used for the purposes of this project. No one else has access to it.

Can I know my results?
Unfortunately, no. When analyzing the data, our research question is: Are people who are similar in one area also similar in other areas? Because we look at group differences and not individual differences, there are no individual results to report. However, if you are interested in knowing more about the findings from the project, we encourage you to look at the summaries above, or visit our website for more articles, updates, and information. www.cdp.auburn.edu
Meet the New Research Team

Dr. Gregory S. Pettit is a professor of Child Development at Auburn University. He is also one of the Principal Investigators of the Child Development project, and works primarily with the Knoxville participants. He is currently using CDP data in preparation for journal articles exploring educational attainment, parenting across generations, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Post-Doctoral Fellow Dr. Stephen Erath is a new addition to the project. He recently received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from Pennsylvania State University. He is currently working on research examining children’s peer relationships.

Tianyi Yu and Dilbur Ariswalla are at Auburn University pursuing their PhD’s in Human Development and Family Studies. They often analyze data from the project for papers, journal articles, and conference presentations. They are currently exploring such topics as the influence of transitions in family life on the development of behavioral problems, the risk and protective factors that affect parent and peer influence, social information processing, and parent emotional socialization.

Mary Antonucci is the on-site research coordinator responsible for DNA collection in Knoxville and the surrounding areas.

New lab coordinator Donna Roland, along with research assistants Joy Blake, Emily Fessler, and Amy Newell manage daily tasks for the project. They are responsible for participant contact, interviews and assessments, data coordination, DNA collection, participant payments, and keeping the project running smoothly. If you have not heard from one of them yet, you will soon!

What Knoxville Participants are Doing Now

You might be interested to know that for our latest completed data collection (2005-2006), 60% of you were still living in Knoxville, 20% reported living in another city in Tennessee and the other 20% have moved to other states. Other than Tennessee, the state with the most CDP participants is North Carolina followed by a three-way tie between California, Georgia and South Carolina.

Some additional interesting facts:

Fifty-six percent of you report attending some type of college or technical school during the 2004-2005 school year and 50% have plans for next year to attend college or technical school.

When it comes to romantic relationships, more than 80% of our participants are single—though many of you report being involved with a romantic partner. Sixteen percent are married (that’s 3% more than last year), and 17% have children.

Eighty-six percent of you are registered to vote and 97% report that you “stand up for your rights.” Nearly 50% of you are busy volunteering in a public service organization, and 90% of you report donating food, money, or clothes to a charitable organization.

Though nearly 78% of you report that it is at least sometimes true that you “worry about the future, and 68% of you reported sometimes feeling overwhelmed, 96% of you still try to meet the responsibilities to your families. Ninety-eight percent of you say you like to help others, and 99% of you state you like to try new things.

This project is now in its twentieth year of data collection and many changes are taking place with our participants. We are well aware that life takes us in a variety of different directions. We would love to hear about all of the places you have been and where you will be going next—whether it is a short stay or a permanent move. You are a valued and important part of the project and we want to know the best and most convenient way to contact you. If you know you will be changing residences or phone numbers, please let us know. You can contact Donna Roland the research coordinator, at 334-844-5981 or e-mail her at rolandj@auburn.edu
Gregory S. Pettit, PhD.
The Child Development Project-Knoxville
203 Spidle Hall
Auburn University, AL
36849