

DEMOGRAPHICS OF HOME SCHOOLERS: A REGIONAL ANALYSIS WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARAMETERS

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Although estimates vary, the numbers and proportions of home-schooled students in the U.S. seem to be increasing. Demographic data on home-schooled children from a regional area of the country are compared/contrasted to national data on home-schooled children. Both samples are then compared to national demographics of non-home-schooled students. Whereas gender of student was consistent, across samples, variability occurred across proportion of two parent families, ethnicity/race, number of children, reasons to home-school, religiosity, and levels of parental education. The constellation of factors common to the regional home-schooled families is aligned with enhanced academic achievement.

Key words: home-schooling, education

School days, school days, good old
golden rule days

— Unknown

The schools ain't what they used to
be and never was

— Will Rogers

Introduction

This manuscript addresses the relative congruence that a (self-selected) sample of families which home-school their children from one area of the country shares with the larger national sample of families which also home-schools their children. In addition to the demographics,

the primary motivations to choose home-schooling were also examined between the regional sample and the national sample.

Although the notion that children learn about their environs, in part, from their home-life is hardly new, an up-surge wherein home-schooling is actualized in lieu of non-residential (public or private) schooling is relatively recent (Ray 2000). In the 1970's, home-schooling was nearly extinct (Ray, 2000). There were only about 15,000 children being home-schooled (Grossman 2001) or only .03% of the total number of students (Bureau of the Census 1976).

Although current estimates do vary, a generally accepted figure is that just over a million children – or about 2.2% of all student ages 5 through 17 years — were being home-schooled in 2003 (Bureau of the Census 2007, National Center for Education Statistics 2003). The trajectory of the number and percentages of such home-schooled students appears to continue to be upward. In addition to addressing the relative congruence of a regional sample of home-schooled families with a national sample of home-schooled children, this article also discusses a comparison of similar demographics between America's home-schooled children and those children who are non-home-schooled.

The 7 to 12 percent growth in home-schooling since 1972 has been variously attributed to an increase in violence in schools and an overall parental dissatisfaction with public schools, inter alia (Grossman, 2001). Aligned with parental dissatisfaction, a good benchmark to understand this up-surge would begin with the works of Holt (1964, 1967) and Illich (1971). John Holt has been considered the father of the modern home-schooling movement (Solomon 2002). Holt was aware that few people inside or out of the school system would support or even tolerate allowing children more freedom, choice, and self-direction (Dobson 1998). Holt began to change his own ideas about schooling when he started communicating with Ivan Illich, the author of *Deschooling Society* (1971). Illich's ideas both challenged and complemented Holt's perspective. Holt, himself, challenged the belief that the current school-system was

not merely a good idea gone wrong; instead, the entire concept may have been a bad idea from the start (Dobson, 1998). He began meeting with parents that had already taken their children out of public school to learn at home. Holt (1972) analyzed the free school movement in his book titled *Freedom and Beyond*. In 1977, Holt founded the magazine *Growing Without Schooling*, to lend support to these families that had decided to home-school (Dobson 1998). It should be noted that, although Holt was a supporter of home-schooling, he never stopped trying to change the public schooling system through reform (Fargena, 1999). For an extensive history of "tutoring" – which would include home-schooling – see Gordon & Gordon (1990).

Method

The sample for this study was composed of self-selected volunteers from the total population of families who are members of the local Home School Association which was in a large southwestern metropolitan area. Participants in this study were those members who returned an on-line questionnaire which was posted on the Association's web-site. The sample size consisted of 130 families with a wide range of diverse demographics, backgrounds, and educational experiences.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was emailed to the site manager of the website for the local Home School Association. The manager of the site then forwarded the questionnaire to the 700 member families of the

organization. The questionnaire included an informed consent form that insured anonymity. In addition, an explanation of the questionnaire and full instructions for filling out the questionnaire were provided for the participants. Questionnaires were collected on-line for one month. The questionnaire, upon request or preference, could have also been mailed to the researcher by the participants during the one month time span. For those families who did not respond to the first questionnaire within two weeks, a follow-up email and the same questionnaire were sent to them. A total of 130 questionnaires were returned and were usable or 18.6% of the 700 potential subjects.

The data from this Home School Association were then compared with data from a national sample of home-schooled children and data from a national sample of non-home-schooled children (US. Bureau of the Census 2008, U.S. Department of Education 2003).

Results

See Table 1 for the (available) demographic data for the three samples: (1) the regional sample from the surveyed Home School Association, (2) a national sample of home-schooled children, and (3) a national sample of non-home-schooled children.

With the regional sample as the frame of reference, the following results occurred (Table 2.):

In terms of the gender of student, the regional sample did not differ from either of the two other samples.

In terms of ethnicity, White (non-His-

panic) was over-represented in the regional home-schooled sample – compared to the national non-home-schooled sample. However, the regional home-schooled sample did not differ from the national home-schooled sample.

The percentage of one-child families was higher in the regional sample than both of the other two samples.

In terms of percentages of two parent families, the regional sample was higher than the national non-home-schooled sample, but did not differ from the national home-schooled sample.

In terms of having a college degree (or higher), the percentage of parents from the regional sample was higher than both the national home-schooled sample and the national non-home-schooled sample.

In terms of religious affiliation, the families of the regional sample were more likely to be Christian than the national non-home-schooled sample, but not different from the national home-schooled sample. See Table 2.

Table 1.

Comparisons of demographics of three categories of schooling for American children: home schooling from a region, home schooling in the nation, and non-home schooling in the nation.

Demographic	Category of schooling:		
	Regional home-schooled	National home-schooled	National non-home-schooled
Grade equivalent			
K-5	na	43.3%	48.0%
Kindergarten	"	9.0%	7.2%
Grades 1 to 3	"	19.7%	24.0%
Grades 4 to 5	"	14.7%	16.9%
Grades 6 to 8	"	27.8%	24.5%
Grades 9 to 12	"	28.9%	27.5%
Gender of student			
Male	48.9%	51.9%	50.9%
Female	51.1%	48.1%	49.1%
Race/ethnicity			
White: Non-Hispanic	83.1%	77.0%	62.0%
Black: Non-Hispanic	2.2%	9.4%	15.9%
Hispanic	7.4%	5.3%	16.2%
Other	4.3%	8.3%	6.0%
Number of children in the household			
One child	24.6%	10.1%	16.0%
Two children	30.0%	28.0%	40.8%
Three or more children	45.4%	62.0	43.3%
Number of parents in the household			
Two parents	86.1%	80.8%	70.7%
One parent	4.7%	17.9%	26.3%
Non-parental guardians	na	1.3%	3.0%
Parents' participation in the labor force:			
Two parents"			
one in labor force		54.2%	20.1%
both in labor force		25.0%	50.1%
One parent in labor force		15.9%	23.9%
Highest parental educational level			
High school diploma or less	22.1%	24.5%	32.9%
Vo-tech/degree or some college	17.9%	30.8%	31.7%
Bachelor's degree	37.9%	25.0%	19.2%
Graduate professional school	22.1%	19.6%	17.2%
Religious affiliation:			
Christian	92.0%	93.8%	76.0%
Other	2.0%	6.2%	10.8%
None	6.0%	na	13.2%

TABLE 2.

Analysis of demographics (through proportions) across the three samples: Regional home-schooling, National home-schooling, National non-home-schooled.

Demographic:	Sample:		
	Regional home-schooled	National home-schooled	National non-home-schooled
Gender of student:			
Male	48.9%	51.9%	50.9%
Female	51.1%	48.1%	49.1%
White; non-Hispanic	83.1%	77.0%	62.0% **
One-child families	24.6%	10.1% **	16.0% *
Two parent families	86.1%	80.8%	70.7% **
College degree or more	60.0%	44.6% **	36.4% **
Christian	92.0%	93.8%	76.0% **

* differs from Regional home-schooled: z-scores; $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

** differs from Regional home-schooled: z-scores; $p < .001$

Reasons to home-school

In terms of why the decision was made to home-school, the five most frequently mentioned reasons to home-school are given in Table 3 for the regional and national samples. A comparison of the over-lapping reasons indicated that the

regional sample had prioritized moral values and academics more so than did the national sample; however the national sample prioritized discipline more so than did the regional sample. There was no difference between the two samples along the religious dimension. See Table 4.

TABLE 3

Ranked mentioned reasons (in percentages) that influence the decision to home-school: regional and national.

REGIONAL:			NATIONAL		
Rank	Category	%	Rank	Category	%
1	Moral values	90%	1	Environment in other schools *	85.4%
2	Academic content	89%	2	Religious or moral instruction	72.3%
3	Religious concerns	65%	3	Concern over academic instruction in other schools	68.2%
4	Social skills	63%	4	Child has special needs	44.8%
5	Discipline	30%	5	Other reasons	20.1%

* e.g. safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure.

TABLE 4.

Analysis of the mentioned priorities (through proportions) in choosing to home-school children for Regional and National samples.

Priority	Regional sample %	National sample %	z-score
Moral values	90.0%	72.3%	6.73 *
Academics	89.0%	68.2%	7.58 *
Religion	65.0%	72.3%	1.745 n.s.
Discipline	30.0%	85.4%	13.78 *

* $p < .001$

Discussion

Although the regional sample is self-selected and may not be totally congruent with the rest of the Association's families, the sample itself is instructive. The sample tended to stress a strong moral code, academic achievement, and social skills. The families tended to have two parents in residence, to be well-educated, to be White (non-Hispanic) and to be Christian. Measured against the Department of Education's list of factors which increase/decrease school achievement, these children would be predicted to perform with success as adjudged by typical barometers of academic achievement. Examples of such risk factors include poverty, single-parent family, lack of English spoken in the home, teen-age pregnancy, low level of mother's education, and chronic medical problems (Flinn 1993; *Principal Magazine*, 2004; NCES 2000).

While standardized test results were not available for the Regional sample, there are results from the national sample of home-schooled children. For all twelve grades tested and for all of the seven scaled scores, the home-schooled students outscored their private/public school counter-parts. The seven scores were composite, reading, language, math, social studies, science, and national median. The percentiles ranged from 62nd to the 91st percentile (Rudner 1999).

Conclusion

Parents who decide to home-school do not represent a random assortment of individuals. In the U.S., ethnicity, religion,

family structure, parent's educational levels (and probably educational expectations for their children) form a core set of demographics which are over-represented in the home-schooled students. Available evidence indicates that enhanced achievement by the home-schooled students is a consequence of this core set of demographics.

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