

Family Life Put to Test At Meeting

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

Special to The New York Times.

STORRS, Conn., Aug. 22—The "frustration tolerance" of 400 family life specialists and their children was tested here at the opening of the annual meeting of The National Council on Family Relations.

Difficulties arose because the specialists had to share the University of Connecticut campus with delegates to a meeting of the American Farm Economics Association. As a result, they found themselves occupying dormitory rooms in outlying areas of this sprawling campus. The rooms, some of them four story walkups, served as a reminder to many that their college days were long past.

Accustomed to listening patiently and sympathetically to the problems of others, the specialists wore their professional faces as they related their woes to the conference officials, who listened patiently and sympathetically.

Children were invited to accompany their parents to the conference because, in the words of Dr. Blaine Porter, president-elect of the organization:

"Since we are an organization of family specialists, it seemed appropriate to include children."

While their elders discussed marriage counseling and related subjects, the children were "being programmed on a planned recreation basis," according to one conference official. That is, they went swimming, played badminton, basketball and other games under the supervision of the University's School of Physical Education.

The conference even provided a baby-sitting service, "A fleet of capable high school girls who are on call at your convenience," said a memorandum entitled "Child Care Provision for Harassed Parents."

One mother who felt guilty leaving her teen-age daughter alone this afternoon told her: "I hate to ditch you."

The girl, who seemed eager to escape, replied: "You're not ditching me, I'm ditching you."

A woman who was glad that she had left her two children at home surveyed the confusion and commented:

"They will all go home exhausted and fight with their families."

Expert Sees Some Virtue In Spanking

Special to The New York Times.

STORRS, Conn., Aug. 23—Permissive parents who spare the rod to strengthen their children's mental health may have been misled by pseudo-scientific tracts on the subject, a family life specialist suggested here today.

Although many studies have shown that children who have been spanked excessively are more rebellious and destructive than others, it does not follow that moderate spanking harms a child, Dr. Edward C. Devereux told a meeting of the National Council on Family Relations. Indeed, it has been found that the child who is never spanked is a greater behavior problem than the child who is spanked occasionally, he said.

In cases of excessive spanking, the question of cause and effect has yet to be established, Dr. Devereux said.

Are these children destructive as a result of being punished? Do they imitate their punitive parents? Does the anger and frustration of excessive spanking create a rage that finds an outlet in destructive behavior? Or are they spanked excessively because they are more rebellious to begin with?

Income a Factor

Nobody really knows, in the opinion of Dr. Devereux, who is Professor of Child Development and Family Relations at Cornell University.

But it is known that many children who are excessively spanked come from low-income families. Many are neglected and undernourished. They reside in neighborhoods in which they are often compelled to join gangs.

Scientists have learned that there is no single cause for a child's behavior, which is now believed to be the result of a complex constellation of interlocking causes, Dr. Devereux said. This makes it difficult to isolate the effect of a particular child-rearing practice, such as spanking, on an individual child.

The intensity of a spanking, the reasons for a spanking (minor infraction or major lapse), the age of the spankee (4, 8, or 12), the sex of the parent who spanks and the sex of the child who is spanked are important factors to consider in determining the effect on a child of the spanking, Dr. Devereux said.

He urged parents not to accept generalizations from family life specialists, but to demand specifics. He also urged more inquiry into the cause of why parents spank as well as further study of the effect of spanking.