

Dr. Richard Warshak, co-principal investigator of a research grant to study the development of children in stepparent homes, is looking for local families to participate in the study. A faculty member of the University of Texas at Dallas,

the principal investigator will be **Dr. John Santrock**, also at UTD. The grant is funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health.

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PLANO—Divorce affects one in three single parent homes. In fact, 13 percent of single parents. A great number of new "blended" family in which

But what may be a solution for a parent in a household, also can resist the new arrangement and a new stepparent may find dealing with it more than she had imagined.

Then there are the stepchildren who only visit on weekends and whom they live remarries the brothers with whom to share the

Sharing parents is difficult. In blended families it can be a real block.

How children between the ages of 10 and 18 adjust to having stepfamilies is the subject of a study conducted by two U.T.D. staff members. Professor of psychology and Dr. Richard Warshak will be the principal investigators. Dr. Weaver will be helping them. The study is funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health.

The researchers are looking for families to participate in the study. According to the study, contributing to a major study about stepfamilies, they will also be provided a sum of money to participate in such studies find them a chance to spend time with the family. Each family will be given a stipend.

The following families with children between the ages of 10 and 18 are needed for the study: families in which there is a stepfather and a stepmother. If you are interested

Staff photos by Jana Beall

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Staff members at U.T.D. obtain funds for plan two - year study of children in blended families

By DOREEN PADILLA
HYDE

Family Editor

DALLAS—It seems as if stepchildren and their stepparents have been fighting the "Cinderella" myth forever. Reality may be very different, but being a stepparent or being a stepchild continues to be a challenging role, with people having to learn to relate to one another in new ways under new circumstances.

Families, how they change and how they cope, continues to be a prime concern of psychologists, the courts and families themselves. Blended families, those in which stepchildren are involved, are becoming more numerous, now comprising 11 percent of all households. That adds up to 6 million children.

Understanding the dynamics of how children in the families develop, how they are like intact families and how they are different, is the focus of a study funded by the National Institutes of Mental Health in Bethesda, Md. Principal investigator on the program is Dr. John Santrock, associate professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Dallas. Co-principal investigator is Dr. Richard Warshak, who is a research scientist at U.T.D., on the clinical faculty of the U.T.D.

Health Sciences Center, and who also maintains a private practice.

Dr. Santrock and Dr. Warshak would like to unravel the "Cinderella" myth and help blended families know what they face and how to help their children adjust and grow. Reality, they feel, can provide the keys for helping those families adjust and cope.

There are just no good studies of children growing up with stepparents," Warshak said.

The men have been searching for local families who would be willing to participate in the study, expected to span two years. They are looking for three kinds of families who have children between the ages of 6 and 11. They are: families where the children have a stepmother, families where the children have a stepfather, and intact families.

According to Dr. Warshak, the study was narrowed to children between the ages of 6 and 11 for several reasons. First, the age range had to be limited so the researchers could take an in-depth look at the problem. Second, they have found that children in this age range are most likely to be affected by changes in the family structure.

Dr. Santrock and Dr. Warshak hope

that this will be a landmark study, one which will shed light on the strengths and needs of blended families, and one in which the methodology will make the final data valid.

There are two basic questions for which the researchers will be seeking answers. They are:

1. How are children faring in blended families and what is the impact of growing up in a blended family?

2. What factors are associated with healthy adjustment in blended families?

Families participating in the study will be assigned a research number so that they can remain anonymous.

The researchers plan to use a variety of approaches to find their data. Among the ways they will seek answers will be private interviews with children, their parents and their stepparents, and having the families complete questionnaires.

"We are not going to look for information in just one way," Warshak said. He also said they plan to discuss a wide range of opinions when they publish their report since the average can mask tremendous variations.

Dr. Warshak published a study on children in father-custody homes several years ago, and that study provided part of the stimulus for the cur-

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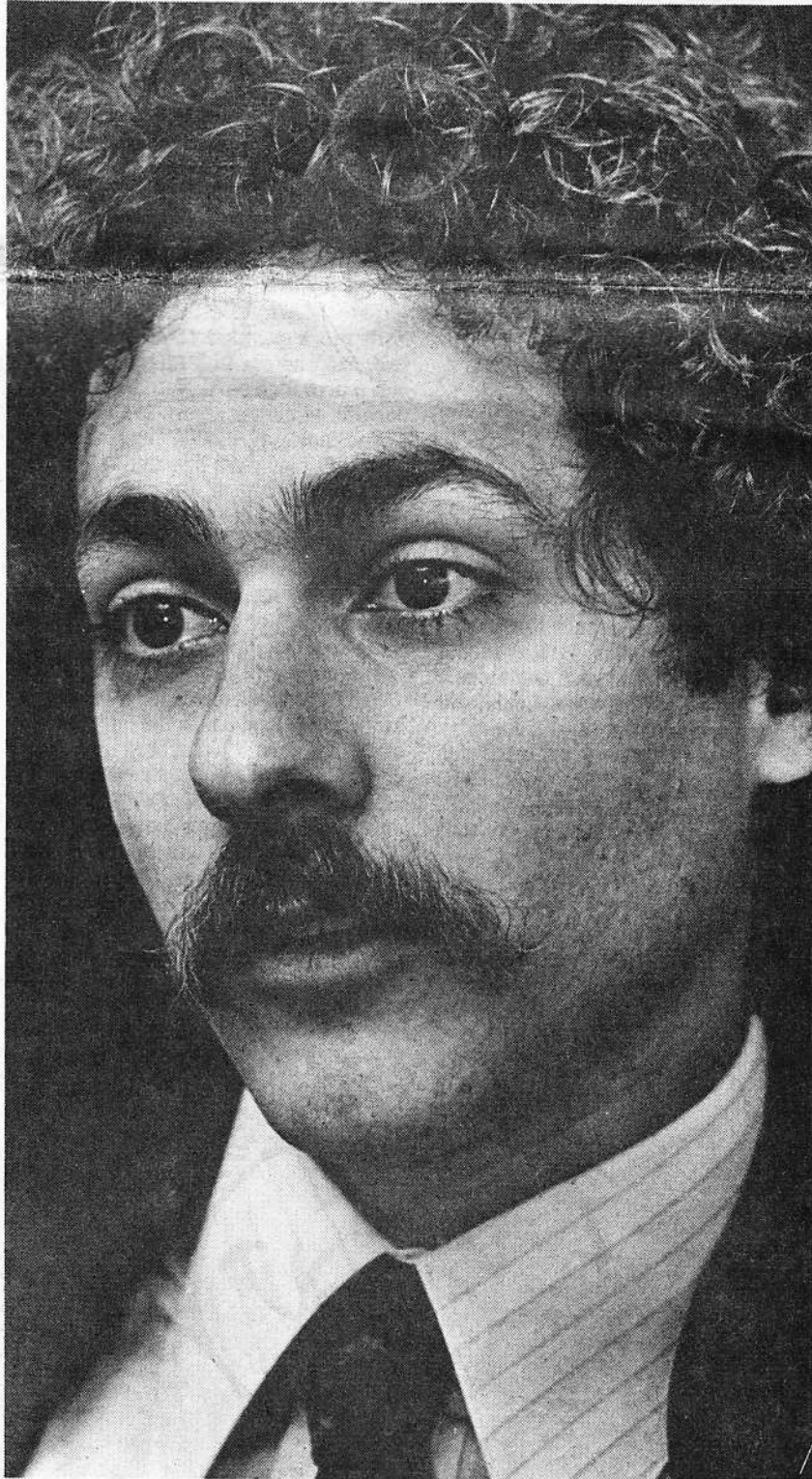
rent project. Warshak said that although the number of father-custody homes has not changed substantially (currently only 1 in 10 fathers receive custody) there has been much more publicity about such cases recently.

One of the major reasons that intact families are needed for the study is so that parenting methods can be compared.

There are problems unique to blended families that also need to be examined according to Warshak. For instance, most couples spend several years getting to know one another before they have children, while in blended families, the kids are there from day one. Also, children usually inherit brothers and sisters one at a time instead of three or four at a time as they may in a blended family.

"Legal authorities and family lawyers are crying out for more information about how children feel about their mothers having custody, fathers having custody and about having step-parents," he said.

Hopefully the study data will provide a lot of answers for families, judges and family lawyers, and for therapists involved in helping blended families raise their children successfully.



Dr. Richard Warshak is planning on finding relevant statistics on blended families, not only to help them to be realistic about their futures, but also to help the legal system with decision making about custody cases.

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Section.

Professors look at area families for new project

PLANO—Divorce affects one family out of every four, creating many single parent homes. In fact, 13 percent of all households are now headed by single parents. A great number of those parents remarry, creating a new "blended" family in which their children will grow up.

But what may be a solution to many of the problems of being the sole parent in a household, also can create other problems. Stepchildren may resist the new arrangement and try to sabotage the new stepparent. The new stepparent may find dealing with her new stepchild more difficult than she had imagined.

Then there are the stepchildren who live outside the new blended family and only visit on weekends or during vacations. If the parent with whom they live remarries there may be more stepsisters and stepbrothers with whom to share their parents.

Sharing parents is difficult enough for children in intact families. In blended families it can be fraught with major emotional stumbling blocks.

How children between the ages of 6 and 11 develop in blended families, how they adjust to having stepparents, will be the focus of a study conducted by two U.T.D. staff members. Dr. John Santrock, associate professor of psychology and Dr. Richard Warshak, research scientists, will be the principal investigators for the study. Graduate student Marty Weaver will be helping them. A grant for the study was awarded to them by the National Institutes of Mental Health in Bethesda, Md.

The researchers are looking for area families who would like to participate in the study. According to Dr. Warshak, participants will be contributing to a major study about how children develop in step families and they will also be provided a summary of the report. He said parents who participate in such studies find it is a rewarding experience since it gives them a chance to spend time talking and thinking about their families. Each family will be given a stipend of \$30 for their participation.

The following families with children between the ages of 6 and 11 are needed for the study: families in which there is a stepmother, families in which there is a stepfather and intact families (who are needed for comparison). If you are interested call Marty Weaver, 690-2397.