Training and Burnout Among Paraprofessionals Who Work with Children with EBD

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Training and Burnout Among Paraprofessionals who work with Children with EBD

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Parent contact, relationships with students, and relationships with staff and administration were rated as low stress. Forty percent of respondents were either overwhelmed or very overwhelmed as a result of program and organizational changes. Unclear job expectations, an inability to influence decisions that affect your job, and dysfunctional workplace dynamics were all rated as producing moderate to high levels of stress. The majority of paraprofessionals indicated that concerns about working too much, job monotony, and job not fitting skills or interests do not produce stress. Forty percent of paraprofessionals in general did not feel that their training had prepared them for their position. Participants had high confidence in their ability to provide on-one support, provide academic instruction, and facilitate relationships between students, but low confidence in small group instruction, implementing plans, and personal care assistance. At the end of a typical work day, 95% of paraprofessionals left their jobs (Tillery, 2007).

The survey had two aims. The first aim was to learn about the experiences of paraprofessionals who work with children with emotional behavioral disorders and, more specifically, their perceptions about the adequacy of training and the burnout they may experience. The second aim was to determine how paraprofessionals feel their jobs prepare them for their position in the classroom.

Methodology

- A mixed-methods design, including both qualitative and quantitative elements, was utilized. This included a cross sectional electronic survey and a focus group.
- The survey had two aims. First, we wanted to understand what training was already in place for paraprofessionals and what still needs to be addressed. In addition to that, we wanted to know if limited training opportunities contributed to burnout due to the demanding nature of their positions.
- The questions and instruments were developed based on data that emerged in the review of the literature on training and burnout.
- A total of 68 surveys were sent out via email to paraprofessionals in the Waseca School District with a total of 20 responses, equating a response rate of about 29.4%.
- The majority of our participants were above 38 years of age, with one respondent between 18 and 20 years.

Literature Review

- More than 88% of those who supervised paraprofessionals reported that “real-life experience” served as the primary source of their knowledge and ability to supervise paraprofessionals, rather than in-service training, college courses, or help from administrators (French, 2001).
- Job demand is commonly reported as a significant contributor to the development of emotional exhaustion for paraprofessionals (Shyman, 2010).
- Stress, workload, lack of respect, administrative issues, and constant program changes were reported as reasons that paraprofessionals left their jobs (Tillery, 2003).
- Paraprofessional turnover put strain on teachers, jeopardized program continuity for students and the relationships between paraprofessionals, teachers, and students in the study (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

Paraprofessional Stress According to Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking (in order)</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Physical aggression</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Getting students motivated</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Boundary issues with students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Redirecting students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References and Acknowledgements

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References are available from author upon request.