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Training and Burnout Among Paraprofessionals Who Work with Children with EBD

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Mission - "In a tradition of excellence, Waseca Public Schools empowers each learner to thrive in an ever changing-world".



Training and Burnout Among Paraprofessionals who work with Children with EBD

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Practicum Agency: Waseca Intermediate School
Agency Supervisor: Barb Olson, MSW, LICSW
Field Liaison: Laura Benesch, MSW, LISW
Academic Advisor: David Beimers, PhD, LISW

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to learn about the experiences of paraprofessionals who are working with children with emotional behavior disorders and, more specifically, their perceptions about the adequacy of training and the burnout they may experience.

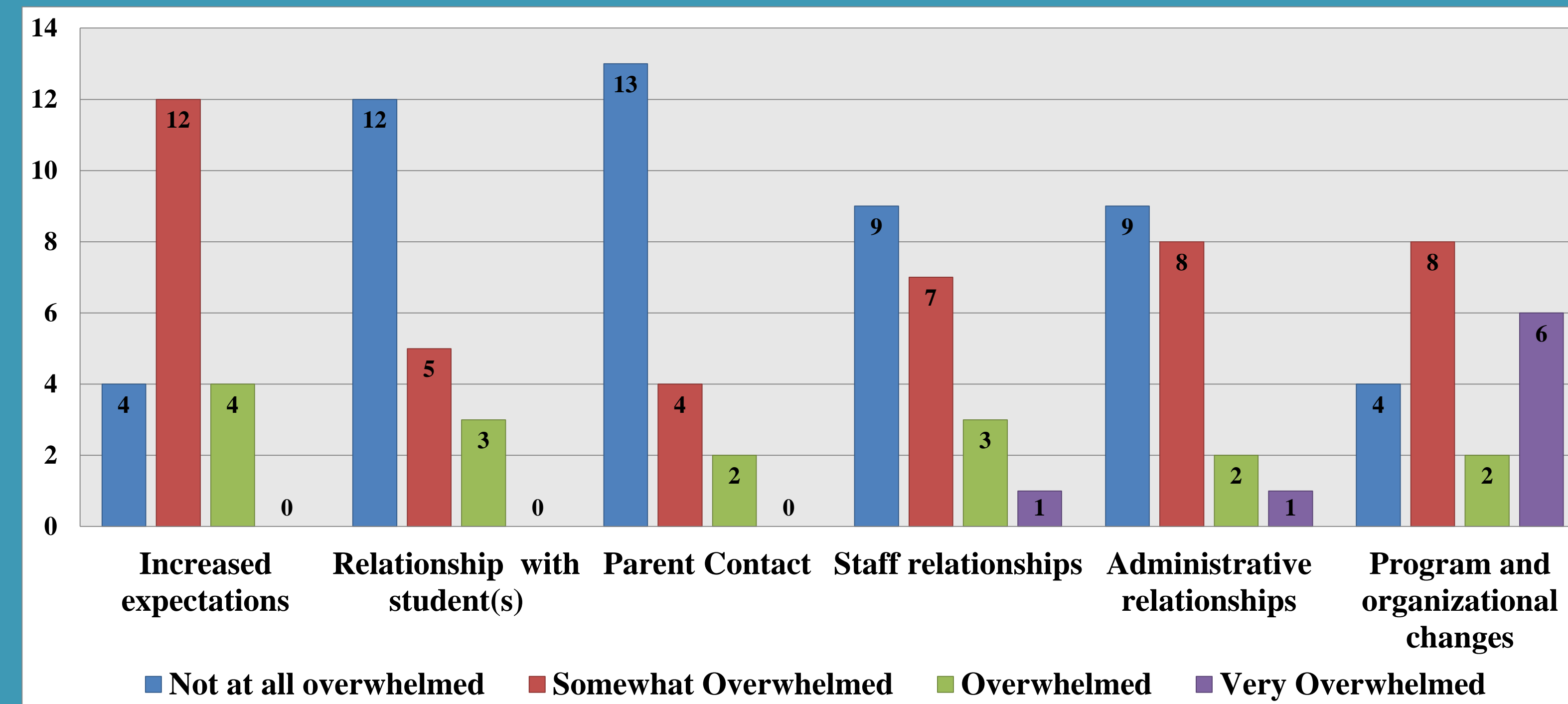
Literature Review

- ❖ 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 working relationships, impacted program continuity for students and the relationships between paraprofessionals, teachers, and students in the study (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007).

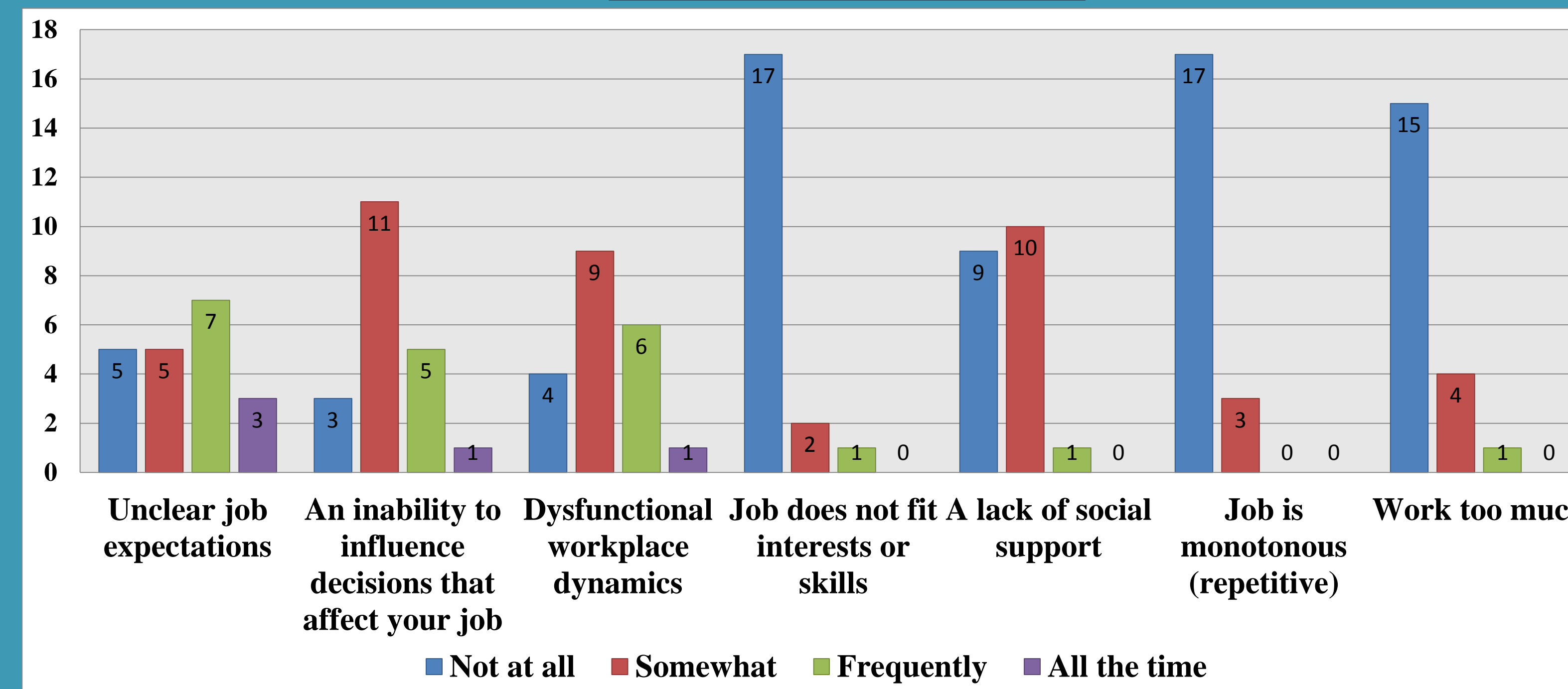
Methodology

- ❖ 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.

Paraprofessional Stress



Factors of Stress



Paraprofessional Stress According to Behavior

Ranking (in order)	Answer	8	2	1	5	Total Responses
1	Physical aggression	8	2	1	5	16
2	Getting students motivated	4	4	5	3	16
3	Boundary issues with students	2	6	5	3	16
4	Redirecting students	2	4	5	5	16

Key Findings

- ❖ 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 one-on-one support, provide academic instruction, and facilitate relationships between students, but low confidence in small group instruction, implementing behavioral plans, and personal care assistance.
- ❖ At the end of a typical work day, 95% of paraprofessionals were mentally exhausted and 75% were physically exhausted.

Recommendations

- ❖ Paraprofessionals lack clarity about what their role is. The district should explicitly communicate what they see as the role of paraprofessionals.
- ❖ The district develop additional trainings and offer a variety of trainings from different disciplines on an ongoing basis that promote the development of the paraprofessionals, utilizing a team approach.
- ❖ Paraprofessionals should receive instruction around issues of understanding each individual child's needs so that appropriate instructional modifications can be made to best accommodate the students.
- ❖ District administrators provide additional outlets for paraprofessionals to communicate with administration and other staff (perhaps routine task groups that balance both process and content).

References and Acknowledgements

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 References are available from author upon request.