The Center for Research and Outreach

Putting Research to Work
for Military Families

★★☆

Focus:
Civilian

Dilemmas of Practice: Challenges to Program Quality Encountered by Youth Program Leaders

SUMMARY: Quality youth programs are composed of well-trained and competent youth workers who regularly encounter challenging situations. Interview data from leaders and youth were used to investigate the types of challenging or "dilemma" situations youth leaders encountered and how each leader dealt with such situation. Results showed over 250 "dilemma situations" youth workers are confronted with while at work with youth. Future research may consider examining other ways youth leaders can be more effective in resolving various situations.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Data indicated approximately 250 "dilemma situations" (i.e., responding effectively to youths' individual needs and personality while working with restricted time and resources) that youth workers encountered over the course of 2 to 9 months.
- Results revealed five categories and 12 subcategories of "dilemma situations".
- Outcomes showed skilled youth leaders generally responded to these situations in various ways that were categorized as youth-centered with the ability to balance multiple concerns.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with high-quality youth development programs that work with military families to provide in-person and observational trainings to increase skills of current youth leaders
- Participate in military events (e.g. reintegration) that impact youth (e.g. deployments, relocation), so as to increase youth workers' competency in working with military youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Recommend increased training seminars on how to resolve "dilemma situations" that youth workers regularly encounter
- Promote quality evaluation methods of youth leaders' skills and program design to increase effectiveness for youth outcomes

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend participation in professional development courses for community youth leaders to increase competency in working with military youth
- Encourage community-based resources that support military youth in times of transition (i.e. deployment, relocation)

REACH

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover™

USDA

METHODS

- Data were derived from a qualitative longitudinal study over 2-9 months of 12 youth development programs for high-school-aged students.
- Programs were recruited based on procedures and criteria, such as a reputation of high quality and experienced leaders and programs that had positive youth outcomes (i.e., engagement).
- Interviews were conducted via in-person and phone at the beginning, middle and end of research study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Eighteen leaders and 113 youth were interviewed from 12 high-school-aged youth programs over the course of 2-9 months.
- Youth development programs ranged in location and programming: urban (n=7); rural or small cities (n=5); community-based (n=6); school-based (n=4), and faith-based (n=2).
- Leaders' ages ranged from 22-55 years old and leaders had 2-30 years of experience. They were mostly female (n = 11) and were comprised of the following racial/ethnic backgrounds: White (n = 9), Black (n = 6), Latino (n = 1), Arab American (n = 1), and East Indian (n = 1).
- Youth interviewed were Black (n=37); White (n= 36); and Latino/a (n=32).

LIMITATIONS

- Although sample is based on high-quality youth development programs, conclusions may not be representative of all programs.
- Other untested variables may be influencing results such as leaders' educational and training background.
- While inter-rater reliability was above 80%, it was conducted with only one research staff member.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Consider evaluating educational and training backgrounds of leaders and their ability to effectively manage and resolve "dilemma" situations
- Explore frequency and range of challenging situations that occur within other youth programs.
- Examine specific problem solving or cognitive skills necessary for skills youth leaders to effectively resolve challenging situations that arise in youth development programs

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
★★☆
Appropriate
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods
★★☆
Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations
★★☆
Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works