

A NOTE ON CHILD AND YOUTH CARE RESEARCH: LOOKING TO OURSELVES

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Within the last few years, the field of Child and Youth work has been steadily building its research/professional literature base through the continued publication of journals (Child Care Quarterly, Journal of Child Care, Journal of Child and Youth Care Work) and texts which serve as guides to professional practice (e.g., *The Re-education of Troubled Youth*, Larry K. Brendtro & Arlin E. Ness, 1983). The field, "hungry for data," is beginning to react to this hunger.

How is the profession addressing this hunger? First, as mentioned above, there are three journals which offer publication opportunities. In addition, help is available to the potential writer in two forms: the "editor traveling road show" of conference workshops on writing and publication, and the matching of a writer with a potential writer who provides direct help on the polishing of a manuscript for publication in the Journal of Child and Youth Care Work, The Journal of Child Care or the Child Care Quarterly. Secondly, we see a recognition of the need for research generated by the field in the inclusion of research courses in the curricula of Child Care education and training programs.

Yet a third possibility for providing "hot data" to this hungry field lies in the direct participation of workers in the "captive audience" approach to survey research. The following report, based on a pilot project by the NOCCWA research committee*, is an example of this approach. Specifically, the research committee of NOCCWA (National Organization of Child Care Worker Associations) developed a survey questionnaire around the theme of an annual Child & Youth Care conference and collected the data at the conference from the "captive audience" at a conference luncheon. Yes, the data represent a biased sample (i.e., those people who came to the conference and thus presumably those with a specific interest in the conference theme, and those from a specific geographic area, etc.). However, if we frame this approach as "provocateur research," that is, live data the purpose of which is to provoke discussion and thought in the field, then we have found yet another avenue through which to use research toward the continued development of our profession.

Following is an overview of the results of the survey from last year's annual Inter-Association Child Care Conference, "The Abuse of

Children & Youth: A Painful Reality.” These results are offered as a sample of “provocateur research.”

* The NOCCWA research committee includes Mark Krueger, Penny Parry, Norman Powell and Vic Savicki.

INTER-ASSOCIATION CC CONFERENCE

Report on: Abuse Survey

Last year at the Inter-Association Child Care Conference, “The Abuse of Children & Youth: A Painful Reality,” the research committee of NOCCWA circulated a survey questionnaire to conference participants. Below is a summary of the main results.

The survey, which included multiple-choice and short answer questions, explored Child Care workers’ perceptions of the incidence of abuse in the children and youth with whom we work, and perceptions of what workers needed to deal more effectively with this abuse. To the one hundred seventy-five workers who replied to the survey, thank you.

WHO REPLIED

Of the 175 workers who replied, 40% were male, 60% female. There was a broad range of age groups represented in both men and women, with a considerable and surprising number of workers in the over-35 age bracket. The majority of workers (75%) were employed in residential programs and were involved in direct care of children and youth.

RESULTS

Workers abused as children –

Approximately 10% of workers reported having been abused as children. Since the survey did not ask individuals to indicate the type of abuse, this reported 10% may involve one or a combination of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. More women (15) than men (7) reported having been abused as a child. (Note, however, that more women than men replied to the questionnaire.)

Abused youth who come into care –

Workers estimated that a high incidence (80% estimate 1 in 5) of the youth in their care have been abused.

- 60% estimated that 1 in 3 youth had been abused
- 20% estimated the incidence as 1 in 5
- 15% estimated 1 in 10
- only 5% estimated the incidence to be greater than 1 in 25.

There was a tendency for workers who had reported being abused as children to have higher estimates of the incidence of abused youth among youth coming into care.

Youth Abused while in care –

Two-thirds of the workers reported having observed instances of physical, emotional or sexual abuse of children while these children were in care. For men, instances of emotional abuse were most common (80%). Physical abuse (12%) and sexual abuse (8%) were much less commonly observed. A different pattern emerged with women workers where physical abuse (40%) was most prominent, with emotional abuse (30%) and sexual abuse (30%) being much less frequent an occurrence in their view. There was no difference in the reported incidence of youth abuse between those workers who did/did not report having been abused as children.

Coping with abuse –

All workers reported needing more support in dealing with child abuse. While some workers felt a need for better understanding of the problem (40%), others felt that being more at ease with themselves (13%) would enable them to be more effective workers. What was needed in further training was:

- more information on how to support youth:65%
- more skill in recognizing abuse40%
- a refocusing of the system on prevention and requests for specific training programs (e.g., dealing with victims)10%

Take a few moments to consider these results.

What questions do they raise given your own experience?

What are you doing about child & youth abuse?

