

Exploration of the Student, Staff, and Parent/Guardian Perspectives on the Success of Residential

Programs: Methods Section

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Introduction The “Introduction” heading is only used in very long pieces. I am truly hoping that your use here is unjustified!

Hariss, Barlow, and Moli (2008) explored the benefits and disadvantages of a therapeutic residential school in the United Kingdom. Great opener! Students, staff members, and parents/guardians were interviewed to obtain their data. Previous research on the subject had only included the students and other stakeholders such as staff members or parents/guardians had not been considered. The themes that emerged were the students made improvements in developing trust, self-esteem, ability to stay in class, and behavior at home. The parents reported an appreciation for the respite from their difficult child, an improved ability to deal with their child and improved academic progress. The negative impacts of being placed at the residential school were missing out on spending time with friends and family.

The study lacks generalization due to both their sampling technique and the size of their sample. Nice transition to critique The study included only students who had been at the residential program for an extended period of time and who were in the process of transitioning to a less restrictive environment (Hariss, Barlow, & Moli, 2008). The results of the study may be useful to residential programs in the United Kingdom but it is unknown if those results would be consistent with the perceived success of residential programs in the United States. This study will use a similar method to explore the perceived effectiveness of residential programs in the United States by conducting interviews at multiple facilities, using a different sampling technique, and interviewing a larger sample of students, staff members, and parents/guardians. This study will also group the data collected on each style to explore the consistency in reported success as described by the student, parent/guardian, and staff members. Very, very well done so far!

Method

Setting I like the logic train demonstrated by your flush left headings

Participants were chosen from four different residential programs in the state of Virginia. The researcher contacted the director of each program and explained the purpose of the study. Permission to include participants was obtained from each program director in accordance with the program's research policy. All four programs are licensed to operate by the Virginia Department of Social Services and the educational program was accredited by the Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities. The programs serve children who are referred by their Local Education Agency because they are unsuccessful in a day school setting due to emotional or behavioral problems. The residential programs primarily serve students who are identified as eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act criteria for emotional disabilities. Both the residential and educational component of each program is highly structured with a formal behavior system and intensive staffing. The residential component of each program includes a highly structured schedule with constant supervision and a four to one student to staff ratio. Each classroom has a capacity of nine students that are taught by a licensed special education teacher and an instructional aide. Additional behavior staff members are available in the hallway for when behavioral crises occur in the classroom. Students are able to earn visits home through positive behavior and success in the program.

Recruitment

The desired strategy was to interview 12 students from each facility, one parent/guardian for each student, and a staff member that worked with each of the selected students. The number of people interviewed was chosen based on doubling the number of participants interviewed by Harriss et al. (2008) for each facility. Twelve students were randomly selected from each facility to be included in the study. The parent/guardian of each student selected was contacted by each program's director to obtain permission for the researcher to contact them. The researcher contacted each parent/guardian by telephone to explain the purpose of the study. An informed consent form and a booklet about the study were mailed to each parent/guardian with a self-addressed stamped envelope. The researcher met with each student individually and explained the purpose of the study. Written assent was obtained from each student to participate. Either a teacher or a residential care provider who worked with that student was then randomly selected to participate in the staff interview. Informed consent was obtained from each of the staff members who participated in the study. If a student or parent/guardian chose not to participate then another student was chosen and the above process was repeated. If a staff member chose not to participate then another staff member who worked with the desired student was selected and the consent process was repeated until the desired amount of 48 students, their parent/guardians, and staff members who worked with them, were recruited.

Participants

Twelve students were randomly selected from each of the four residential programs for a sample of 48 students. The students (38 male, 10 female) were aged 11-17. The amount of time each student had been at their respective residential programs ranged from 2-24 months with the average amount of time being fifteen months. The students were all eligible for special education services under the category of emotional disability. Twenty-five of the students were

African-American, thirteen were Hispanic, and ten were Caucasian. Thirty-five of the students were still in the custody of at least one of their parents, ten students were in the custody of a relative, and three students had been referred to the residential program from a foster care placement. The parent/guardian of each student identified to participate was interviewed.

Twelve staff members (6 teachers, 6 residential workers) that worked directly with each student were selected from each program. All of the teachers selected held a current special education license and had 2-10 years of teaching experience with the average amount of experience being 3.8 years. The residential staff members all had bachelor's degrees and had been working in residential programs from 6-48 months with the average amount of experience being 18 months.

Procedure

Data was collected from each participant through an interview using open-ended questions. The order of the questions was flexible and the interview was conducted in a manner that allowed each person to describe the overall experience in the program. Whenever the participant started discussing an area that may be covered in a different question, the interviewer posed that question to maintain the flow of the conversation. The interviewer used a checklist for the questions to ensure that each question was asked during the course of the interview.

The interviews were conducted by the primary researcher and five graduate students. The five graduate students were trained by the researcher in how to conduct the interviews. The same questions used by Hariss et al. (2008) were used in these interviews. The parent and student questions focused on the areas of first contact with the residential program, difficulties that lead to being placed at the residential program, residential care at the program, quality of education being provided, relationships with staff and other pupils, plans after leaving the

program, and how the program has or has not helped. The staff questions focused on the areas of their role in relation to the student, profile of the student prior to beginning at the program, progress of the student, quality of residential care, quality of education, relationship with staff, and plans for when the student leaves the program (Hariss, Barlow, & Moli, 2008). The interviewers would ask follow-up questions to probe for more information if the respondent was giving short answers or avoided answering the question that was posed.

Initially, the interviewer met with each student to introduce themselves and establish rapport. Once each interviewer had introduced themselves to all of their students, they began meeting with each of them individually. The interviewer met with the residential staff members during school hours and the teachers after school hours. The parent interviews were all conducted by telephone. The interviewers took notes on interview protocols that captured information about the person's behavior during the interview. Each interview was tape-recorded and took from 45-90 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed by the graduate students who conducted the interviews. The interview protocols were added to the end of each interview transcript. The data from each person was assigned a number to remove any information that may identify that person as an individual. The data that pertained to each student was grouped accordingly to ensure that the information reported by the student, their parent/guardian, and the staff member was analyzed together.

The primary researcher trained the five graduate students on how to analyze the transcripts and identify major and minor themes. The five graduate students worked together to analyze the transcripts. One group of data (student, parent/guardian, staff member) was analyzed

from each school to identify themes. The identified themes served as a template for the analysis of the data from the rest of the interviews. As new themes emerged during analysis, they were included in the thematic template. Recurring themes were analyzed to minor themes within them. Grouping the data together for each interview protocol, student, parent/guardian, and staff member, triangulated the data to facilitate the accuracy of the themes. The data was also analyzed for consistency in responses for each student in terms of success in each program. Checking for consistency in responses provided information on any differences in the perceived effectiveness of the residential programs. For example, if a student and parent/guardian reported being successful within the residential program but the staff member reported the student was unsuccessful, the data from that student was analyzed a second time in terms of the inconsistencies. The second analysis on consistency was reported in a separate section. The results of the analysis were verified by the primary researcher.

The only thing missing is your set of original questions.

References

- Harriss, L., Barlow, J., & Moli, P. (2008). Specialist Residential Education for Children with Severe Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties: Pupil, Parent, and Staff Perspectives. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* 13(1), 31-47.