

Perceptions of Head Start Staff: The Role of Services Provided and Child Behavior in Preventing Youth and Adult Criminal Behavior

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Introduction

In the present study, Southern Oregon Head Start employees were surveyed to gather their perspective regarding the impact of the following services and behaviors in regards to Head Start children and parents:

- current services provided
- additional or improved services
- the significance of specific behaviors displayed as possible indicators of future criminal behavior.

Materials and Methods

Participants: The sample in this study was comprised of 40 Southern Oregon Head Start employees of all ages, gender, race, and educational backgrounds.

Materials: A survey was utilized to collect the data on all of the measures being analyzed which consisted of 31 rating questions, two open-ended questions, six fill-in-the blank questions, and four demographic, categorical questions.

Hypotheses

1. **Nutritional services; social-emotional development** for child and; **family involvement** will be rated as the current most impacting services.
2. **Providing services to more eligible children** and; **increasing teacher salaries** will be rated as the new or improved services with the greatest impact.
3. **Hitting teachers** and; **refusing to acknowledge and obey teachers**, staff or volunteers, will be ranked as the most significant problem behaviors.

Results

•Hypothesis #1

•Nutritional services:

•Overall rated as the sixth, most impacting current service, $M = 7.15$ ($SD = 1.528$)

•Social-emotional development:

•Overall rated as the most impacting current service, $M = 8.25$ ($SD = 1.127$)

•Family involvement:

•Overall rated as the second, most impacting current service, $M = 7.83$ ($SD = 1.130$)
•There was a statistically significant difference between how participants in Josephine $M = 8.33$ ($SD = .816$) and Jackson County $M = 7.52$ ($SD = 1.163$) rated family involvement, $t(36) = 2.347$, $p = .025$.

•Hypothesis #2

•Provide Head Start services to more eligible children:

•Overall rated as the most impacting new or improved service, $M = 7.87$ ($SD = 1.508$)

•Teacher salary increases:

•Overall rated as the seventh new or improved, most impacting service, $M = 7.32$ ($SD = 1.141$)

•Job coaching services for parents:

•Overall rated as the sixth new or improved, most impacting service, $M = 7.33$ ($SD = 1.562$).
•There was a statistically significant difference between how participants in Josephine $M = 7.93$ ($SD = 1.223$) and Jackson County $M = 6.91$ ($SD = 1.676$) rated family involvement, $t(36) = 2.028$, $p = .050$.

Results, cont'd

•Hypothesis #3

•Hitting teachers, staff or volunteers:

•Overall was rated as the most significant predictor of adult criminal behavior, $M = 7.87$ ($SD = 1.361$).

•A child refusing to acknowledge and obey teachers, staff or volunteers

•Overall was rated as the fifth, most significant predictor of adult criminal behavior, $M = 7.30$ ($SD = 1.372$).

•There was no statistically significant difference in how all of the variables were rated depending on employment position, level of education, county of employment, and duration of employment at Head Start.

Discussion

- Participants in Josephine County rated family involvement as having a more impact in helping Head Start children become contributing, responsible, law abiding citizens than participants in Jackson County.
- Participants in Josephine County rated job coaching for parents as having a more impact in helping Head Start children become contributing, responsible, law abiding citizens than participants in Jackson County.
- Participants in management positions $M = 9.57$ ($SD = 17.317$) predicted that a higher percentage of children who displayed severe "problem behaviors" by the end of the school year, would engage in juvenile and/or adult criminal behavior than those working at the center level $M = 35.67$ ($SD = 36.401$).

•Data suggests that Head Start employees consider children and families residing in Josephine and Jackson County to have differing needs.

•Due to the small sample size, it is dangerous to make any conclusions. Further studies are needed with a larger sample size.