

POLICY ANALYSIS SERIES

ISSUES RELATED TO WELSCH v. LEVINE / NO. 14

TRAINING NEEDS AS PERCEIVED BY RESIDENTIAL
AND DAY PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a study of the perceived training needs of residential and day program staff working in community facilities serving developmentally disabled people.

An assessment of personnel and training programs for staff working with developmentally disabled people is mandated by the 1978 Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (P.L. 95-602) which states:

The (State) plan (for developmental disabilities) must provide for . . . an assessment of the adequacy of the skill level of professionals and paraprofessionals serving persons with developmental disabilities in the state and the adequacy of the State programs and plans supporting training of such professionals and paraprofessionals in maintaining the quality of services provided to persons with developmental disabilities in the State . . . (42 USC 6009).

This policy analysis paper is the third in a series of three reports on the current status of training opportunities for professionals and paraprofessionals working with the developmentally disabled, and the training needs of these individuals.

The first paper (*Policy Analysis Paper No. 12*) focused on nonformal training. The second paper (*Policy Analysis Paper No. 13*) reported the results of a survey of formal training programs in postsecondary institutions. This paper will present the results of two surveys of a state-wide sample of administrators and line staff in community residential facilities and developmental achievement centers.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since extensive literature reviews on training-related topics were included in *Policy Analysis Papers 12* and *13*, this review will consist of a brief summary of additional literature on staff performance, identification of training needs, and evaluation of training opportunities.

The literature on staff performance suggests that performance is affected by congruency between staff expectations and actual assignment of duties (Miringoff, 1980; Nebraska Mental Retardation Panel, 1979; Zaharia & Baumeister, 1979); staff attitudes about their job responsibilities (Elder & Magrab, 1980; Humm-Delgado, 1979); the potential for career advancement and training (Ramsayer, 1980; Jones, 1979; Pickett, 1979; New Career Training Laboratory, 1979); and the staff's level of confidence in their understanding of the current technology (Dellinger, 1978).

Identification of training needs may be revealed by individual performance evaluations (Frank, 1970). Concrete measures that encourage a competency-based education and evaluation system are most effective measures of skill possession (Nebraska Mental Retardation Panel, 1979; Repp & Deitz, 1979; Wolraich, 1979). A competency-based evaluation system of staff and training opportunities is recommended instead of the traditional testimonial responses (Wieck, 1979; Mager & Pipe, 1970; Frank, 1970; Byham, 1970).

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this paper consisted of two surveys of administrators and line staff in developmental achievement centers (DACs) and residential facilities (including Rule 34, ICF-MRs, Rule 80--Physically Handicapped, Rule 5--Child Caring Institutions, and Rule 8--Group Homes for Adolescents).

A random sample was drawn of agencies from each economic development region. Participation in the survey was voluntary. The questionnaires were designed by the Developmental Disabilities Program staff, with input from the regional Developmental Disabilities coordinators. Interviews were conducted by the regional coordinators; surveys were edited and coded by Developmental Disabilities Program staff.

Using a semistructured questionnaire, administrators were asked about their agencies' staff recruitment and development activities and pre-service and in-service training opportunities, as well as their own educational backgrounds and experiences. The average length of time for administrative interviews ranged from one-half hour to two hours. A total of 113 surveys were completed between August and October, 1981.

Direct care staff were chosen randomly from the agencies' list of professional and paraprofessional employees who spend more than 50% of their time directly with clients. They were provided with a structured questionnaire which asked about their educational background and experience, client demographics, and perceived training needs. A total of 312 surveys were completed between August and November, 1981.

IV. SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the administrator and staff surveys will be presented in the following order: (a) education level of administrators and staff; (b) years of experience; (c) staff supervisory responsibilities and client contact; (d) staff and administrators' perceptions of client characteristics; (e) personnel policies and staff development; (f) staff turnover and recruitment; and (g) preservice and in-service training.

Educational Level: Both administrators and line staff were asked to indicate their level of education. As Table 1 shows, DAC staff tend to have more years of education than residential staff. The majority of DAC line staff (54 percent) have a bachelor's or master's degree, while 38 percent of the residential direct care staff have this level of education. Educational training of the two administrative groups, however, is very similar.

Years of Experience: DAC administrators and staff also tend to have more years of experience in the field, as Table 2 shows. The median length of work experience for DAC staff is 4 years, while the median for residential staff is 2 years. For DAC administrators, the median is 10 years; for residential administrators, it is 8.5 years.

Staff Supervisory Responsibilities and Client Contact: Staff members were asked whether they supervise other staff. Of this sample, 25 of 69 (36 percent) day program staff supervised others while 61 of 243 (25 percent) residential program staff had supervisory responsibilities.

Staff members were asked to estimate the amount of time they spent in direct contact with clients. Approximately 74 percent of the DAC staff in this sample spent from 76 to 100 percent of their time with clients. Of the residential staff, 66 percent spent from 76 to 100 percent of their time with clients.

Perceptions of Client Characteristics: Both staff and administrators were asked about the characteristics of the clients served in their agencies. Table 3 shows the responses to these questions including the primary disability level served, and the proportions of multiply handicapped clients and clients with severe behavior problems. In general, the staff viewed the clients as higher functioning and having fewer handicapping conditions than administrators did. There seemed to be closer agreement on the proportion of clients with severe behavior problems.

Table 1
 Education Levels of Staff and Administrators
 (Minnesota Residential and Day Program
 Staff and Administrators: 1981;
 n = 312 and n = 113;
 100% Reporting)

LEVEL OF EDUCATION	DEVELOPMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS				RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS			
	Staff		Administrators		Staff		Administrators	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school	1	1%	0	0%	11	5%	0	0%
High school	14	20	2	6	76	31	2	2
AVTI certificate/Associate of Arts degree	16	23	2	6	64	26	5	6
Bachelor's degree	35	51	19	59	88	36	49	61
Master's degree and beyond	3	5	9	29	4	2	25	31
TOTAL	69	100%	32	100%	243	100%	81	100%

Table 2
 Years of Experience of Staff and Administrators
 (Minnesota Residential and Day Program
 Staff and Administrators: 1981;
 n = 312 and n = 113;
 100% Reporting)

NUMBER OF YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	DEVELOPMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS		RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS	
	Staff Number	Administrators Percent	Staff Number	Administrators Percent
0 to 1 year	6	9%	53	21%
1 to 2 years	8	12	60	25
2 to 4 years	20	29	60	25
4 to 7 years	20	29	46	19
7 years and more	15	21	24	10
TOTAL	69	100%	243	100%

Table 3
 Perceptions of Client Characteristics
 (Minnesota Residential and Day Program
 Staff and Administrators: 1981;
 n = 312 and n = 113;
 100% Reporting)

PERCEIVED CLIENTS CHARACTERISTICS	DEVELOPMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS				RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS			
	Staff		Administrators		Staff		Administrators	
	Number ^a	Percent	Number	Percent	Number ^a	Percent	Number ^a	Percent
Functioning Level of Majority of Clients:								
• Mild	5	7%	2	6%	26	10%	10	12%
• Moderate	44	63%	14	44%	129	51%	38	46%
• Severe	17	24%	16	50%	80	31%	27	33%
• Profound	4	6%	0	0%	20	8%	8	10%
Proportion of Multiply Handicapped Clients:								
• 0%-25%	46	66%	17	53%	161	67%	39	48%
• 26%-50%	13	19%	14	44%	30	13%	25	31%
• 51%-75%	7	10%	1	3%	15	6%	6	7%
• 76%-100%	3	4%	0	0%	33	14%	11	14%
Proportion of Clients with Severe Behavior Problems:								
• 0%-25%	61	88%	32	100%	173	71%	62	77%
• 26%-50%	6	10%	0	0%	43	18%	9	11%
• 51%-75%	1	1%	0	0%	8	3%	7	9%
• 76%-100%	1	1%	0	0%	21	9%	3	4%

NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

^a Numbers may vary due to multiple responses.

Personnel Policies and Staff Development: The personnel cycle of hiring, training, and retention of employees should include maintaining up-to-date job descriptions and personnel policies, and conducting regular job evaluations or performance appraisals.

When asked whether their agency had up-to-date job descriptions, 31 of 32 DAC administrators reported having current job descriptions, while 79 of 81 residential administrators stated the same. Almost all administrative respondents (109 of 113) reported that their agencies had personnel policies.

Of the DAC directors, 25 of 32 (78 percent) reported that performance appraisals were conducted. This practice was also reported by 76 of 81 (94 percent) residential administrators. The frequency of performance appraisals was reported as follows: (a) annual = 66 (58 percent); (b) semiannual = 25 (22 percent); (c) quarterly = 5 (4 percent); (d) other = 5 (4 percent); and (e) none = 12 (11 percent).

Of the 113 administrators, 61 reported that the results of the performance appraisals were used in determining staff development plans. However, only 35 of the 113 reported that individual staff development plans had been written to correct staff deficits in skills or knowledge.

Staff Turnover and Recruitment: Administrators were asked which position in their agency had the greatest turnover rate. Thirty-two administrators (29 percent) reported no turnover during 1981. The greatest turnover rate occurred in two residential facility positions: houseparent and houseparent aide. The most frequent reason cited for turnover was personal reasons (n = 37) followed by leaving for a higher paying position (n = 35) and job dissatisfaction (n = 10).

Administrators were also asked whether any specific staff positions were difficult to fill. Of the 113 agencies, 70 (64 percent) reported no difficulty in locating employees. Residential facilities tended to report more difficulty in recruiting houseparents because of unfavorable working hours (n = 10; 12 percent) and low salary (n = 6, 7 percent). DAC administrators tended to have difficulty recruiting staff willing to work in the rural part of the state.

Preservice and In-Service Training: Both administrators and staff were asked questions regarding preservice and in-service training. The administrators were asked to list the topics covered in the agency's preservice and in-service training, and to describe the methods of providing in-service training. Staff were asked to indicate what in-service topics they needed and desired.

The administrators reported that their preservice training activities cover a wide variety of topics. The most common topic of preservice training (37 percent) is "general program orientation." Specific

assessment and charting skills are the next most common topic (18 percent). Some preservice training includes information on safety (11 percent), skill development (9 percent), interpersonal skills (8 percent), or medical (7 percent). Occasionally, the training includes legal information (4 percent) or site visits (4 percent).

The administrators' responses indicate that in-service training focuses on more specific task-oriented topics. Skill development (21 percent), interpersonal skills (20 percent), and medication (19 percent) in-services are the most commonly reported training provided by the sample of facilities. Safety (16 percent) and program planning (15 percent) sessions are less frequently provided. In-services on legal issues (6 percent), program orientation (3 percent), and site visits (1 percent) are rarely provided.

Administrators reported that they generally make arrangements for in-service training to be provided by community professionals on an independent basis. Medical professionals from the community, e.g., nurses and dental assistants, are the most frequent instructors (27 percent). Local educators, e.g., college instructors, or civil service persons, e.g., fire marshals, represent 20 percent of the service presenters. Administrators use their own staff expertise and presentations offered by professional groups, e.g., MinnDACA or ARRM, at the same level (21 percent). An additional 11 percent of the training is provided by outside consultants.

In order to assess staff in-service training needs, line staff were presented with a list of 29 possible topics for in-service training. Respondents indicated by "yes" or "no" whether the topic was needed and desired. Table 4 presents all 29 topics and the total number of "yes" responses from the 312 direct care staff members.

As Table 4 shows, in-service training on behavior problems is clearly the area of greatest perceived need. "Preventing behavior problems" was the top response, with almost 4 out of 5 line staff (79 percent) requesting this topic. The second highest response was "designing and developing behavior management programs," which was seen as a needed and desired training topic by two-thirds (64 percent) of the surveyed staff. "Handling client self-abuse" was the fourth highest response (61 percent), and "handling severe behavior problems" was the sixth highest (59 percent).

Current information on developmental disabilities was perceived as a continuing need by those questioned. Of the respondents, 63 percent (68 percent DAC and 62 percent residential facilities) wanted training sessions that focused on recent findings about handicapping conditions and developmental disabilities. An in-service on available services for client referrals was requested by 3 out of every 5 workers (60 percent).

Table 4
 Staff Development Topics Needed and Desired
 (Minnesota Developmental Disabilities
 Staff: 1981; n = 312;
 100% Reporting)

RANK ORDER	STAFF DEVELOPMENT TOPIC	FREQUENCY OF "YES" RESPONSES	
		Number	Percent
1.	Preventing behavior problems	245	79%
2.	Designing and developing behavior management programs	201	64%
3.	Current information--handicapping conditions	197	63%
4.	Handling client self-abuse	190	61%
5.	Resources/services for developmentally disabled clients	187	60%
6.	Handling severe behavior problems (aggression)	185	59%
6.	Community acceptance	185	59%
7.	Alternative communication methods	178	57%
8.	Improving team relationships	176	56%
8.	Legal rights	176	56%
9.	Medications and side effects	171	55%
9.	Implementing behavior management programs	168	54%
10.	Using curriculum/training materials	161	52%
11.	Selecting curriculum/training materials	157	50%
11.	Health care procedures	156	50%
12.	Goals, objectives (individual program plans)	154	49%
12.	Normalization--application	153	49%

Table 4
 (continued)

RANK ORDER	STAFF DEVELOPMENT TOPIC	FREQUENCY OF "YES" RESPONSES	
		Number	Percent
13.	Task analysis	143	46%
13.	Teaching new skills	142	46%
14.	Changing teaching programs that don't work	138	44%
15.	Communicating with parents	128	41%
15.	Observing, defining, recording client behavior	128	41%
16.	Accurate record keeping	125	40%
16.	Training other staff how to teach	125	40%
17.	Assessment of clients	83	27%
17.	Positioning clients with physical handicaps	83	27%
18.	Using adaptive equipment	76	24%
19.	Developing eating responses	71	23%
20.	Toilet training	51	16%

After reviewing all topics, each staff member was asked to rank the five most important topics, and those priority ranks were tabulated. By rank order, the top five topics were: (a) preventing behavior problems; (b) designing behavior management programs; (c) knowing about resources and services for developmentally disabled clients; (d) knowing about medications and side effects; and (e) writing goals, objectives, and individual program plans (IPPs).

V. SUMMARY

This paper reported the results of two surveys of residential and day program staff. Statewide samples of 312 line staff and 113 administrators responded to questions regarding their educational backgrounds and experience, agency personnel issues, and in-service training needs.

Line staff members were given 29 possible topics for in-service training, and asked to indicate whether training on each topic was needed and desired. Staff members were then asked to rank the five most important topics. These respondents identified training on behavior problems as their top priority need in in-service training. Preventing behavior problems and designing behavior management programs were the two highest need topics, both in terms of the total frequency of positive responses and the priority ranking of the five most critical areas of need.

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