

RESEARCH

You May Have Missed

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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RESEARCH YOU MAY HAVE MISSED . . . provides brief summaries of recent research relevant to youth development practice. It is designed to help youth development professionals keep up-to-date with contemporary research.

Editor's Note: The focus of the research articles summarized in this issue is retention and drop out in youth development programs.

■ Albright, M.B. (2008).

Here today, gone tomorrow: An investigation into why older youth leave the 4-H program.

Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University. NAL call number: (not available).

The complex problem of older member retention and understanding why 4-H members choose to leave the program is one that 4-H has struggled with for many years. The present article is of a qualitative study designed to explore factors related to older youth discontinuing their involvement with the Erie County 4-H program. The factors examined include exploring the reasons why youth chose not to re-enroll, identifying the barriers to participation in the 4-H program for these youth, and determining what conditions would facilitate participation in the Erie County program. Sixteen youth, ages 11 to 17, who were enrolled in a community club program in 2007 but did not re-enroll in 2008, participated in one of three focus groups to discuss why they discontinued their involvement in 4-H. Significant findings concerning the retention of older 4-H youth related to: (a) experiences with advisors,

(b) experiences with the competition, and (c) conflicts with other activities. The findings clearly revealed that the relationship between a club advisor and a member had an influence on a teen's satisfaction with their club, their satisfaction with the 4-H program as a whole, and the decision not to re-enroll. Another theme that emerged from these focus groups was negative judging experiences, with youth citing perceived favoritism during judging, unclear expectations for judging, problems with organization during judging, and poor sportsmanship exhibited during competition. A final point several youth made about 4-H and which influenced their decision not to re-enroll, is that 4-H was time-consuming and interfered with other activities. This study provides information that may be relevant to many clubs and which could be useful to leaders as they work with older members. **-RC**

■ Anderson-Butcher, D. (2005).

Recruitment and retention in youth development programming.

The Prevention Researcher, 12(2), 3-6.

Youth development program participation is associated with improved academic achievement, social competence, school engagement and lower levels of negative outcomes such as substance use or delinquency. This review of factors that lead youth to join and continue in a program is aimed at youth development program managers, and outlines factors that affect youth involvement in a program. Young people prefer

programs that provide them with opportunities; that are interesting and relevant to them; that give them the opportunity to learn and practice new skills; that allow them autonomy; and that provide a social network and close relationships with peers and adults. Programs that match young people's interests and provide them with opportunities, skills, and a sense of responsibility and ownership are more likely to have higher levels of

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engagement and retention. Retention is higher among programs that develop strong positive relationships between young people and program staff or volunteers, allowing youth to experience a sense of belonging and a common identity; furthermore, youth may feel a higher comfort level in the program if adult staff or volunteers

are similar to the youth participants demographically. Programs with a variety of activities and opportunities will be more likely to attract a diversified group of youth with varied interests. Recruitment and retention can be improved through strategic planning of programs that fit these varied needs of youth. **-KH**

- Borden, L.M., Perkins, D.F., Villarruel, F.A., & Stone, M.R. (2005).

To participate or not to participate: That is the question.

New Directions for Youth Development, 105, 33 – 49.

This research study examined the reasons why ethnic minority youth choose to participate or not participate in youth programs. The study included 77 urban young people who identified themselves as Black/African American, Latino, Arab American, or Chaldean (ethnic people from the region now including Iraq). Thirty-three were female, with a median age of 14, and 44 males, with a median age of 13. Youth were asked to brainstorm, sort and rank responses based on two main interview probes: i) One of the reasons young people take part in youth programs is...” and ii) One of the reasons young people are NOT involved in youth programs is,...”. A total of 344 statements were recorded for the former probe and 353 for the latter. Categorical analysis helped reduce the data to manageable themes. Reasons youth participate fell into four categories: how youth programs help young people stay off the streets, learn new things, avoid boredom and participate in enjoyable activities that are fun. Reasons for participation varied by gender and ethnic group. For example, African American females indicated that programs helped them overcome shyness, develop confidence and self-esteem, while African American males indicated that their involvement had to do with staying off the streets. Arab American females mentioned having fun, staying off the streets, developing

personal skills and being involved in the community in a positive way. Arab American males mentioned that youth programs provide a safe alternative to the streets, as well as homework assistance and help in learning new skills. Chaldean females and males mentioned homework assistance as a primary reason to attend youth programs as well as an opportunity to learn English. For Latinas, the program provided activities not available in school and opportunities for community involvement. For Latinos, the major reasons for participation were involvement in sports and the chance to avoid boredom. Four main reasons were mentioned for non-participation: i) youth were too busy or lacked time, ii) they had other interests, iii) they held negative opinions of the youth center, iv) they were constrained from participation by parents or guardians. The researchers discuss these findings, suggesting that understanding reasons for youth participation in programs will allow organizations to design these programs bearing issues of access and engagement for young people of different ethnic backgrounds. The article concludes with a list of key recommendations for organizations to increase the likelihood that young people will participate in their programs. **-AS**

- Ferrari, T.M., & Turner, C.L. (2006).

An exploratory study of adolescents’ motivations for joining and continued participation in a 4-H afterschool program.

Journal of Extension, 44, 4, available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2006august/rb3.php> .

This small qualitative study used interviews and focus group data with seven youth to examine young people’s reasons for joining or leaving an after school program in Ohio. Motivations for joining the program included encouragement from a caring adult, whether a parent or a program staff member; to obtain homework assistance, and other opportunities. The respondents who wanted to continue in the program felt the adult program staff with whom they interacted were “helpful,” “respectful,”

and “nice,” and that the adults trusted the youth and gave them freedom and opportunities to try new things. Youth mentioned feelings of comfort, safety, and connectedness within the program as a reason for remaining a program member. Additional reasons to stay in the program included the fun they had and friends they had made within the program, and opportunities to learn new life skills and to develop empathy and maturity. **-KH**

- Harder, A., Lamm, A., Lamm, D., Rose, III, H., & Rask, G. (2005).

An in-depth look at 4-H enrollment and retention.

Journal of Extension, 43(5), available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005october/rb4.shtml>

Despite positive growth in overall 4-H participation in the last several years, membership in organized clubs has remained nearly static. In 1996, there were 6.30 million youth participating in 4-H; of those, 1.54 million were enrolled in 4-H clubs. In 2003, 7.0 million youth experienced some form of 4-H, but only 1.57 million of those youth were club members. The data for this study are from ES 237 data which are gathered in each county and state annually and includes demographic information for all youth and leaders involved in the 4-H program. The present study examines the issue of fluctuation in 4-H membership by examining enrollment and retention trends in Colorado 4-H membership during the years of 2002 and 2003. The analysis was based upon traditional club membership of 11,518 and 17,331 net records for 2002 and 2003, respectively, and are grouped in the context of four categories: 4-H member population by age, estimated net dropout rate by age, years in 4-H by age – intermediate members and senior members. Results indicated that members who were 11 years of age comprised the largest percentage of the 4-H population, with the smallest percentages occurring at ages 5-7 and 16-18. With regard to dropout rate by age, more children enrolled in 4-H than left the program at ages 6-11, while from ages 13-18 4-H increasingly lost more members than it recruited. That there are less second year members in each age group

than there are first year members supports previous research indicating that high percentages of first year families drop the program. For every age group, the majority of members had enrolled in 4-H at age 7. Not surprisingly, older youth are less likely to join 4-H; less than 5% of this group enrolled as new members. Yet, many members who joined at an early age continue to re-enroll each year as they grow older. Identifying the reasons long-term members choose to continue with 4-H could provide keys to understanding how best to serve older youth. The authors offer several recommendations for recruitment and retention efforts. Recruitment efforts could include working with school districts, distributing information and targeting advertising; increasing parental awareness of the benefits of joining 4-H as a Cloverbud (ages 5-7); encouraging members to share information with their friends. Suggestions for retaining members include implementing a new family mentoring system to support first year members; conducting a needs assessment for the intermediate and senior levels of membership could also yield valuable information. The authors suggest increasing flexibility in the structure of the club program to allow older youth to explore outside interests while maintaining membership in 4-H and suggest future research examine the effects of joining 4-H as a Cloverbud has on retention. **-RC**

- Homan, G., Dick, J., & Hedrick, J. (2007).

Differences in youth perceptions of Ohio 4-H based on gender.

Journal of Extension, 45(5), available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007october/rb7.shtml>

Youth perceptions are an important component to program planning and development. National 4-H statistics indicate a trend of higher enrollment by females across the United States. In 2003, there were 668,579 males (43.8%) and 858,029 females (56.2%) enrolled in community clubs. Camping numbers also reflect a higher enrollment by females (58.2%) than by males (41.8%). There are also significantly more female volunteers (70.6%) than male volunteers (29.4%). An analysis of youth enrollment statistics suggest gender can play a key role in youth enrollment and retention in 4-H. In order to make the program more attractive to males, 4-H professionals should consider designing programs that are more attractive to male youth. The purpose of the present study was to explore the nature of gender and its effect on youth perceptions of Ohio 4-H.

Youth in grades 4, 7, and 10 from nine different schools in five Ohio counties were chosen for participation in this study. A total of 1,462 answered questionnaires designed and tailored for past 4-H members, current 4-H members, and those who have never joined 4-H. Analyses are presented for two questions asked of male and female 4-H members: (a) perceptions of 4-H being “fun,” “cool,” or “boring,” and (b) whether youth received encouragement from parents and friends about their participation in 4-H. When evaluating the perception of 4-H by youth, females were significantly more likely than males to agree that 4-H is “fun,” “cool,” and less likely to agree that 4-H is “boring.” When reporting parental and friend encouragement to participate in 4-H, stronger encouragement is perceived by females than males when asked if their parents want

them in 4-H, if their friends want them in 4-H, and if their friends that are in 4-H will stay in 4-H. The results indicate an overall perception difference in 4-H based on the gender of youth. With national data indicating more females take part in and remain in 4-H, these results have relevance for other states. Educators should seek programs that appeal to male youth because they are under-represented. Male youth are less likely to remain in 4-H as they get older, and 4-H curriculum should be

evaluated to ensure that 4-H projects are meeting the needs and interests of both genders equally. Volunteers may need additional training to design local club experiences that are attractive to male youth and more male volunteers should be actively sought. The author stress that the opinions and input of diverse youth should be sought in developing 4-H club activities to ensure their attractiveness to all youth. **-RC**

- Homan, G., Dick, J., & Hedrick, J. (2007).

Youth perceptions of Ohio 4-H.

Journal of Extension, 45(4), available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/rb7shtml>

The majority of the members in most youth organizations are 9-11 year-olds, and most experience a drop in the membership of their older members. Youth have more choices of extracurricular activities as they age. Knowing how youth perceive 4-H is important in order for 4-H to remain an attractive and relevant youth development experience. The purpose of the present study was to examine youth perceptions about 4-H in Ohio. Data were collected through questionnaires given to youth in grades 4, 7, and 10, from nine different schools in Ohio. A total of 1,462 students provided usable data. This article presents data from two questions: (a) Is there a difference in perception of 4-H among youth who are currently enrolled in 4-H, those who were former members of 4-H

(but left the organization), and those who never enrolled in 4-H? and (b) Is there a difference in perception of 4-H among 4th, 7th, and 10th grade students? Results indicated that when evaluating the perception of 4-H perceived by youth, those who had never been members of 4-H were significantly more likely to agree that 4-H is “boring” while current and former members were significantly more likely to agree that 4-H is “fun” and “cool.” There were significant differences in how the perceptions of 4-H were rated across the different grade level students. The older the youth, the less favorable they viewed 4-H. The authors stress the importance for 4-H to consider youth perceptions in program planning and adapting to the needs of new audiences and older members. **-RC**

- Russell, S.T., & Heck, K.E. (2008).

Middle school dropout? Enrollment trends in the California 4-H Youth Development Program.

Applied Developmental Science, 12(1), 1-9.

Youth development program enrollment tends to be highest in the late elementary years and lower among middle and high school students. Reasons for this pattern have not been thoroughly investigated, although some believe that youth drop out of youth development programs around middle school age, possibly because there are more competing opportunities for young adolescents or perhaps because youth development programs are not as successful at meeting the needs or interests of youth in their early teens compared with somewhat younger children. This study used proportional hazards modeling, also known as survival analysis, with over 221,000 youth in the California 4-H Youth Development Program data during 1992-2002 to examine patterns of enrollment, retention, and dropout. Enrollment records were linked over time so that youth could be tracked and identified as being retained or

dropping out. Survival analysis allows data to be analyzed according to relative lengths of time. Results showed that enrollment was greatest among youth ages 10-13 in 2002, and the age curve was somewhat flattened, with a less pronounced peak around ages 10-12 than there had been in 1992. There was a trend toward dropout beyond age 11, but accompanied by fewer new enrollees. Enrollment was fairly stable at the younger ages, with similar numbers of young people joining and leaving the program, but dropout accelerated in middle school and beyond and was not made up by new youth joining the program at that age. Two-thirds of new enrollees were between ages 8 and 12, and fewer than 14 percent joined at high school age. The average number of years youth spent in the program was greatest for youth who joined at age 9 (3.85 years spent enrolled, on average) with declines with age; youth who joined

the program at age 14, for example, spent only 1.84 years in the program, on average. Results showed that white youth and those living on farms were less likely to drop out of the program than other young people. This quantitative study, which used administrative enrollment

data, cannot answer questions about why young people join and leave the program, but it does shed light on demographic trends and provide information about the prevalence of enrollment and retention, and time in the program, for California 4-H youth. **-KH**

- Simpkins, S.D., Ripke, M., Huston, A.C., & Eccles, J.S. (2005).

Predicting participation and outcomes in out-of-school activities: Similarities and differences across social ecologies.

New Directions for Youth Development, 105, 51 – 69.

The researchers examine the differences in participation by gender and socio-ecological variables by examining two samples of children who are of the same age and participated in a similar range of activities but differed with respect to family incomes, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and neighborhood characteristics. Youth in the first data sample, from the Childhood and Beyond (CAB) study came from largely white, middle class families in urban, suburban and rural Michigan. Youth in the second study sample called New Hope, came from low income families in Milwaukee who were primarily African American and Hispanic. This review focuses on the results with regard to activity participation. Data from the CAB study were in three waves, with an age range from kindergarten to sixth grade (approximately 400 to 500 children in each wave). Children's activity participation was matched to compare with the New Hope study sample. Five activity groups included sports, art lessons, recreation and community center activities, club and youth groups and religious activities. From the New Hope sample, 541 children ages 6 - 12 were chosen to compare activity participation. Parents reported how frequently their children participated in lessons, sports, clubs and youth groups and religious classes and events using a five point scale. Findings revealed that children's participation differed on child characteristics and social ecologies in certain areas and by age. Overall a greater percentage of younger children from the CAB study participated in some activity,

compared to the New Hope sample. The percentage of children participating in lessons and club/youth groups was similar across the two samples. Notable differences were in sports, recreation/community centers and religious activities. Children from middle class families tended to participate in sports more than community/recreation centers compared to low-income children. More New Hope children participated in religious and recreation/community center activities, however this could also be accounted for the fact that the New Hope questionnaire included service attendance, which was not measured in the CAB study. In the New Hope sample, the percentage of children participating in various activities increased with age, but in both samples there were decreases in the percentage engaging in club/youth groups after age eight. In both studies, a higher number of girls participated in art/lessons than boys. More younger boys participated than younger girls, but by age eleven there were no differences in sports participation. The findings suggest that low-income families take advantage of religious institutions and local recreation and community centers more than middle class families who enroll their children in lessons and sport teams, possibly because the former are more affordable, or more readily available. The research highlights social ecological factors and age factors that influence young peoples' choices and access to extra-curricular participation. **-AS**

- Weisman, S.A., & Gottfredson, D.C. (2001).

Attrition from after school programs: Characteristics of students who drop out.

Prevention Science, 2(3), 201– 207.

The article describes a study comparing characteristics of students who remained in after-school programs with those who withdrew before the end of a school year. The researchers hypothesized that after-school programs tend to serve young people who are less at-risk than originally intended, because at-risk youth are

harder to retain or engage. To test this hypothesis data were gathered from an evaluation of eight after-school programs in the Maryland area, specifically exploring two variables – program attendance and program withdrawal. The sample included 234 participants who registered for the program and showed up for

at least one day. Participants were on average 11.5 years old, nearly two-thirds were male and 80% were Black or non-white. A total of 77 of the original 234 participants withdrew from the program, indicating a 33% withdrawal rate. With regard to program attendance, on average, participants who remained in the program for the entire year attended 87% of the days, while participants who withdrew from the programs attended 57% of the program days. To measure at-risk status, survey data were collected with eight indicators of risk: rebellious, delinquent behavior, last year variety of drug, last month frequency of drug use, attachment to school, commitment to education, peer drug models and parental supervision. School attendance data were also gathered. The researchers also computed a measure of neighborhood social disorganization using census block data. In addition to these quantitative measures, 5-10 minute interviews were conducted with 63 (82%) of

the students who withdrew, with the open-ended question, "Why did you leave the program?" Results showed that higher-risk participants were the ones who were more likely to drop out. Drop-outs reported significantly more peer drug models, more days absent from school and higher levels of social disorganization in their home neighborhoods. Parental supervision was significantly associated with increased program attendance. Interviews indicated that the main reasons students withdrew from the program were because they found the program boring (33%), because of relocation (19%) and because of transportation difficulties (14%). The researchers emphasize that after school programs will need to make extra efforts to maintain students who are most at-risk, finding strategies for engaging these students and meeting needs such as opportunities for status, peer group approval, independence and tests of physical, personal and social endurance. -AS ■

Book Reviews

. . . on topics relevant to youth development will be periodically published. We encourage submissions for future editions. Reviews may be sent to Ramona Carlos (rmcarlos@ucdavis.edu).

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Reprints of articles reviewed may be obtained by contacting the 4-H Center for Youth Development at (530) 754-8433.



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