5-12-2017

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Erin R. Veltman
Grand Valley State University, veltmane@mail.gvsu.edu

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Erin Veltman

Grand Valley State University

Abstract

The central focus of this project is a survey of programs and organizations serving youth labelled at-risk. This program study is to see how positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) systems versus consequence based behavioral management systems are used in programs for youth labelled at risk. It also surveys if PBIS systems are beneficial for working with this population. The methods used in this study were to generate a survey asking questions about the behavioral management systems used in the facilities and the effectiveness of the systems used. Results indicated that of the facilities surveyed, all of them worked with youth labelled at risk, and youth involved with the juvenile justice system. 80% of facilities surveyed used a positive behavioral intervention and support system, and all that used this system stated that it had been effective as a behavioral management system with this population. Further research is needed into how a PBIS system can benefit organizations serving youth labelled at risk, however, preliminary research indicates that a PBIS system is useful in working with at risk youth.

Keywords: *positive behavioral intervention and support system, youth at risk, juvenile justice, detention*

Introduction

A positive behavioral intervention and support system (PBIS) is a three tier system of positive support, utilizing a proactive approach to establish support, positive behavioral change, and a positive social culture in a facility. PBIS systems are focused on creating and sustaining primary (facility-wide), secondary (group-wide), and tertiary (individualized) support systems to improve the life of a youth (San Jose Unified School District, 2017). It works by understanding the communication behind a negative behavior and modifying or replacing it to a positive behavior (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Currently nearly 100,000 juveniles reside in some form of restrictive setting (detention or residential housing), and between 12% and 50% have some form of emotional, cognitive, or behavioral disability (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). These disabilities allow for a wide variety of negative behaviors to flourish, including aggression towards staff and peers, withdrawal, opposition or defiance, suicidal ideation, and sexually acting out. Past attempts to reform youth have taken a punitive approach, which has not been effective in rehabilitation juvenile delinquents (Mathur & Nelson, 2013). Instead, the juvenile justice system needs to focus on implementing effective, evidence-based practices to promote positive growth among the incarcerated youth. A PBIS system is an efficient way to do that.

PBIS systems work on a three tier framework of positive reinforcement and constructive, consistent consequences. Common interventions include facility wide rules of behaviors, recognition for positive behaviors, group-based therapy sessions with rewards and consequences for behaviors, and individual interventions such as journaling, deep breathing, yoga, exercise, and art (Jolivette, Swoszowski, & Ennis, 2013). A PBIS system can have a wide variety of outcomes for the incarcerated youth, mainly in the social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral

domains (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). These positive outcomes can possibly have significant positive long-term effects on the youth.

Research Questions

This survey seeked to answer the following questions:

1. Do juvenile residential organizations that serve youth labelled at-risk utilize positive behavioral intervention and support system l?

2. Are positive behavioral intervention and support systems effective in working with youth labelled at-risk?

Methods

The following survey was sent out to a variety of professionals who work within the juvenile justice system at juvenile detention facilities.

Consent Statement: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and anonymous. There is no way to link your individual responses to you directly. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You are being recruited through the Therapeutic Recreation Facebook Group because of your interest and experience in working with at-risk youth.

By completing the survey, you are giving your informed consent that you have been informed of the risks and benefits of your participation in this study. If you have any questions about this survey, you may contact the student researcher, Erin Veltman, at veltmane@mail.gvsu.edu, or the academic researcher, Dr. Dawn DeVries at devridaw@gvsu.edu.

You are asked to voluntarily provide specific information to this website. You may skip any question or stop participating at any time. The information collected will be used for the

stated purposes of this research project only and will not be provided to any other party for any

other reason at any time except and only if required by law. You should be aware that although

the information you provide is anonymous, it is transmitted in a non-secure manner. There is a

remove chance that skilled, knowledgeable persons unaffiliated with this research project could

track the information you provided to the IP address of the computer from which you send it.

However, your personal identity cannot be determined.

By clicking "yes" for the first question in this survey, you are giving your informed

consent to participate in this study and are indicating that you are over the age of eighteen (18)
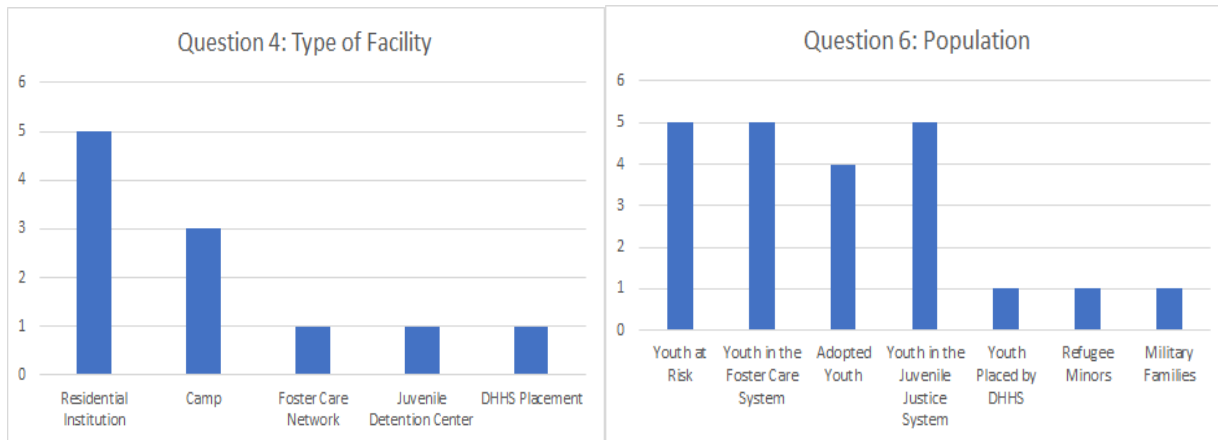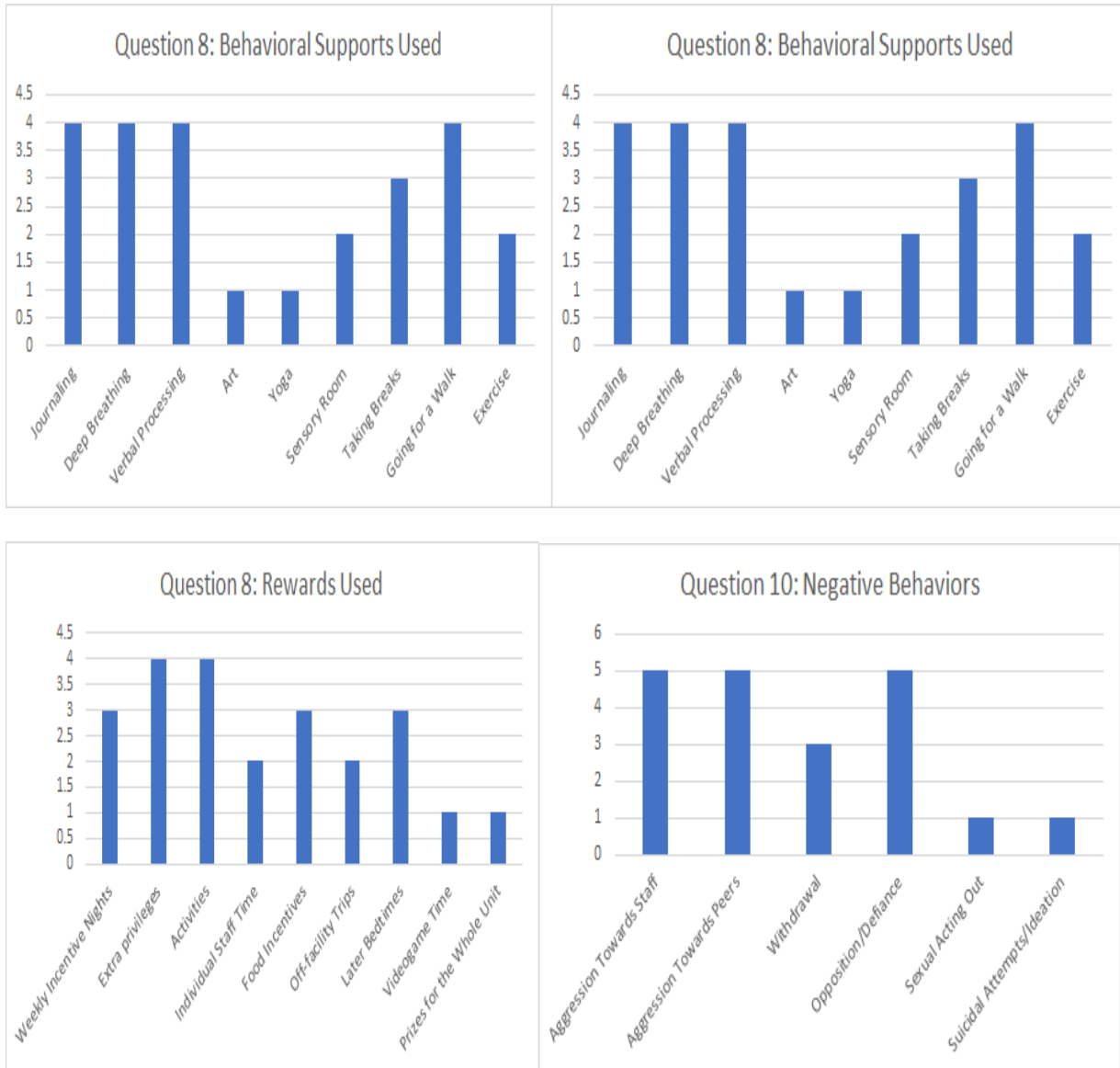
years of age.

Survey:

1. Are you over 18 and have the consent statement?
2. What state is your facility located in?
3. How long has your facility been open?
4. Is this facility a residential institution, group home, a juvenile detention center, camp, or other type of facility?
5. Does your facility employ a CTRS (Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist)?
6. What population does your organization serve?
    a. Youth at Risk
    b. Refugee Minors
    c. Youth in the Foster Care System
    d. Youth that have been adopted
    e. Youth in the Juvenile Justice System
    f. Other
7. Does your facility use a multi-tiered system of positive support for the youth, also known as a positive behavioral support system?
8. If the answer to question 7 was "yes", how does this system function within your facility?
    a. List behavioral supports used (journaling, verbal processing, positive rewards, deep breathing skills, etc.).
    b. List rewards systems used (extrinsic) (special snacks or treats, later bedtimes, movies, outings from facilities, etc.).
    c. I answered "no" to question 7.
9. If the answer to question 7 was "no", what type of behavioral management system does your facility utilize?

10. What types of negative behaviors are treated at your facility?
    a. Aggression towards staff
    b. Aggression towards peers
    c. Withdrawal
    d. Opposition/Defiance
    e. Other
11. On average, how many physical interventions does your facility experience each day? (Physical interventions being the use of mechanical restraints, medical sedation, or physically "holding" a youth).
12. Does the current behavioral management system produce efficient, effective, and positive results?
13. If the answer to question 12 was "no", what needs to be changed in the facility to produce efficient, effective, and positive results?
14. What is the best trait about your facility and how it handles behavioral management?
15. What is the area that needs the most improvement in your facility in how it handles behavioral management?
16. What is the overall atmosphere of your facility?
17. Additional comments?

Results

The following graphs display the most important results from this survey.

Question 8: Behavioral Supports Used

Question 8: Behavioral Supports Used

Question 8: Rewards Used

Question 10: Negative Behaviors

Discussion

The trends shown in the results of this survey demonstrated that positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) systems are being implemented into juvenile residential facilities. There was a wide variety of behavioral supports and rewards systems used by each facility, and the most common ones were journaling, taking walks, deep breathing, verbal processing, incentive activities, food incentives, and extra privileges. 80% of the facilities surveyed used a PBIS system, and they all stated that the behavioral management system was

effective, efficient, and positive. Positive behavioral intervention and support systems are beginning to enter the juvenile justice system, and can be effective, but more research must be done.

Conclusion

Positive behavioral intervention and support systems work on a data-driven framework of positive support and reinforcement, and consistent, constructive consequences. This system has proven effective in working with youth in special needs classrooms who have behavioral issues (San Jose Unified School District, 2017). According to Simonsen & Sugai (2013), "restrictive settings experience similar challenges that public schools face. Evidence supports the adoption of PBIS systems in public schools. Emerging evidence and practice demonstrate that PBIS can be implemented within a variety of restrictive settings, including residential programs and juvenile justice facilities". Because PBIS systems work by understanding what a behavior is trying to communicate, it can help modify or replace negative behavior, changing it to positive behaviors.

There has not been much research done on the use of PBIS systems in juvenile residential facilities. This survey was an attempt to discover if there were facilities that utilized this type of behavioral management system, and if the system was effective. This survey only received a few responses, so the results are inconclusive, however, the data showed trends of facilities using this system and the system being effective. It is this researcher's plan to continue researching this system following the conclusion of this survey.

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