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ABSTRACT

This study defines the role of the extension youth program aide in the food and nutrition education program as perceived by himself (herself), other paraprofessionals, and professional staff members of the Washington State Cooperative Extension Service. Data were collected from six groups through the use of a mail questionnaire. The six groups were: extension program aides, other program aides, extension assistants (youth phase), other extension assistants, county extension agents, and human resources staff. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of 17 selected functions as to how they felt they should be performed and how the functions were now being performed. The major distinction between the youth phase and the ongoing expanded food and nutrition education program is the inclusion of volunteer leaders. Conclusions as a result of this study are: (1) The relatively low rating given the functions (teaching volunteer leaders how to work with young people, training and recruiting volunteer leaders) has implications for a need for improved communication and an extensive training program; (2) The paraprofessionals were fairly well agreed that they were placing emphasis on the functions which should be emphasized. The professionals agreed but to a lesser extent; (3) Although experience seemed to be related to rank order to a lesser degree than age and education, those with longer tenure rated those functions pertaining to volunteer leaders higher than those with less tenure; and (4) Level of education seemed to be less of a factor in ranking the selected functions of the extension youth program aide by professionals than experience or age. (Author/LS)

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THE ROLE OF THE EXTENSION YOUTH PROGRAM AIDE IN WASHINGTON STATE

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THE ROLE OF THE EXTENSION YOUTH PROGRAM AIDE
IN WASHINGTON STATE*

by

Elaine I-Ling Wang

Purpose

This study was an attempt to clarify the role of the extension youth program aide working in the expanded food and nutrition education program of the Washington Cooperative Extension Service through the process of role analysis.

The specific purpose of this study was to define the role of the extension youth program aide as perceived by himself (herself), other paraprofessionals, and professional staff members of the Cooperative Extension Service.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were: (1) to determine the order of importance of functions of extension youth program aides in Washington state as they should be and are now being performed as perceived by (a) extension youth program aides, (b) other extension program aides, (c) extension assistants (youth phase), (d) other extension assistants, (e) county extension agents, and (f) human resources staff; (2) to determine the order of importance of functions of extension youth program aides in Washington state as they should be and are now being performed as perceived by (a) paraprofessionals and (b) professionals; (3) to determine relationships between the opinions of paraprofessionals concerning the order of importance of functions which they feel extension youth program aides should perform and (a) years of experience, (b) formal education

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completed, and (c) age; (4) to determine relationships between the opinions of professionals concerning the order of importance of functions which they feel extension youth program aides should perform and (a) years of experience, (b) formal education completed, and (c) age.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical and conceptual frame of reference for this study was based on certain aspects of "role theory" as developed by Linton, Parsons, Newcomb, and others.

The study was based on the premise that the role an individual assumes within an organization is determined, to a great extent, by the expectations of groups within the organization whose expectations are relevant.

The term "role" has been defined as "what an individual does as an occupant of a position within an organization."

Scope and Procedures

Data were collected from six groups through the use of a mail questionnaire. The mail questionnaire was developed partially through reviewing many related writings about the role of program aides and through the author's one week of observation in Yakima County. A pre-test was administered to 12 aides in Yakima County.

The six groups included in this study were: extension youth program aides, other program aides, extension assistants (youth phase), other extension assistants, county extension agents, and human resources staff.

The respondents were asked to rate the importance of 17 selected functions as to how they felt they should be performed and how the functions were now being performed. The respondents indicated a degree of importance of from 5 (most important) to 0 (not a part) for each function.

Mean weighted scores were determined for each function by the total group and by position group. The 17 functions were then entered in tables in descending order according to mean weighted score. Two measures of consensus were employed in the analysis of data. Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation (ρ) was used to measure consensus between position groups, and Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) was used to measure consensus among position groups. Percentage distributions provided data for visual observations.

Limitations of the Study

No attempt was made to generalize the findings of the study beyond the Washington State University Cooperative Extension Service. It is hoped, however, that other state extension services operating under similar circumstances to those described in this study may be able to make use of the findings as they seek to define the role of the paraprofessional responsible for working with youth programs.

Summary and Conclusions

The data collected in this study were summarized according to stated objectives and are presented below.

Objective 1: to determine the order of importance of functions of extension youth program aides in Washington state as they should be and are now being performed as perceived by (a) extension youth program aides, (b) other extension program aides, (c) extension assistants (youth phase), (d) other extension assistants, (e) county extension agents, and (f) human resources staff.

The total group ranked the 17 functions as they "should be" performed in the following order: teaching mothers of young people nutrition, keeping up to date in subject matter and teaching methods, teaching young people basic nutrition, developing and maintaining good public relations, teaching volunteer

leaders, recruiting young people for the program, organizing groups of young people, recruiting volunteer leaders, evaluating programs or activities, keeping records, making reports, and securing public support for programs, planning programs or activities with young people, teaching young people subjects other than nutrition, counseling people on personal and family problems.

Kendall's coefficient of concordance reflected a medium agreement among all respondent groups with a W of $+0.62$ for importance now being given as compared with a W of $+0.79$ (high agreement) for importance that should be given.

Consensus as to "now being" and "should be" order of ranking of the 17 functions as measured by rho varied from position group to position group. For the "should be" ranking, the highest agreement was between the extension youth program aides and the other extension assistants ($+0.85$); and the lowest agreement was between the extension youth program aides and the county extension agents ($+0.52$). The highest agreement for the "now being" ranking was between the extension youth program aides and other extension program aides ($+0.82$). The lowest agreement was between the extension assistants (youth phase) and other extension assistants ($+0.47$).

Kendall's coefficient of concordance and Spearman's rho reflected that there was considerable agreement between and among position groups.

If each group's expectations are considered to carry comparable weight in determining the role the extension youth program aide should play, then the rank order of functions is valid as listed at the present time.

Special attention should be drawn to the fact that the relative importance of three functions pertaining to volunteer leaders varied greatly between the paraprofessionals and the professionals.

The major distinction between the youth phase and the ongoing expanded food and nutrition education program is the inclusion of volunteer leaders. Apparently

this distinction has not been made clear to the paraprofessionals and specifically to the extension youth program aides. The relatively low rating given the functions (teaching volunteer leaders how to work with young people, training volunteer leaders, and recruiting volunteer leaders) has implications for a need for improved communication and an intensive training program.

Objective 2: to determine the order of importance of functions of extension youth program aides in Washington state as they should be and are now being performed as perceived by (a) paraprofessionals and (b) professionals.

Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation reflected a medium agreement between two groups with a rho of +.67 for importance "now being given" as compared with rho of +.72 (high agreement) for importance that "should be given."

In comparing the "now being" to the "should be" in the ranking, the rho correlation between groups were: paraprofessionals +.86 and professionals +.67. It was obvious that there was agreement between professionals and paraprofessionals in the ranking of "now being" and "should be" functions of extension youth program aides although agreement among paraprofessionals was higher. These findings indicated that the paraprofessionals were fairly well agreed that they were placing emphasis on the functions which should be emphasized. The professionals agreed but to a lesser extent. The differences in the rating of functions pertaining to volunteer leaders could have influenced the rho values obtained.

Objective 3: to determine the relationships between the opinions of the paraprofessionals concerning the order of importance of functions which they feel extension youth program aides should perform and (a) years of experience, (b) formal education completed, and (c) age.

The paraprofessionals with less experience, less education, and under 35 years of age ranked "keeping records" considerably higher and ranked "training

volunteer leaders" and "recruiting volunteer leaders" considerably lower than did the other paraprofessionals with higher education, more experience, and over 35 years of age.

Spearman's rho reflected high agreement between those with less experience and those with more experience (+.82) and medium agreement between those with low education and those with high education (+.60) and those under 35 years of age and those over 35 years of age (+.69).

From the data presented, it was evident that age, education, and years of experience were related, at least slightly, to the ranking of importance of the selected functions. Although experience seemed to be related to rank order to a lesser degree than age and education, those with longer tenure rated those functions pertaining to volunteer leaders higher than those with less tenure.

Objective 4: to determine the relationships between the opinions of professionals concerning the order of importance of functions which they feel extension youth program aides should perform and (a) years of experience, (b) formal education completed, and (c) age.

By applying Spearman's rho correlation, it was found that there was high agreement (+.70) between professionals with Bachelor's degrees and those with advanced education as to the rank order of importance of selected functions of extension youth program aides. There was medium agreement (+.62) between those with less than three years and those with more than three years experience and medium agreement (+.69) between those under 35 and those over 35 years of age.

Level of education seemed to be less of a factor in ranking the selected functions of the extension youth program aide by professionals than experience or age. There were differences when the rankings were examined by the three variables but the differences were slight.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. The findings of this study should be made available to all the respondents included in this study, especially county extension agents (home economists) and human resources staff members who have responsibility for developing training programs and training program aides in Washington state.
2. The findings of this study should be made available to those responsible for teaching extension education courses at Washington State University.
3. Written job descriptions should be developed for all paraprofessionals and specifically extension youth program aides based, in part, on the findings of this study.
4. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of "the role of the volunteer leader in the youth phase of the expanded food and nutrition education program" in future orientation and induction training programs designed for extension youth program aides.

