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BELIEFS ABOUT RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG HELPING PROFESSIONALS IN A GROUP HOME

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BELIEFS ABOUT RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG
HELPING PROFESSIONALS IN A GROUP HOME

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Dominic John Williams

June 2016

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ABSTRACT

This study will examine how religion impacts adolescents in a group home setting, and how they perceive its importance in their lives. The data was gathered using a qualitative method, and included interviews with a sample of helping professionals (all adults) who work with adolescents in a group home setting. These staff members were interviewed and asked 15 questions pertaining to their knowledge regarding the ways in which their subject residents embraced religion and spirituality. This included their observations as to frequency of prayer or meditation, reading or studying of sacred texts, meetings such as prayer meetings or other ritual activities, and a number of other questions regarding the ways in which religion and spirituality are manifested among residents in a group home setting.

The study also inquired of the helping professionals whether adolescent residents had ever expressed to them a belief in God or a higher power, and if they had, their reflections and feelings verbally expressed. This research focuses on the impact of religion on the outlook of adolescent group home residents, including what it means to them and whether or not it is important, and if so to what degree. Helping professionals were interviewed rather than the residents themselves to avoid any possible conflicts or legalities in questioning subjects under the age of 18 years old. The responses to the questions by the staff members will help to provide answers as to how adolescents in a group of setting feel about religion and spirituality.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Truly, with you anything is possible in this life, and you have empowered me to do the impossible. Thank you Lord for making a way along this journey, and the compassion you have given me for your creation. I want to also dedicate this to my parents who have always supported me in my endeavors, and have helped make a way to make this possible. Thank you both for the values and love you have instilled in me to help others. I would like to dedicate this hard work to my partner, friend, and the lady who always stood by my side Nancy. You have always believed in me even when I did not, and helped sacrificed with me along the way. Also, my two beautiful daughters, Alissa and Isabella Williams. You two have been my guiding lights in life, and you both have always found a way to make me smile, work harder, and push myself when I felt I had nothing left.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professionals in group home settings has long been the subject of study and debate for a number of reasons. The literature is clear in that it posits that vulnerable children who are raised in institutional settings are more likely to take risks, experience more threats to achievement and associate with peers who tend to influence them negatively.

Statement of the Problem

In some cases, such children often experience a lack of nurture as infants and young children that may lead to attachment disorders in adolescence and adulthood. Some of the studies have also found that institutionally reared individuals often have increased rates of poor psychosocial functioning and are themselves unable to parent effectively as adults. Institutional experiences are often unsympathetic, impersonal, and have an element of detachment that does not bode well for human beings who require socialization for success in later life. The general consensus among experts who have studied the effects of institutionalization on human beings is that residential care is viewed as a most unsatisfactory long-term option when compared with placement in a biological family or foster family setting. At least one researcher posits that in the long term, marginalized children who are

institutionalized will grow up to be psychiatrically impaired as well as economically unproductive adults.

Therefore, remedies and solutions have been sought to mitigate this situation when children or adolescents are placed in group homes or other institutionalized living situations. One of the most effective remedies appears to be the introduction of religion and spirituality, or the continued practice of either one by adolescents who have some early practice in the area of spirituality. Much of the literature seems to confirm that adolescents in group home settings are positively impacted by the effects of religiosity. A large number of the studies that have been conducted have found that religious practice and family life are well established elements for success in adulthood. The initial phase of this study examines the prior outlook adolescents have about religion prior to being placed in a group home setting. Second, does the adolescents' family have any type of belief or following to any type of religious denomination? Third, after being placed in a group home setting, does the influence of religion or a higher calling help them get thru their daily struggles with the pressures of negatives influences they experience?

This chapter will focus on the contributing factors to the problem statement, purpose of the study, and the reasons why social workers should care about this situation when working with clients in a group home setting. The spirituality paradigm may be an effective tool in addressing issues among adolescents in a group home setting, including aggressiveness, depression,

antisocial behaviors, and other negative behaviors. Human beings are inherently social beings who require caregiver attachments, close relationships and interactions with each other in order to become high functioning and productive adults. A study of the impact and effect of religion and spirituality among adolescents in group home settings may answer questions about how best to overcome infant and early childhood institutionalization, abuse, detachment disorders and other dysfunctions that may derail any possibility of becoming productive adults.

Purpose of the Study

This chapter will explain in depth the purpose of this study as well as the goals and objectives of the research itself. The primary concern of any research project is meeting a goal and purpose that will have meaning and significance to those who read it. It is the hope of this researcher that those who examine the samples and statements contained herein will be enlightened and informed and a new and important way. While each research project is unique and critical to the area it explores, the real hope is that a project will open mental doors to the future and inspire others to continue to search and grow in ways that bring meaning to all our lives. Before anyone undertakes a research project of this magnitude, they must be inspired.

Inspiration is key to the energy and depth of purpose that is required to produce a research project that is not redundant, does not simply regurgitate prior research, and most importantly does not cause the reader to doze off in

boredom. Approaching this subject, it was indeed an inspiration on every level and a critical undertaking. It has long been my desire to further explore and build upon the scholarly research that has already been done on the impact of religiosity and spirituality on adolescence in group home environments.

Although it is easy to make assumptions, jump to conclusions, and surmise that religion must certainly have a positive impact on young people, it is important to know the facts, look at the numbers and come to informed and educated conclusions. Although a significant amount of research on this subject has been conducted in the United States, it has been less so in countries around the world. Certainly there are cultural and ethnic considerations, as there would be in any research subject. However, human beings are inherently social beings who have many commonalities and are much more alike than they are different. While I had every reason to think this might also be the case with religiosity and spirituality, I wanted to undertake a scholarly study, review the literature and find out for myself what kind of research had been conducted. I did conclude that last research had been conducted on a global level than in the United States itself.

My research is primarily focused on adolescent group homes within a few miles of the university I attend. While these group homes do have some ethnic variables, they are predominantly Latino and so, with that in mind the research results may be so influenced. Having worked in group homes for a significant period of time, I began to wonder what kinds of ideas or policies we

could implement to mitigate negative behaviors, calm violent tendencies, and instill the moral and ethical codes and coping mechanisms that adolescents require for success as adults. Knowing that religion and spirituality had a very positive affect in my own life, it was natural that I take it a step further and wonder what impact, if any, religion and spirituality might have on adolescent boys and girls in group home settings.

First I researched the impact of institutionalization on infants, children, and young adults. Some of these results will appear in my literature review and other sections of this project. It did become apparent to me that institutionalization, no matter how brief or how seemingly ideal, is filled with obstacles and issues where human beings are concerned. As social primates, humans are simply not hardwired for institutional living.

Therefore, the purpose of this study became centered on the ways in which we might soften the hard or negative effects of group home living where young people are concerned. The focus of this study is on adolescence between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. Both male and female subjects are considered and no particular ethnicity has been targeted. Additionally, I have not targeted any particular religion or spirituality but rather have focused on general behaviors about which I will go into more detail further along in the project.

I think it is important to state here that I have chosen to interview staff members with regard to their observations rather than the adolescents

themselves. This is, in part, to avoid IRB or any possible legal issues in working with minors. Staff members are in a unique position to observe adolescent group home residents 24 hours a day and make notations regarding behaviors, attitudes, and options. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to discover whether the subject adolescence practice the common behaviors that are associated with religiosity or spirituality, such as reading sacred texts, prayer and meditation, or attendance at regularly scheduled religious meetings. Further, if they do practice any of these prescribed behaviors, what effect or impact does it have on the ways in which they cope with situations on a day-to-day basis and/or conduct themselves?

Is the impact on anger for instance, calming or aggravated? Are spiritually inclined adolescents more apt to exhibit behaviors that imply an ability to cope with disappointments and crises? What effect, if any, does spirituality have on school and study habits? In short, we are seeking to discover whether religion and spirituality have a positive or negative affect, or any effect at all on adolescent boys in a group home setting.

Significance of the Study

Human dignity and human behavior are central to the tenants of social work. The profession of social work is based upon a set of core values and ethics that still define our purpose and goals in today's world with this much relevance as they did a century ago. Human worth is a central component of social work and is, perhaps, it is most important value. The ways in which we

help and uplift each other, our mutual dignity and worth, the importance of our relationships, our personal integrity, are all part and parcel of social work ethics. This chapter will discuss the significance of the instant research project as well as its value and relationship to social work.

When we undertake a study or research project, it is virtually always centered on these types of concerns and issues. As social workers we seek to make the world a better place in which to live and perhaps even more important we seek to elevate our fellow man and woman to a place of dignity and wellness that transcends the day today difficulties and obstacles that we all face as human beings. The majority of us are parents and grandparents.

All of us at one time experienced adolescence with all of its accompanying laughter and tears. We have raised children and grandchildren and perhaps, most of us have relived our own youth through them. We all know that there are few times during the life of a human being that are more fraught with difficulty, contradictions, and conflicts than the years between perhaps 12 years and 20 years of age. Finding ways to help our young people navigate the perilous maze of teenage years, develop into healthy and productive adults, and self-actualize as human beings is one of social work's most noble callings. This research project seeks to make a contribution toward those goals, and the significance of developing young lives cannot be misunderstood.

This particular project focuses on adolescence who reside in group homes. This particularly vulnerable and at risk group of adolescents requires great attention and particular concern. The majority of these children are lacking a loving and biological home or nuclear family from which to draw their ethics and moral compass. They are adrift if you will, in a sea of peer pressure and external influences which are largely negative unless channeled in another direction. This study hopes to discover the effect and impact, if any, religion and spirituality may have upon adolescence in a group home setting.

There are a limited number of ways in which we may in part morals, values, and ethics to any of our children. This research project takes a look at one of the most utilized methods by which we set about guiding our children through the formative years of their teens, in the hope they will become the healthy and stable adults we wish them to be. Social workers face unique challenges simply because of the demographics with whom they work.

Most often these are individuals who face challenges such as disabilities, homelessness, substance abuse, adoption, loneliness, isolation, learning disabilities, mental and physical illnesses, and much more. Coping mechanisms and defense mechanisms are the ways in which this at risk group of our population is able to navigate as human beings. As referenced in chapter 1 of this research project, the problems we face with adolescence in group home settings are myriad and have much to do with their isolation, detachment from nuclear families, and their abilities to cope with dysfunctional

upbringings and family situations. It is the hope of this research study that the results will be of benefit to society and in particular, to the adolescence who must reside in group home situations and are seeking a better life and a more effective way of meeting their challenges.

Indeed, if religion and spirituality are two of the effective methods by which young people are able to cope and indeed are able to thrive, then the significance of this study will be met. In some limited way, we will have answers to some of our questions, and perhaps learn new ways in which we might be of assistance to this honorable group of children. Social worker do need to have an awareness of how spirituality and religion do have an impact on adolescents. It is part of the humble beginnings of social work, and something that should be more of an emphasis in empowering the youth. If we could help adolescents get in touch with their spirituality, which can be used as a strength in their lives that brings them hope. Bringing light and dignity to the lives of marginalized young people is a critical component of social workers, and it is with great hope and determination that this research project is undertaken.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A review of the literature supports the contention that there is a positive correlation between spiritualism and mental health. In particular, I will focus on the correlation as it relates to adolescents in general and specifically adolescents who are in a group home living situation. An important article from 2007 discussed the transpersonal theory, which is an all-encompassing spirituality theory that is believed to be consistent with the values of social work, and how it relates to this spiritual education of adolescents in multiple cultures. It explains that, “Transpersonal theory posits that spirituality is a universal characteristic of human existence and would transform the bio – psycho – social framework into a bio – psycho – social – spiritual framework” (Baker, 2007, p. 151).

Engagement Strategies for Each Stage of Study

The same article discusses several multicultural approaches and also states that, “Addressing spirituality from a human development perspective is a foundational attempt to honor holistic personal development, from a bio – psycho – social – spiritual framework. It also implies that a person’s spiritual capacity is not stagnant, but indeed develops, changes, and potentially increases” (Baker, 2007, p. 153). Another article from the Journal of Religion

and Spirituality in Social Work states that, “The research literature has pointed to spirituality as an inherent strength that can lead to positive developmental trajectories in children and adolescents. As such, an understanding of the process and context of spiritual development across the lifespan is important.” (Benavides, 2014, abstract)

In fact, this article explores the ways in which spiritual development from childhood through adolescence has been understood and studied, including stage models of spiritual development through an understanding of spirituality as an inherent component in all human beings from childhood through old age.

A 2006 journal article focusing on the resilience of adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse cites religion as having a significant impact in a number of ways. Few would argue against sexual abuse as one of the most damaging types of abuse experienced by children and adolescents. This article stated as follows, “In a landmark study on resilience, Warner and Smith (1982) found that the absence of behavioral problems at school and sources of support in the family, neighborhood, school, and community were important correlates of resilience. They found that many of the youth who were initially viewed as having a poor prognosis were able to rebound and lead stable adult lives when sufficient social support was made available to them. Luster and Small (1997) found that sexually abused adolescents that have supportive relationships with their parents were less likely to binge drink or to have

suicidal thoughts. In addition, Blundo (2002) documented the importance of social networks such as schools, churches, and other community agencies in supporting resilience. The findings revealed that interactions with peers and social relationships are prime ways to reduce stress and promote mental health” (Edmond et al., 2006, p. 5).

I would submit then that adolescent group homes provide the necessary components to meet the criteria as listed above necessary for such rebound and resilience among adolescents. The same article also discusses a number of studies over the recent years that examined the significance of religion along with ‘any potential beneficial effects as a protective factor against mental health and substance abuse difficulties’ and concluded that indeed, a ‘spiritual relationship with the benevolent, higher power’ was considered a crucial factor in the ability to withstand substantial trauma over time as well as the ability to reclaim a sense of meaning and purpose (Edmond et al., 2006, p. 5).

At 2015 article from the Journal of Social Work and Christianity and cited earlier in this paper, included five separate articles by guest editors that highlighted the ‘influence of religious and spiritual beliefs in diverse practice settings, illustrating how social workers can competently and ethically deal with these issues in social work practice’ and supported the conclusions of other studies that emphasize the significant role of religion as well as spirituality in social work (Husain & Scherr, 2015). In fact, a national study

examining the attitudes of social workers regarding religion and spirituality in practice with children and adolescents, concurred with Husain and Scherr as well as other literature [in this paper] citing the results of their respondents, “The majority of respondents regarded religion and spirituality as relevant to this population and used a wide variety of spiritually-based interventions. Respondents also reported a somewhat frequent identification of spiritual and religious abuse and neglect of youth. However, the vast majority reported that religious or spiritual issues were rarely, if ever, addressed in their social work education. Findings revealed the need to develop specific curricular content about the religious and spiritual lives of youth, including ethical guidelines for spirituality sensitive practice with this population” (Kvarfordt & Sheridan, 2007, abstract).

Self-Preparation

Adolescents in group homes settings are all too often youth who have been homeless previously and have therefore had significant challenges to overcome. A 2015 Journal article on adolescence and spirituality posited that, adolescents and young adults represent a rapidly increasing proportion of the homeless population accounting for roughly 500,000 – 3 million cases each year. The majority of homeless youth fleeing abusive and dangerous living situations report at least one type of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect) or trauma, in addition to consistent and

intense family conflict, as the main reason for leaving home.

(Mastropieri, et al., 2015, p. 904)

Thus, group homes and are all too often the default living situation for adolescents of this demographic. The same article stated that,

A systematic review... demonstrated that religiosity and spirituality may often promote healing and adaptation to traumatic events, as well as leading to greater resilience. Engaging in spiritual and religious coping is associated with both psychological and physical health benefits.

Research has shown positive associations between the utilization of spiritual and religious coping practices and adjustment to situation specific stressors (i.e., catastrophic accidents, unexpected losses) broader physical health issues, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer, and HIV/AIDS, and psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. (Mastropieri, et al., 2015, p. 905)

A 2011 study from the University of Texas at Austin, found a correlation between low religiosity and early and risky sexual behavior. Conversely, high levels of religiosity are associated with delayed sexual activity and seem to be a buffer against other negative behaviors. As stated in the article about the study,

Previous studies have shown that individual factors such as gender and low religiosity are associated with early and risky sexual behavior...

Others found that sexual risk behaviors were higher in adolescent males than in females in urban settings... social connectedness the lines vulnerable children with caring adults is a critical individual resource that has been shown to protect adolescents from an array of poor developmental and health outcomes... buffering the effects of extreme conditions such as poverty and neighborhoods characterized by high crime and violence on adolescence. (Rew, Carver, & Li.,2011, p. 190)

Diversity Issues

This particular study was guided by the Youth Resilience Model and was based on findings from studies that suggested both risk and protective factors at the individual, family, and community levels as being an influence with regard to early and risky sexual behavior. In addition, as might be expected, peer influence was an important factor. In a group home setting this aspect is especially important since adolescents are living together as quasi-family and may be easily influenced on an almost daily basis.

A 2013 journal article reviewed a substantial amount of the literature and offered several case studies, as well as an in-depth discourse on the effects of religion and spirituality in Social Work. The author posits two major difficulties in the way spirituality is conceptualized in the field of social work and summarizes as follows:

1. Although recent definitions of spirituality offer social workers and students many rich perspectives, they are not fully inclusive, and they have created a dualistic view of spirituality, in which a person is “more” or “less” spiritual. Rather than viewing each person subjective viewpoint of his or her relationship to the unknown as a valid spiritual perspective, some ways of viewing a person’s relationship to the unknown are defined as spiritual, whereas others are not. The current definitions of spirituality are constructs grounded in common points of view about the nature of existence that are actually individual spiritual belief systems in themselves, and do not validate each person’s unique relationship to what is unknowable. These definitions are therefore not completely in accordance with the value of inclusiveness that is emphasized in social work education, but rather appear to advocate certain perspectives about existence.
2. Spirituality, as defined in the social work literature, is far too amorphous a term, as it incorporates an array of constructs that are associated with culturally derived points of view about spirituality. Rather than clearly defining spirituality as each person’s unique relationship to what is unknowable about existence, conceptualizations of spirituality have incorporated a range of ideas associated with prevalent spiritual belief systems.

This has resulted in a confusing framework for students and a fragmented, no inclusive way of assessing and working with the client's spirituality and social work settings. (Senreich, 2013, p. 549-550)

The same journal article reiterates that there are significant strengths to be acknowledged found in the literature of the past 20 years with regard to incorporating spirituality into social work education and practice. The roots of social work itself, such as charity organizations and societies, the settlement house movement, and the social welfare agencies of the past two centuries, for strong influence in markings of Christianity as well as to a lesser degree Jewish religion traditions and even some from the Muslim faith as well.

However, Senreich also points out that,

Despite the aforementioned strengths of recent social work literature regarding integrating spiritual perspectives into social work education and practice, there are difficulties with how spirituality is defined in relation to the core values of the profession. the challenge, however, is to find a definition of spirituality for social work students that fully conforms to social work values and that can be used when working with all clients. (Senreich, 2013, p. 551)

Thus, there are challenges when working with a variance of cultures, religions, and even age groups. Adolescents in group homes may have experienced virtually no religious training or spiritual counsel or perhaps, have

experienced such religiosity in the extreme, such as membership or exposure to a cult. Since one of the core values of social work is respecting the inherent dignity and value of every human being, it is particularly important that spirituality is an area in which careful attention is given, particularly so with full verbal adolescents. A 2007 article in the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* reminds us of just a few of the landmines we face when working with a diverse population in group homes settings. Author Sarah Todd and Diana Colich focus on an anti-oppressive pedagogical approach in their work, *Christian Fundamentalism and Anti-Oppressive Social Work Pedagogy*. They state that,

Christian fundamentalist religious beliefs, expressed by social work students, present a challenge to the social work educator... While important to providing educational equality for students with diverse gender expressions and sexual orientations... has some limitations when working with students with fundamentalist beliefs. The prospect of negotiating fundamentalism raises questions that require a critical reflection on our own belief systems, a rethinking of social work anti-oppressive values and ethics, and the consideration of our role as educators. (Todd & Colich, 2007, abstract)

Political Issues

How religion and spirituality impact adolescents in group homes is inextricably tied to their personal, prior experiences and the extent of or absence of any religious training at all, but one thing seems to be clear from

the literature: the impact is a positive one more often than not. Uecker's 2008 study on alternative schooling strategies and the religious lives of American teenagers seemed to underscore that opinion. Among the social contexts that shape adolescence religiosity, Uecker contends that the family, along with friends and religious congregations are of particularly strong influence.

However, he also states that,

Yet, adolescents spend many of their waking hours in school, and the religiosity of their schoolmates may actually have a larger effect on the religious lives than does the religiosity of their friends. The religious effects of different types of schools, namely, Catholic, Protestant, and homeschools however are rarely evaluated. (Uecker, 2008, p. 563)

Professor Christian Smith, associate chair of Sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill has done an extensive amount of research in the area of religious effects among American adolescents. He states that, "A systematic review of the literature on religion and youth reveals notable patterns of religious influences among American adolescents." Among his findings are that "Across a number of areas of concern, various measures of religiosity are typically associated with a variety of healthy, desirable outcomes" (2003, p. 17).

Smith draws upon the works of other researchers as well, but his own findings are certainly worth mentioning and worth drawing upon in this research project. He also states as follows,

sociology has a long history of reductionist thinking and analysis. With regard to religion, this reductionism has often expressed itself in claims that what on the surface appears to be religious phenomenon are in fact revealed by serious analysis to really only be about other things quite unrelated to religion. Thus, what appears to be divine or spiritual or transcendent or pious or sacred are really only about social class, race, gender, after this city, nationalism, solidarity, social control, and so on. (2003, p. 19)

A 2012 journal article, presents, “a longitudinal study that presents the first examination of the relation between hope, spirituality, religious practice and life satisfaction of students in Portugal.” This study examines aspects of positive psychological research and calls upon researchers to examine adolescence in other countries to discover what if any common grounds exist with regard to the impact of spirituality, whether positive or negative, on adolescent humans. The article also defines life satisfaction as, “global evaluation by the person of his or her life.” This would seem to be an accepted definition in most of the literature and a barometer by which we might gauge the personal happiness of adolescent subjects. However, the same article also cautions that, “currently research regarding hope, spirituality, and religious practice and their impact on adolescent life satisfaction is limited, in particular there is no known longitudinal research using a Portuguese sample” (Marques, Lopez, & Mitchell, 2012). A 2011 study however was done in Brazil

and focused on religious influence and adolescent sexual behavior. This researcher cites religion as becoming an important and more highly present factor for Brazilian adolescents and young adults and disallowing them to maintain closer relationships and become active participants in a religious environment. The researcher goes so far as to turn this as a transformation in the Brazilian religious landscape and corroborates the findings of Professor Christian Smith, mentioned earlier in this literature review as to the positive outcomes when spirituality is made a part of the adolescent lifestyle (Verona, 2011).

A 2015 journal article looks at the phenomenon of anger and violent behavior among adolescents and posits that anger is a common factor in two of the causes of death of adolescents, homicide and suicide. The researchers studied the level of anger in groups of adolescents and found a strong correlation between stress and anger as well as a minor relationship between parental drinking behaviors and anger. Angry adolescents seem to be commonly plagued by attachment disorders and feelings of isolation or disconnect. Among the variables that seem to have an effect on adolescent anger were gender differences, cultural differences, family and social environments, and religion. The article states as follows, “Although anger between radically opposing religion exists, research shows that religion/spirituality actually decreases the incidence of anger. Goodwin (2006) found that females cope with anger by using techniques such as prayer.

Clergy members can provide a support system for angry teens” (Shore & Shore, 2009) (Pullen et al., 2015, p. 136-138).

Another journal article from 2013, discusses coping strategies among adolescents, citing, “Religiosity and spirituality have been identified as developmental assets for youth, particularly in the face of diversity” (Crawford, Wright, & Masten, 2006). This article also goes into depth discussing the link between spirituality and religiosity to positive outcomes for adolescent teens, particularly those who are vulnerable or in group home situations. Citing revenge seeking and cognitive distancing as negative outcomes in adolescent behavior, the researchers posit that spirituality and religiosity are able to counterbalance these types of negative emotions (Hall & Flanagan, 2013).

Summary

If there is a paucity of research in the areas of adolescents and spirituality it is certainly found within the area of research on the effect of religious schools on the religiosity of American adolescents. Additionally, even though a great many parents now homeschool for religious reasons there is a paucity of research in this area as well, particularly as to whether or not the parents are accomplishing their goals with regard to inculcating religious values with their own children. Nevertheless, the literature seems to agree that schooling strategies do affect adolescent religiosity. The question seems to be more of a matter of degree and extent. With group homes serving as both

living arrangements and educational environments, attention must be given to the effect of religious education on children and youth.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss, “Beliefs about religion and spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes.” This chapter will also discuss the study design, and how the information will be collected. The data analysis was presented by the principles through a qualitative survey with eight staff members who work with the adolescents in a group home. This study in totality was to empirically investigate how religion and spirituality influence the everyday lives of adolescents in a group home, and if the staff witness any types of behavioral difference as a result of those factors.

Study Design

The focus of the research project is to understand the beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professionals in group homes, whose behaviors are witnessed by the adolescents they are in contact with daily. The method used in this research project is a single group qualitative design. The reason a single subject controlled group was used for this research was to directly focus on asking staff members who work with the adolescents questions about what they witness. There is no other controlled method that is comparable that can gather the necessary data for this sample. The study reflects on the main question of the research: “What effect does religion and

spirituality have among adolescents in a group home”? The participating members at the group home were asked to share their responses regarding what influence does religion and spirituality have among the adolescents in a semi-structured interview process. The researcher asked each of the participants the same questions, in the same order, to get an understanding of their responses having the same consistency and interpretation in what they witness with the adolescents.

Sampling

The research sampling for this study was composed of eight staff members who work at the group home with the adolescents, and have contact with them on a weekly to daily basis based on their schedule. The participants were notified during a monthly staff meeting at the corporate office with the administrator, and also a reminder letter was posted on their activities wall at the group home. The group home chooses to remain anonymous, but is a non-profit organization that operates group homes that has served the Inland Empire for the last 30 years. The group home specializes in taking 12-18-year-old adolescents who committed an adult crime, and were placed in the group home by the judicial system. Along with a Licensed Clinical Therapist, the group home reconnects the adolescents with their families and reintegrates them back into society to become productive individuals. The participants for the study were broken down into four female and four male staff members who have knowledge of religion and spiritual beliefs. The eight

participants that were selected for the sample needed to meet the qualifications, such as, having an adequate knowledge of the adolescents, and choosing to participate in the study.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data regarding the effects of religion and spirituality among helping professionals in a group home was collected by using an explorative qualitative research design. The independent variable for this research is the helping professional in the group home. The dependent variables for the research are the effects of religion and spirituality. The measure is to determine if religion and spirituality have an influence how the helping professional view both, and if they affect how they conduct themselves around individuals who practice. The information was collected through a survey of questions that asked the helping professional specifics of religious or spiritual practices they observe or utilize in the group home.

Survey Questions

Title: Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes.

1. Do you note teens self-identify as a particular religion?
2. If religious services are part of your program, are teens required to attend?
3. How many attend these services voluntarily?

4. Do you observe resistance by teens to religious services?
5. Do you observe acceptance of their preferred religion?
6. Do you observe prayer among teens?
7. Are the residents required to say grace at a meal?
8. Do you observe anyone doing a daily devotional?
9. Do teens request visits from clergy or church members?
10. Do teens ask you about God or other matters of religion?
11. Do you observe differences in the happiness levels of those who are spiritual versus those who abstain from religious activities?
12. Do teens seem interested in spiritual matters or training?
13. What characteristics have you noticed among non-spiritual teens versus spiritual teens?
14. Do you think religion or spirituality should be a requirement of the program?
15. Should staff be trained in the areas of spirituality or religion to use as a tool of intervention with the residents?

The above questions were compiled over a course of observable traits that the administrator provided this research. Some of the specifics such as “Do the adolescents pray or say grace before meals” is a mandatory practice the agency requires all adolescents to do. The agency promotes the adolescents to attend religious services, and provides reading materials in the facility they are assigned to. Also, the agency promotes the adolescents to

explore religion and utilize it in their lives as a source of strength. Since these things are in place, this will prove as a way to test the helping professionals if aforementioned practices are happening while they work with the adolescents. There are limitations since some helping professional may have their biases towards religion and spiritual practices. While other helping professionals may say adolescents do practice these behaviors in case they feel their responses may return back to the administration.

Procedures

Eight semi structured interviews were conducted with helping professionals at one of three group home sites. These helping professionals are in normal contact with the adolescents, and have a general idea about each one. Each of the interviews took between 25 and thirty minutes each. The eight helping professionals were interviewed, with each of these interviews taken place in Rialto, Highland, and the Riverside locations of the group homes. All of the interviews were face to face. Prior to meeting with the staff, the Administrator gave approval to conduct interviews with the staff within the agency. Furthermore, the administrator made staff aware that their participation would be greatly appreciated. The helping professionals who participated in the study contacted the researcher either by personal contact or appointments to set-up to conduct the survey. Each of the helping professionals who volunteered to participate in the survey received a \$5 gift card to target, and the written data was translated by the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

To ensure the interviewee's information remained confidential, the researcher provided each of the participants with an informed consent form. The informed consent was provided prior to the interview, and was read to each participant by the researcher. The information collected was anonymous, and nothing was referred back to identify them. The informed consent was passed out to each participant, including the voluntary basis of their participation with the researcher's contact information and research advisor's phone number. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher had each participant read and understand the contents of the consenting information with their signature. At the end of each of the interviews, the researcher handed out the debriefing form. The form offered each participant an opportunity to make suggestions, ask questions, and give feedback regarding the study.

Data Analysis

The data retrieved from the Beliefs about religion and spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes was analyzed by the researcher. The data was gathered by the researcher through active listening, reviewing the written responses, and taking notes from each of the eight interview sessions. The researcher conducted eight interviews with different helping professionals, and their responses were transcribed into an understandable data set. The interviews were conducted at either the sight of the helping professionals

group home, or somewhere of their preference where they felt comfortable. I understood there were some questions the helping professionals did not want to answer, which that information was set up into a different section of non-responses. Overall, the helping professionals and the influence of spirituality and religion in my opinion, is an impactful way that makes them effective workers with the adolescents.

As the researcher, I believe there is a positive correlation that religious or spiritual beliefs have on the success adolescents have in the group home. However, the helping professionals that have contact with the adolescents are the experts in this study, and will have a better understanding of how religion and spirituality truly influence them. The literature has proven that religion and spirituality have a positive influence on adolescent's lives, and has helped them live a more productive lifestyle. The helping professional who has a belief system in their lives, has used it as a way to cope with stress, emotional issues, and an encouragement tool to work effectively with the adolescents. Whether it is the helping professional or the adolescent in the group home, I believe religion or spirituality is something that helps make the environment in the group home more peaceful.

The researcher looked for consistency in the helping professional's responses from the interview sessions. Common responses were highlighted and whether they feel religion and spirituality as a positive or negative reinforcement strength for the adolescents. To conclude the study, the

researcher noted if the helping professional has a religious preference and if it affected their perception if the adolescent belief system is different from theirs.

The study was broken down into four different themes: people, places, things, and ideas. Each theme is influential in how the helping professionals see things through their eyes in the group home, and the significance each has in their services to the adolescents. The people is how the helping professional describes those he/she comes in contact with working at the group home. Places are the types of environments helping professional's associate working with the group home whether it be the facility, substance abuse groups, or the weekend outings. Things are what they associate with the group home or adolescents, and can consist of: objects in the facility, certain types of food, or families they deal with. Lastly, ideas are things of abstraction the helping professional's feel they can bring into the group home that make it a better environment, and is productive for the progression of the lives of the adolescents. Ideas can be as simple as a suggestion for the organization to change in policy, or development of a new technique that will assist the helping professionals be more effective with the adolescents. Each of these aforementioned items are part of the coding process, and the general themes that are associated with the helping professional's perspectives.

Summary

The aforementioned study of the beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professionals in group homes was completed by utilizing a

qualitative research design. The purpose of this study was to see if helping professionals view adolescents as individuals who talk about religion or spirituality in their time in the group home. Furthermore, if the adolescents utilize these types of beliefs in their lives, and is it a source of strength they rely on. For their time, each of the participants were compensated with a \$5 Target gift card. Each of the participant's confidentiality and information was maintained by locking it in a lock box, so nobody has access to it except for the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter four is the results of the interviews that were conducted by this researcher. This chapter focuses on the responses from the interviewees, and the datum along with the demographics that were covered in the survey.

Presentation of the Findings

Eight helping professionals who worked for adolescents in three different group home locations, provided the results for this research. The helping professionals who participated for the research have worked at least a year in a group home with adolescents, and have direct contact with them at least 32 hours a week. The participants were a mix of Hispanic, African American, and other ethnicities. Each participant brought a unique perspective to the research, all have different viewpoints of the adolescents as it pertains to what they see. Based on their responses, the following diagram, “Spirituality as a Way of Hope”, was created to demonstrate the correlation of Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes. The data collected for Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes includes questions that were adapted from the Ndukwe questionnaire Meichenbaum (2008) and handout. The major themes of the research are spirituality, religion, god, religious materials, prayer,

observation, religious services, happiness levels, non-believers, spiritual training, age group, and ethnicities. The survey is broken down into different sections, and the following responses are of those of participants involved.

Participant Demographics

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Ethnicity	Gender	Agency	Religious Affiliation	City	Shift
Hispanic	Male	Group Home	Agnostic	Riverside	Graveyard
Hispanic	Female	Group Home	Catholic	Highland	Afternoon
African-American	Male	Group Home	Christian	Rialto	Graveyard
Caucasian	Male	Group Home	Christian	Highland	Afternoon
African-American	Female	Group Home	Christian	Rialto	Afternoon
Hispanic	Male	Group Home	Catholic	Rialto	Graveyard/ Afternoon
Hispanic	Female	Group Home	Catholic	Rialto	Morning
African-American	Female	Group Home	Christian	Riverside	Morning/ Afternoon

Ethnicities of Participants: African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian

Genders Involved: Females and Males

Religious Affiliations: Christians, Catholics, Christian-Catholics, and Agnostics

Agency: Group Homes located in Riverside, Highland, & Rialto

Shift: Morning: 7am-3pm; Afternoon: 3pm-11pm; Graveyard: 11pm-7am

Group homes have different dynamics that influence certain behaviors of the adolescents, and present challenges for helping professionals. Demographics such as age and ethnicity are influential components in what belief and religious systems they believe in prior to entering into the agency. All of the participants agreed that there are three main ethnicities they interact with, Hispanics, African Americans, and Caucasians. As for the age of the adolescents, all of the participants agreed the age range is from 14-18 years of age. From younger adolescents to young adults, the maturity level is also a factor of how the individual perceives religion and spirituality.

Teens Identifying to a Religion

Of the biggest factors this research is out to find, is if adolescents self-identify themselves to a particular religion. One-half of the participants agreed that they do not witness any type of particular religion any of the adolescents identify to. The religions that are identified by the helping professionals mainly consisted of Christians and Catholics (Participant 1, Survey Interview, January 2016). Even though adolescents have not verbalized their association with a specific religion, “it does not mean they do not follow certain statures associated with a particular belief system” (Participant 7, Survey Interview, January 2016).

Voluntarily Attend Services

Each individual that is associated with a specified religion, has an obligation to attend a number of services that convene each week. These

gatherings consist of a group of individuals that celebrate the same beliefs through a sermon presented by a pastor of that congregation, hymns or praise to their God, and the opportunity to have their sins forgiven through confession. Just because an individual follows a certain religion, it does not mean they are willing to attend services. For example, “I think going to church are a part of the program, however, some of the adolescents do not want to attend” (Participants 5, Survey Interview, February 2016). This quote came from one of the helping professionals that gets rotated between all three of the agencies locations, and examines the willingness of one location primarily committed to attend services. Though some adolescents are associated to a certain religion, it is not a predictor of their willingness to participate in church services.

As previously stated, certain religions require their followers to attend a certain amount of services on a daily basis; or weekly basis. Sometimes attending services is not always the case for certain individuals, or there may be certain obstacles from the individual to attend. There are three locations the agency has adolescents placed, and each facility holds six individuals to capacity. One participant stated, “I will probably say six out of the eighteen possible adolescents from all three houses attend” (Participant 1, Survey Interview, February 2016). Another person felt different and stated, “Varies, depends on who is in the mood that day to go, and what denomination they refer to” (Participant 8, Survey Interview, January 2016). The willingness of the

individual is sometimes based on how the mood they are in, or a barrier can be the associated religion they refer to.

Despite some of the accommodations the agency makes to take the adolescents to their associated religious services, some are not always in the mood to attend. When it comes to resistance to attending religious services, one participant stated “Yes, I kind of do witness resistance, and the adolescents rather play video games, get high, drunk and doing their own thing” (Participant 3, Survey Interview, January 2016). It is apparent some of their obligations are not always dedicated to their religious preferences, and choose to engage in other behaviors instead. While another participant witness’s resistance and states, “I feel they think of attending services as useless and will not help their situation in the group home” (Participant 6, Survey Interview, February 2016).

Identifying with a Religion

When an individual is a follower of a particular religion, they fully embrace the responsibilities that come with it. Even though it is not humanly possible to follow all of the statures, the individual makes it a priority to abide by them as best as they can. One of the participants stated, “When the adolescent practices the type of religion they follow, they read their material, pray, and even tell others about their faith” (Participant 2, Survey Interview, February 2016). However, another participant stated, “To my knowledge, no religion has ever been a part of the program” (Participant 4, Survey Interview,

January 2016). Not every individual embraces their religion according to the participants, while others embrace their religion fully.

Prayer

One of the cornerstones of religions is prayer, whether it is for a certain situation, future hope, or for others in a person's life. Followers of a particular religion believe prayer is empowerment in their lives, and are committed to it on a daily basis. Religious institutions promote prayer to its members, and even dedicate a particular portion of the service in doing so. When it comes to prayer, one participant stated, "No that is something very rare I witness. I have been working with the group home for over 8 years, and the only time I really see prayer is for meal time" (Participant 8, Survey Interview, January 2016). However, from another perspective, adolescents are witnessed doing prayer "All the time, and specifically, when one of the residents are in distress in their lives they would ask me to engage" (Participant 5, Survey Interview, January 2016). Prayer can be a habit for some individuals, while others commit to doing so in troubling situations they are going through.

Religious Reading

Along with prayer, statures, and attending religious services, each religion encourages its members to read from the materials that provide the foundation of their beliefs. Even though some members may cite some of the readings can be difficult to interpret, once understood, the readings help lead the individual to a life of success, peace, and purpose they were created for.

The hope of each religion is to encourage their members to read and study the religious materials, and able to utilize it during good and bad times in their lives. One participant cited, “No, they never really read the bible, but will read other material about gangs, murderers, or something negative” (Participant 3, Survey Interview, January 2016). The same perspective is shared by another participant stating, “No they do not at all except for reading things that are negative” (Participant 1, Survey Interview, January 2016). Despite the fact religious materials can be a building block to success, not all participants witness adolescents finding importance in doing so.

Religious Questions

No matter the length of time someone is dedicated to a practice, there will always have pertinent questions regarding what they follow. Religious materials such as the Bible, can be a very complicated book to interpret and make sense of. Every participant in this study has some form of religious background of following, and have their own questions on topics they are unsure of. One participant stated adolescents ask questions to get “concrete answers they are seeking in their situation” (Participant 1, Survey Interview, January 2016). Another participant had a followed a different religion than the adolescent, and could not comment on his question stating, “I explained to him it was a conflict of interest, and stopped asking me questions” (Participant 6, Survey Interview, January 2016).

Mood Differences in Spiritual and Non Spiritual Adolescents

Religion and Spirituality helps provide the individual with a sense of peace during the rough times in life. People will also see a noticeable difference in the individual, and point out the positive impact spirituality is making in their lives. That change can be noticed by the participants, and one cited the differences,

When the adolescents practice their preferred religion they are happier, make better decisions, more respectful to peers and staff, and graduate the program at a more frequent rate. The adolescents who do not practice are more hostile, grumpy, make abrupt decisions, and struggle in the program. (Participant 2, Survey Interview, January 2016)

This view is shared by all the participants in this survey, so there is a correlation between mood and spiritual practices associated with religion.

Characteristics of Practicing versus Non-Practicing Adolescents

Perception and attitude are two of the changing points of character an individual acquires from following a certain practice. From a religious standpoint, an individual's nature should be the first noticeable characteristic they experience and all people around them should see that change. Some of the changes of practicing versus non-believing adolescents is stated by a participant as "Adolescents are less standoffish with me and my colleagues, they have a better attitude, they have better success in their program, and choose to do better" (Participant 5, Survey Interview, January 2016). However,

another participant believes there is no change in practicing adolescents and they maintain their “wicked ways and morals” (Participant 7, Survey Interview, January 2016). It really comes down to the perception of the believer, and how impactful their beliefs are to their lives.

Spirituality and Religion as Requirements of the Program

The data has shown a positive correlation between an adolescent having improved behavior, which some of the participants agreed is contributed to a belief system in their lives. If this was the case, every helping professional would be hopeful that each adolescent has that type of mindset coming into the program. However, should the agency implement a policy where religious or spirituality is a requirement for helping professionals or adolescents? One participant believes, “It would help give the adolescents hope in their lives, and I feel if they get into church and hear people recover from similar situations in their lives; they would be inspired to do better” (Participant 6, Survey Interview, January 2016). However, this opinion was not shared by another participant, as he felt “A person cannot change, and they will rebel if they make it a requirement” (Participant 3, Survey Interview, January 2016). Religion and Spirituality may be sources of strength for adolescents, but it truly is their right to self-determination if they choose to believe or not.

Religious and Spiritual Training as an Intervention

The participants were split in believing spirituality or religion was a factor of improved behavior in the adolescents. That argument can be up for debate as some of the adolescents have done well in the program, and they did it without a belief system in their lives. One thing the helping professionals do agree upon, if they can have an easier way to diffuse situations; they would welcome it. This is shared by one of the participants that quoted, "I believe the agency should make a conservative effort to train the staff to have a good knowledge base, and it can help serve as a good intervention during a crisis" (Participant 2, Survey Interview, January 2016). Furthermore, another participant does not share this view and believes, "It could be a conflict of interest with some of the staff, as everyone has different beliefs and attitudes towards religion" (Participant 8, Survey Interview, January 2016).

Summary

In summary, the data this research produced shows there may be a correlation between religion and spiritual beliefs and the direction the adolescent goes in the program. The adolescents can either embrace their beliefs or use it in a positive way to graduate the program, or, ignore what it is telling them and struggle finding the peace to complete the program.

The participants agreed on the demographics of adolescents, but the rest of their responses varied. Some participants believed identified adolescents were religious or spiritual, while others did not see those beliefs in

them. Training in matters of religion and spirituality may help provide the participants a way to diffuse a crisis, and something the agency may wish to consider. Prayer at meals and helping professionals who follow a specified religion are reflections of the agency's morals they utilize to bring consciousness to the adolescents.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

A qualitative exploratory research was utilized to conduct this study based on the Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes. Through eight semi-structured interviews with helping professionals working in group homes, the main focus was to examine if they witnessed any types of religious or spiritual beliefs among adolescents they interact with. There were a total of three group homes, eighteen adolescents, and were of African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian backgrounds. Furthermore, it is also focused on the behaviors of the adolescents as it pertained to religious and spiritual preferences, and if these systems had a profound change on the individual.

Discussion

The goal of this research was based on the Beliefs about Religion and Spirituality among Helping Professional in Group Homes. This study in totality is to empirically investigate how religion and spirituality influence the everyday lives of adolescents in a group home, and if the staff witnessed any types of behavioral difference as a result of those factors. If there is a religious or spiritual preference in the adolescent's life, does their behaviors and perception change during the course of time in the group home. The research

was conducted using an exploratory qualitative design, and utilized a strength's based approach for helping professionals to see religious or spirituality as an intervention. Through the semi-structured process of the interviews, the responses were in conjunction to answer the aforementioned research question.

The results from this research study made helping professionals self-aware of the aspects of religion and spirituality has in their agency working with adolescents. The participants had different belief systems in their lives, which ranged from: Christians, Catholics, Catholic-Christians, and Agnostic believers. Each of the participants also had different perceptions of religion and spirituality, and interpreted in ways they perceived the importance of practices in their lives. The participants felt that religious or spiritual practices had no influence on the lives of the adolescents; however, some have seen the impact in a positive light in the individual. This may be true, as a study conducted by Twenge et al., states adolescents of this era as compared to fifty years ago are less focused on religious aspects and more concerned fitting in society (2015).

Despite certain helping professional's opinions correlating with empirical research, it is important culturally for adolescents to understand aspects of religion and spirituality. The helping professionals need to understand the dynamics of society have changed over the years, and even the definitions of religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality are

interpreted differently by each individual, and pending on their cultural background; they may not see it as important. The secularization of religion and government puts the adolescent at a crossroad to decide what is more fruitful to their lives, while the other serves as something that serves little to no purpose. One participant reiterated that “religion is seen by adolescents more of a group of society that has too many rules and regulations, and do not find it appealing to be a part of it” (Participant 3, Survey Interview, February 2016).

If the family of the adolescent did not place an emphasis on the importance of religion or spirituality, then the individual finds themselves having to learn it through institutional teachings, helping professionals at group homes, or from word of mouth from another adolescent. Even some of the helping professionals themselves admit, “I think the program should provide that type of empowerment and self-discovery as a strength of the teens” (Participant 3, Survey Interview, January 2016).

If religion or spirituality would be part of the program at the group home for the adolescents, it may provide them additional tools they need to cope with the time they need to complete. Koenig reinforces this point, as he states that “religion and spirituality serves as coping mechanisms that provide the individual peace, structure, emotional strength, and empowerment through the life challenges they encounter” (2001). This confirms truth that religion and spirituality are a vital part of the lives of everyone, and can be utilized as a strength for the adolescents troubling times.

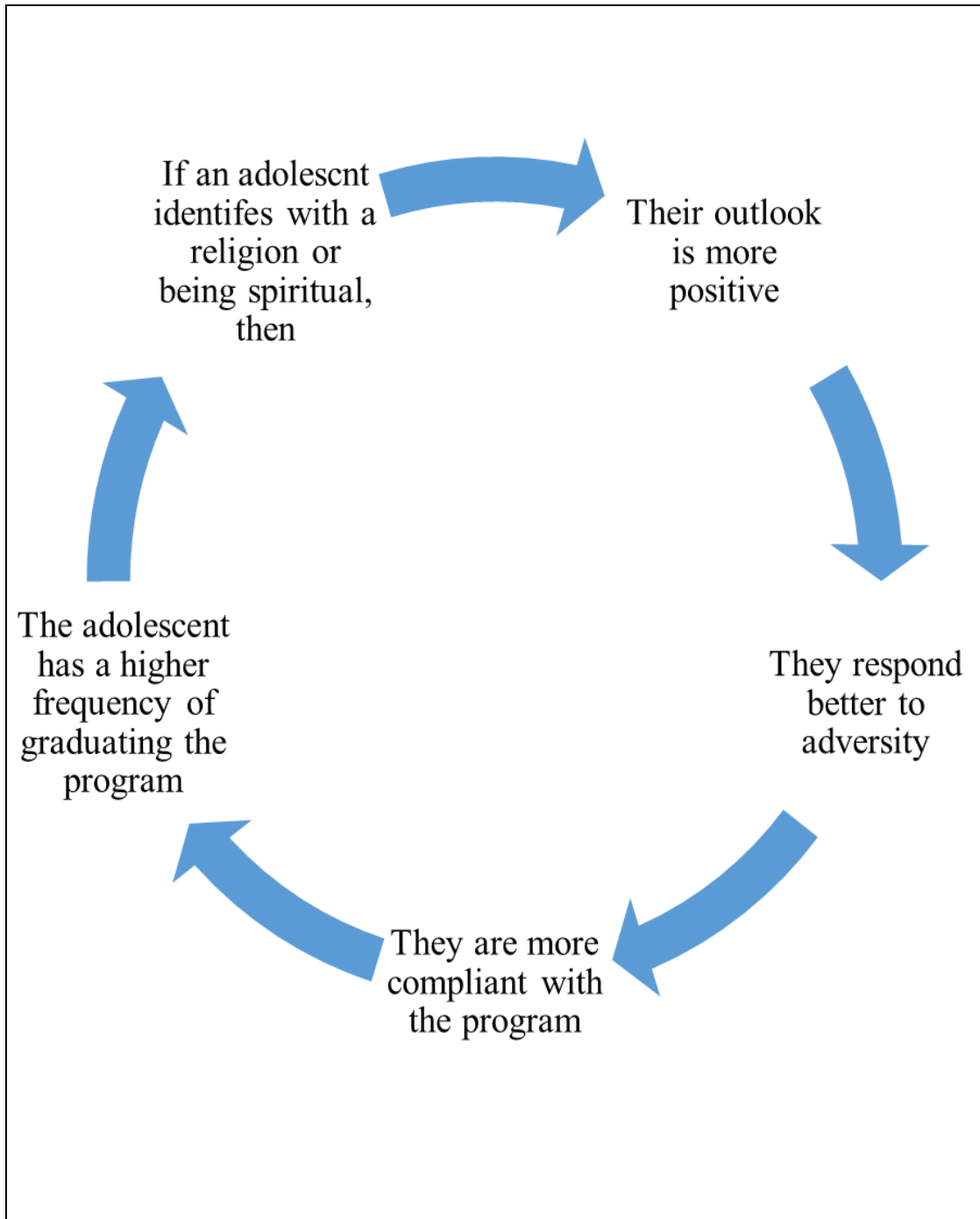


Figure 1. Adolescents that have a Spiritual or Religious Belief

Figure 1 entitled, “Adolescents that have a spiritual or religious belief,” is response to the adolescents having a belief system in their lives. As the results have demonstrated, the adolescents have some consistent responses having an incorporated religion or spiritual background. It is a five step process that this figure identifies, which starts as identifying with a religious or spiritual background. The process leads to the adolescent having a more positive outlook on life. The positive outlook correlates to handling adverse situations in their life with better outcomes. Responding better to adversity leads to a more compliant attitude to the group home and its policies. Once they are compliant with the program, then they have a higher graduation and retention rate. This is an explanation of the positive outcomes of adolescents who identify to a religious or spiritual background.

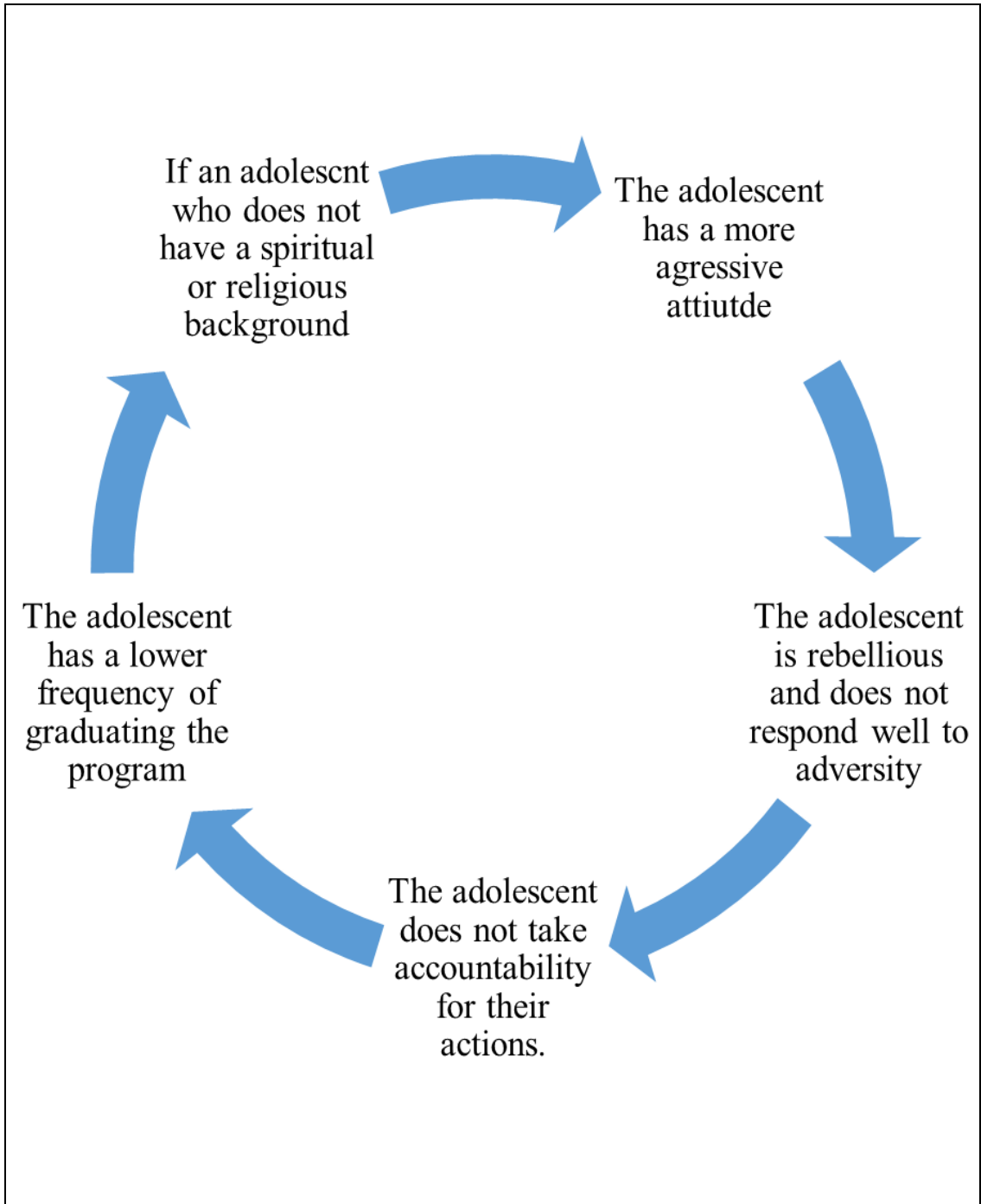


Figure 2. Adolescents without Spiritual or Religious Background

Figure 2 entitled, “Adolescents without spiritual or religious background”, is represented in a cycle that refers to stages adolescents go through. The initial stages refer to adolescents that do not identify to any religious or spiritual beliefs. From there, adolescents tend to respond to violence and aggressive attitude with peers and the helping professionals. When adversity arises, the adolescents are rebellious and non-compliant with agency statutes. As their negative attitude continues to persist in the program, they take no accountability for their actions. Therefore, the adolescent’s actions lead them to having trouble in the program and have a lower rate of graduating the program. These are the cyclic stages that represent adolescents and the behaviors they follow that do not identify to a specified religious or spiritual affiliation.

Limitations

The limitations of this research had to do with the small sample size of eight participants. If more participants were to be involved, it could have different results based on opinions of those individual’s perception. A second limitation of this study was religious beliefs of the helping professionals, as they were limited to only four denominations. Now if there were more religions involved, would the responses be the same as there are over 4,200 religions in the world (Rew et al., 2007). A third aspect would be if the research was conducted at more group homes or at different locations. The sample size was

limited to three locations in the inland empire, and each group has a different conduct policy.

What if the adolescents were to be interviewed for this study, would they have shared the same response the helping professionals provided? Some might agree or disagree, or for that matter, even care to participate. As previously mentioned, these individuals have put their trust and faith in material and financial gain. Adolescents are a diverse group of individuals, in particular, this group of individuals have come the juvenile system. They are in a house 24 hours a day with a helping professional that they have either a good or bad relationship with, and based on that can be more open to religion or spirituality conversations if they feel comfortable. Overall, the helping professionals involved in the study interact with the adolescents at least 32 hours a week. If certain restrictions could be researched or bypassed, maybe this might be an opportunity for future researchers to explore conducting studies similar to this particular one.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

As current and future social workers continue to work with the adolescent population, there are some things they need to keep in mind in providing them services. A one all fits approach does not work with everyone, and adolescents are no exception to this perspective. Adolescents are a diverse group, and have different perspectives as to what they define is

important. Religion and spirituality continue to dwindle in importance to adolescents, and the benefits they find in both is material and social gain. Social Workers need to work from a spiritual perspective, and emphasize the importance of these factors that can serve as a coping mechanism and working intervention. Not only does religion and spirituality serve as a coping mechanism, but culturally, it gives them an understanding of practices that their people associate with.

Social Workers need to have a better understanding of the different backgrounds adolescents come from, and how it shapes their perception. Some of these individuals go through adverse situations they are not always in control to change. The access to resources within the community is an intricate part of how they perceive society. If the family has low income coming in, they have no choice to move into a community that may have violence, poor housing, and drug trafficking. This is not a safe environment an adolescent should be raised in, and these negative influences shape how they perceive the world around them. Unless the social worker can relate to the adolescents environment, they do not have an understanding of the obstacles they have endured to survive. Most adolescents are exposed to horrific situations by this point in their life, and the last things they need are preconceived judgements from social workers.

Conclusion

To conclude this study, religion and spirituality are subjects that are becoming taboo as time goes on. The importance of these aforementioned aspects are becoming less relevant in society, and the future within the adolescent population do not show much interest towards either one. The results have demonstrated that some helping professionals have seen a change in these young individuals if they practiced a religious or spiritual belief system. The other half of the participants feel that no matter if the adolescents have a belief system or not; there is no change in the way they do their program. Whatever the stance of the helping professional, it is their responsibility to educate the adolescents from a cultural standpoint and help the individual identify who they are. Religion and spirituality is associated with every culture, and once they can identify with the importance of these aspects; it might be something they have a different perspective about.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Title: Beliefs about religion and spirituality among Helping Professionals in Group Homes.

1. Do you note teens self-identify as a particular religion?
2. If religious services are part of your program, are teens required to attend?
3. How many adolescents attend these services voluntarily?
4. Do you observe resistance by teens to religious services?
5. Do you observe acceptance of their preferred religion?
6. Do you observe prayer among teens?
7. Are the residents required to say grace at a meal?
8. Do you observe anyone doing a daily devotional?
9. Do teens ask you about God or other matters of religion?
10. Do you observe differences in the happiness levels of those who are spiritual versus those who abstain from religious activities?
11. Do teens seem interested in spiritual matters or training?
12. What characteristics have you noticed among non-spiritual teens versus spiritual teens?
13. Do you think religion or spirituality should be a requirement of the program?
14. Should staff be trained in the areas of spirituality or religion to use as a tool of intervention with the residents?
15. What are the ages of adolescents in the group home?
16. What are the ethnicity's do the adolescents consist of?

Developed by Dominic Williams

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to examine beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professionals in group homes. The research study is being conducted by a graduate student, Dominic J. Williams under the supervision of Dr. Herbert Shon, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professionals in group homes.

DESCRIPTION: Some of the questions the participants will be asked are their religious affiliation, religious and spirituality practices, status of use of religious and spirituality component in their treatment with adolescent clients, perceptions of the effectiveness of using religion and spirituality component in their treatment with adolescent clients, and some demographic variables.

PARTICIPATION: Participation for this research study is totally voluntary, and is greatly appreciated for the purposes of collecting data. There is no penalty or issue if the participant chooses to not continue with the survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: The data will be anonymous and no identifying information will be included, because the participant's names will not be reported along with their responses. The information will be kept in a locked box maintained by the researcher, and will not be shared to any of the other participants in the research.

DURATION: It will take approximately 40-60 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject as a result of participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, the study may benefit the community by expanding their knowledge and awareness of the beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professional working in a group home. Participants will be compensated will be entered into a drawing to win a \$20 Target gift card.

CONTACT: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact my faculty supervisor Dr. Herbert Shon at (909) 537-5532

RESULTS: The results of this study will be available at California State University, San Bernardino after December 1, 2016 at the Pfau library.

I have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in this study.

909.537.5501 • fax: 909.537.7029 • <http://socialwork.csusb.edu/>

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

Place an X mark here

Date

I agree to be audiotaped

Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Study of Decision-Making Processes Debriefing Statement

This study you have just completed was designed to examine the Beliefs about religion and spirituality among helping professionals in a group home. Some questions discussed during the interview were do helping professionals have any religious or spiritual beliefs, and if so, does it impact how they conduct services with adolescents. Does it bother the helping professional if fellow colleagues have different religious or interpretations of spirituality than themselves? Do they encourage the adolescents to utilize their religious or spiritual beliefs as a source of strength? The research was conducted on a small sample size, and examines if helping professionals utilize their belief system into their profession. My interests was to see if the above questions have a correlation in the way the helping professional conducts services to adolescents, and if they encourage colleagues to utilize a religious or spiritual approach with adolescents.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the decision question with other students. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Professor **Herbert Shon** at **(909) 537-5532**. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact the Pfau Library at Cal State University of San Bernardino after December 2016.

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHICS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ethnicity	Gender	Agency	Religious Affiliation	City	Shift
Hispanic	Male	Group Home	Agnostic	Riverside	Graveyard
Hispanic	Female	Group Home	Catholic	Highland	Afternoon
African-American	Male	Group Home	Christian	Rialto	Graveyard
Caucasian	Male	Group Home	Christian	Highland	Afternoon
African-American	Female	Group Home	Christian	Rialto	Afternoon
Hispanic	Male	Group Home	Catholic	Rialto	Graveyard/ Afternoon
Hispanic	Female	Group Home	Catholic	Rialto	Morning
African-American	Female	Group Home	Christian	Riverside	Morning/ Afternoon

Ethnicities of Participants: African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian

Genders Involved: Females and Males

Religious Affiliations: Christians, Catholics, Christian-Catholics, and Agnostics

Agency: Group Homes located in Riverside, Highland, & Rialto

Shift: Morning: 7am-3pm Afternoon: 3pm-11pm Graveyard: 11pm-7am

APPENDIX E
AGENCY LETTER

P . H . I . L . O . S .
ADOLESCENT TREATMENT CENTERS, INC.

Date: December 7, 2015

P.H.I.L.O.S. Adolescent Treatment Center, Inc. is a proud supporter of our staff's academic success. We at P.H.I.L.O.S. encourage and support all academic projects however, any and all academic projects conducted by P.H.I.L.O.S. staff are for the sole purpose of the student conducting the academic project, and do not reflect the opinion of the agency or it's clients.

Dominic Williams has our support to conduct an academic project with staff at our agency under their own free will, although Mr. Williams has requested to use individual that are employed by our agency, our agency is not and will not be responsible for compensation of said individuals nor will their answers reflect our agency in anyway.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at (909) 777-3599.

Thank you,
Thomas R. Ybarra, Sr.
Administrator

P.O. BOX 821 • RIALTO, CALIFORNIA 92376 • (909) 777-3599 • Fax (909) 777-0011

"Leading The Way To A Better Future"

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