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EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL WORK
INTERVENTION IN THE "MAKING ATTENDANCE
A PRIORITY PROGRAM"

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

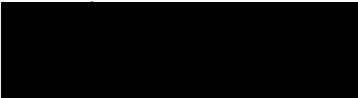
by
Justine Beatriz Rangel
September 2011

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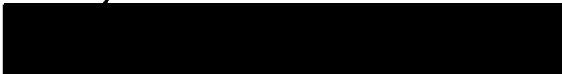
A Project
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Justine Beatriz Rangel
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ABSTRACT

Truancy is a widespread problem with a variety of intervention approaches. In this study the correlation between a social work intervention and attendance was studied. Quantitative analysis in the form of secondary data analysis was used to answer this research question. The sample included 27 charts of fifth grade students referred to the MAPP program (Making Attendance a Priority Program). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of social work intervention on truancy rates for students in the MAPP program. Charts of participants in the program were reviewed for a 6-month period, to monitor if attendance had increased and whether there was a correlation between attendance increase and levels of intervention. It was found that in regards to the first research question; did attendance increase for participants of MAAP? Regarding effectiveness among the cohort of those observed, a positive correlation was observed among attendance and MAPP participation with the highest overall rate of absenteeism being recorded in the initial month of this study, and subsequent drops in unexcused absence being subsequently recorded thereafter. A second consideration was viewing whether there was a correlation between levels of social work intervention and

attendance increases. Among students with higher levels of social work intervention there was a negative correlation to absenteeism, a finding not supported by original expectations of this study. The final research question relates to gender and its role in absences among surveyed MAPP participants. There were no significant findings among the variable gender and absences.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this chapter, the problem of truancy will be clearly identified in regards to the field of social work. The purpose of the present study and the reasons for this specific approach to studying interventions for truancy are covered. In conclusion, the importance of the study for social work practice will be discussed.

Problem Statement

Truancy is a serious issue affecting all social and economic classes regardless of geographic area. According to the California Department of Education (CDE) (2010) California legislature defines truancy in specific language. Section 48260 (a) of the Education Code states, any pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without an excuse for three full days within one calendar school year is defined as a truant. The code then goes on to state any pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or continued education who is absent for ten percent or more during any calendar school year without an excuse is defined as a chronic truant. According to

Biddle (2010), out of Los Angeles county's eighty-eight school districts, fifty seven had truancy rates of greater than ten percent. This is a huge number and may not be a clear indicator of actual truancy rates due to misrepresentation and unclear reporting practices, experts speculate that the actual numbers are even higher.

Truancy has been identified as a risk factor which is linked to delinquent behavior, substance abuse, educational failure and school dropout according to Hendricks, Sale, Evans, McKinley, & Carter (2009). The reasons for truancy are many and vary depending on age and individual circumstances. According to Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent (2003), truancy involves four factors: school, economics, family and the student. Family factors include lack of guidance or supervision, substance abuse, ignorance of truancy laws and differing values placed on education (Baker et al., 2003). School factors include overall school environment, school size, attitudes of student, teachers and administrators, inconsistencies in truancy policies, lack of consequences for poor attendance, and the inability to be attuned to cultural differences in learning styles of students (Baker et al., 2003). Some economic factors include lack of transportation or childcare, student employment, and

single-parent households (Baker et al., 2003). Factors related to the student include substance abuse, ignorance of truancy laws, poor health mentally or physically, lack of social networks and English deficiencies (Baker et al., 2003).

Although truancy is known to be a serious issue with detrimental consequences to the student, their families, and society as a whole, there seems to be a lack of research done in this particular field. In the articles reviewed, the consensus appears to be that in order for programs to be successful in reducing truancy they must be individualized to the student, there must also be a positive relationship between the student and school staff, parental communication must be increased and incentives must also be available for parents' level of responsibility, attendance policies must be clear, and strengths-based family counseling aimed at the goal of increasing attendance must be implemented (Hendricks, et al., 2009).

The above the issues related to truancy are many and varied, prevention and intervention options are therefore based on differing fields of study aimed at reducing the problem. According to Kearney (2008), historical and predominate fields of study include education, psychology,

sociology, child development, law, medicine, and criminal justice. Approaches are varied, and as such so are policies addressing this issue, with little continuity among allied agencies, therefore no unified policies exist. This inconsistency of approach occurs despite a clear definition of intervention outlined in California's Education Code.

In the context of practice, social workers supply a needed commodity in truancy prevention and intervention. In the agency in which the research will be based, the social workers perform many of the tasks identified earlier. They provide extensive case management services, strengths based counseling, parental incentives and systems based interventions, and they act as a family advocate and liaison to outside agencies. According to Dube and Orpinas (2009), school social workers play a vital role in health and well-being of children in education settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to address the problem of truancy by looking at what types of effective interventions helped to decrease truancy within the preadolescent population. According to Henry (2007), the

predictors associated with truancy include poor grades, parental education, and large amounts of unsupervised time. The goal of this study was to evaluate a specific program aimed at the reduction of truancy.

This study looked at subjects from the MAPP program (Making Attendance a Priority) as a means of measurement. The MAPP program is a collaborative effort among the Public Defender's office and the Department of Behavioral Health of San Bernardino County, to provide intervention services to targeted students who were identified by the San Bernardino City Unified School District as having serious issues with truancy. The MAPP program is funded through an early intervention and prevention grant, with the goal of preventing future problems in this population by targeting issues of poor attendance.

The goal of the MAPP program is to increase attendance through the use of social work intervention. A social worker is assigned to every case and the intervention approaches and numbers of interventions applied is varied. The MAPP program has been in existence since August, 2009 and the agency was interested in looking at program effectiveness after a six-month period. The MAPP program is a wrap-around program which provides services to the identified child as well as his family in

the form of case management, counseling, tutoring, transportation, and referrals, as well as unspecified services. All or most services are provided in the home. In order for students to be referred to the MAPP program they must have 15 unexcused absences before a referral is made. Excused absences, suspensions, and "early outs" (an early out is a verified absence for which the student was removed from the school for various reasons such as illness, or appointments) do not constitute an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences are those for which the parent did not call to excuse the absence for a variety of reasons and those which the school district deems an unexcused occurrence.

Issues studied include whether there was a correlation between number of social work visits and increases in attendance. Social work visits were conceptualized on a scale of mild, moderate, and intensive, dependent on the numbers of face to face contacts. Scores were determined by the amount of time social workers spent with the identified student and their families.

Parties concerned with this issue include the social workers involved in the study because they wanted to know if their intervention methods were successful in reducing

truancy rates for this population. Also, the Public Defender's office wanted to know if they were able to fulfill the requirements of the grant, which would in turn allow them to reapply for additional grants. Additionally, the school district was concerned with the issue because they wanted to increase the attendance rates of their students, which may increase their revenue for dealing with these children. Next are the families of the identified students because they wanted their children's attendance to improve, so they can prevent any future financial payments to the courts. The researcher was concerned with this issue because as an intern in this program she wanted to help out and be as much service as possible. This is an area the Public Defender's Office wanted studied. This was the first time the program has been evaluated in any fashion. Despite the varied reasons for concern, one common thread exists truancy continues to be a present problem effecting most school districts in the United States. According to Henry (2007), due to inconsistent reporting practices and tracking from schools an accurate representation of prevalence for truancy does not exist. Yet his study concluded eleven percent of eighth graders and over sixteen percent of tenth graders self-reported truancy over a four week period. According to

Biddle (2010), the problem of truancy starts with the statistic itself. For example he states most states tend to calculate attendance by dividing the total number of days missed by the total number of days students are supposed to attend. Although this appears optimally designed to maximize school funding it is a misrepresentation of actual truancy rates, which his research shows is closer to sixteen percent of students (Biddle, 2010).

A quantitative design was the best approach to serve the needs of this study because secondary data was used, and time restraints did not allow for a qualitative approach. The data source was case records. Case records were used to look at types of interventions used and levels of interventions needed per student. Again levels were categorized based on numbers of face to face contacts. Charts were picked from a six month period. Attendance one month prior to MAAP involvement was used as a baseline measure of comparison. Monthly attendance reports in MAPP files were analyzed for the entire six month period to check if attendance had increased compared to the month prior. Next, social work visits were categorized, to assess if attendance had any correlation with number of face to face visits provided and if

intensity of visits played a role in the increase. All participant charts, opened and closed, were reviewed. The study looked at 27 charts.

Independent variables included levels of intervention: mild, moderate and intensive. Levels were determined based on number of interventions needed and services provided. Other independent variables included types of services provided and demographics of the cases identified such as age, sex and family demographics such as income, and single or two parent households. The dependent variable was increases in attendance, which was measured by reviewing statistical information in the MAPP files; the MAPP files contained monthly printouts of attendance on MAPP participants. This study also required talking to the social workers, who worked with these children to gain a greater understanding of the types of interventions performed and additional information that was not gathered from looking at case records.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The findings of this study can change social work practice on both an agency and individual levels. This study can change practice on an individual level by forcing society to look at how truancy is treated.

Furthermore, it is of great importance to understand this problem further because it is important to measure the success of the MAAP program. This study has the potential to change the agency, depending on the results; it can either cause the public defender's office to continue their approaches or modify their services in order to better meet the needs of this population. It is also important to understand how the problem of truancy can be alleviated or decreased. Truancy is a serious problem on a micro, mezzo, and macro level, therefore it is important to study this issue and study the ways in which to decrease truancy rates among the fifth grade population. According to Fantuzzo (2005), truancy has reached epidemic proportions with thousands of children being absent every day in urban academic settings. The phase of the generalist intervention process which will be informed by the study is the evaluation phase.

The research questions answered was did attendance increase for students with the intervention of a social worker from the MAPP program? Did levels of social work intervention correlate with increases in attendance? Lastly, did attendance increase significantly between male and female participants?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The seriousness and prevalence of truancy has led researchers in differing fields of study to address this issue from differing intervention approaches. While circumstantial evidence suggests truancy is at epidemic proportions state wide, poor school reporting habits make it impossible to pinpoint exact prevalence. This chapter provides an overview of literature to provide a clearer understanding of current research in the areas of reasons for truancy, theories regarding truancy, and current intervention and prevention efforts.

Reasons for Truancy

Despite differences among reasons stated for absenteeism, all literature reviewed states one common notion; truancy is a problem that affects society on multiple levels (micro, mezzo, macro). It is associated with problems such as substance abuse, school dropout and poor academic achievement on the individual level (Fantuzzo, 2005). On the community level it has been linked to vandalism and criminal violence, according to Fantuzzo (2005). Although the Public Defender's office in

particular has not done research in this specific area they were extremely interested in the results of this study, for reasons mentioned above.

Truancy is a problem which deserves more attention, however in order to address the issues of truancy we must first look at the underlying reasons, speculation as to the true reasons for truancy have resulted in multiple program development, massive amounts of spending, and policy implementation both punitive and supportive. Nevertheless despite tremendous efforts from several independent entity's (schools, legal, social services) one common notion remains, truancy continues to plague our school system's and society. Perhaps this can be attributed to the varying reasons children miss school. Research suggests the main reasons children are truant are attributed to poor academic involvement, poor grades, drug use, large amounts of unsupervised time, and lack parental education. Henry (2007) indicates lack of supervised time results in an increase in drug use and experimentation which sequentially leads to truancy. When researching reasons for truancy regarding secondary school students, it is evident that truant behaviors result from family issues instead of individual behavior. For example lack of transportation, low regard for education expressed by

primary care givers, parental drug use, and poor parenting practices. Children in homes where it is permissible to be truant regardless of reason and receive no disciplinary action tend to adopt an attitude in which school attendance is unimportant.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

A brief overview of major conceptualizations which included psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and education will be discussed here.

Research centered on truant behavior from a psychological perspective views truancy as a micro issue. According to Kearney (2008), viewing truancy from a psychological perspective focuses mainly on child symptoms such as anxiety, fear, and depression. Therefore intervention practices would be psychological in nature. Psychological interventions would be centered on cognitive-behavioral therapy and psycho education surrounding anxiety (Kearney, 2008). A review of available research suggests that truancy as a result of psychology pathology needs to be addressed using conventional methods such as psychotherapy. Similarly a further analysis of past research shows evidence that students that are truant tend to develop secondary issues such as drug use, poor

grades, and teen pregnancies, which in turn leads to increased truant behavior and diminished emphasis on school success.

A review of research regarding the legal theories regarding truancy argues truancy is a result of a lack of result for the law and legal system and therefore should be handled through a legal approach. Such as court programs or punitive matters. Kearney states (2008), that social/criminal justice approaches focus on rule breaking behavior and legal type intervention, such as court referrals and community services. These programs often result in a fee or fine and involve parental punishment, including jail time or sanctions of cash aid assistance.

Past research suggests that educational approaches mirror a psychological perspective which tends to view the cause as individual in nature. Educational approaches focus on school type interventions such as counseling because they view absenteeism as a result of psychological or social circumstances (Kearney, 2008). Social circumstances would include lack of peer bonding and healthy peer to peer relationships.

Pertinent to this study research on truancy interventions from an interdisciplinary approach is most useful. Researchers suggest that an interdisciplinary

approach to addressing truancy is most effective. When applying a biopsychosocial perspective the intervention can be geared towards addressing the complex issue of truancy by looking simultaneously at biological causes such as developmental delays, psychological causes such as low self-esteem or anxiety; social perspectives such as homelessness, lack of resources and deficient parent participation. In addition multi system involvement is encouraged, as it is in the MAAP program. The MAAP program attempts to address truancy from a multi-system approach. Social workers work closely with the school districts, families, the public defender's office and health care providers in the community to develop the best plan of action for the individual child. Collaboration is encouraged and advocacy is central to assistance. Research to this point does not discuss a program in which the issue of truancy is truly addressed from a biopsychosocial perspective.

Interventions and Prevention Efforts

Truancy intervention literature depicts a transition from a one-dimensional intervention approach, such as correctional models to a more multidimensional approach which fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and

interaction. For this reason it is of great importance to study this collaborative effort between the Department of Behavioral Health and the Public Defender's Office in their attempt to address the problem of truancy.

Traditionally issues of truancy have been dealt with through school districts. Interventions are used for student identified as habitual truants (student who have not responded to usual school type interventions, such as parental meetings). Once a student is identified as a habitual truant intervention approaches include referrals to SARB (school attendance review board), county probation departments, or the Office of the District Attorney. The purpose of these referrals is to remain compliant with the law (Education Code 48264.5). which requires that intensive guidance be provided to meet the needs of students with school attendance or behavioral problems. Interventions approved are designed with the goal of keeping students out of the juvenile justice system and decreasing the chances of school drop out. Penalties defined in the education code (section 48264.5) increase in severity for the truant student and their parents. Examples of penalties outlined in the Education Code include weekend study programs, fines, suspensions, loss of driving privileges, supervision by the juvenile justice

system, and mandated participation in court approved truancy programs (site). Penalties for parents include fines ranging from 100-500 dollars, and participation in parental education or counseling programs. In addition to penalties accrued thru the education code, parents are also subject to penal code penalties which can include a 2,000 dollar fine, up to a year in county jail, mandated mental health or substance abuse treatment, and/or parenting classes. This is a clear example of how our state attempts to address issues of truancy. All of which appear punitive in nature and one dimensional, in the regard that all parties involved are employing the same measures.

Past research looks at the treatment of truancy from a single facet treatment therapy approach such as using solution focused intervention and contingency management. Rarely in the literature are multiple intervention methods applied such as case management services, school involvement, legal involvement and therapy. Project MAAP employs all of these tactics to fight the issue of truancy from a micro, mezzo, and macro level.

The social workers in the MAAP program utilize solution focused counseling with the student and family members to identify and reduce truant causes and

solutions. In a study conducted by Enea and Dafinoiu (2009), the objective was to assess the effectiveness of using motivational techniques as a means of reducing truancy. Effectiveness was examined for a three month period; approaches examined in this study include solution focused counseling, motivational counseling, behavior contracts and reinforcement techniques. The results of this study show a 61% decrease in truancy. This study's main focus is to show that positive reinforcement works better than punishment to increase attendance; positive reinforcement is achieved through counseling at an individual level. Although this shows remarkable insight into the treatment of truancy, it does not address family issues. The MAAP program assesses family strengths and weaknesses in regards to the student's attendance issues.

In a similar study conducted by Brooks (2001), contingency management as a technique for reducing truancy with 20 high school students was researched. Techniques included a token system, a contract, and guidance group meetings. This study yielded a slight increase in attendance over a 22 day period. As stated earlier this is an approach geared towards the individual level; it fails to address the problem of truancy on a mezzo or macro level. It also does not discuss treatment of family, such

as with family systems theory. Again all intervention methods employed through the MAAP program.

Literature was reviewed on one-dimensional approaches such as the two stated above, and through the literature it was found in order to get a handle on this issue we must look at it from several different perspectives, which include not only looking at what type of therapy to provide the individual but what is the best way to offer treatment to the family. One way this can be accomplished is by treating the system as a whole. In order to study this issue it must be looked at from a systems perspective, which states change in one unit effects other units, according to Lesser and Pope (2007). Other theories which to consider include social networking theory and the biopsychosocial model. In addition, we can look at this issue from a social constructivist theory. By looking at how society views truancy and the value society places on the problem, this theory can be used to examine if truancy has been addressed primarily from a one- dimensional approach, because society as a whole views the issue as a family or school issue, instead of a societal problem.

Lauchlan (2003) states the most effective approach to dealing with chronic absences is to use an individual program geared towards the student's unique needs but also

initiating a multi-systems approach. This shows the importance of the move from the traditional one dimensional approach to the multi-dimensional approach (Lauchlan, 2003). This particular study validates the suggestion earlier, as to what is the best approach when addressing the problem of truancy.

In order to complete an extensive review of literature, articles addressing the problem of truancy from a systems approach must be reviewed. Also research based on what past evidence suggests about having social workers available to assist organizations when it comes to increasing attendance must be reviewed. Research done on one-dimensional approaches is plentiful, but research on interventions for truancy from a multi-approach system such as counseling, case management services, financial assistance, and school based help is scarce. More literature needs to be reviewed in the areas stated above, in order to gain a greater awareness into the problem of truancy interventions.

Summary

The literature on the issue of truancy, as stated above, varied and differing, based on conceptualization. Reasons for truancy are also varied depending on

conceptualizations. Literature reviewed on the topic of intervention approaches is based solely on available current research. The need for an evaluation of a clearly social work approach is greatly needed due to lack of research based on this type of intervention.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter the study design, sampling method, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis will be covered. The ways samples were obtained and levels of measurement for both independent and dependent variables will be discussed. Limitations to this specific are identified.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of social work intervention on truancy rates for students in the Making Attendance a Priority Program (MAPP). The study design was secondary data analysis. The research method was quantitative. This particular research method was chosen because case records were reviewed on twenty seven charts; time constraints did not allow for qualitative research. Research questions studied include 1. Did attendance increase for participants of the Making Attendance a Priority Program with the intervention of social workers? 2. Was there a correlation of level of intervention and increases in attendance? 3. Did demographics (gender) significantly correlate with

attendance increases? A correlational study design was used.

Sampling

Data were obtained from case records of students and their siblings who were referred to the MAPP program from the San Bernardino City Unified School District. Because the MAPP program was new all charts were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Twenty seven case charts were reviewed.

A selection criterion was based on all available charts; however the sample did not exceed twenty-seven charts. This particular sample was chosen to give the best representation of the effectiveness of the program.

Arrangements were made to insure that access to the files was allowed. Charts were reviewed for a six month period, to see how attendance has been affected as a result of social work intervention during that time frame.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data on attendance were collected as well as demographics and levels of intervention. Independent variables included levels of intervention: mild, moderate and intensive. Levels were determined based on number of interventions needed and number of services provided.

Levels of intervention were ordinal. Mild intervention represented one to four face to face contacts with the client. Moderate intervention was represented by five to eight visits with the client. Intensive intervention was represented by nine plus visits. Other independent variables included types of services provided and demographics of the cases identified such as age, sex and family demographics such as income, and single or two parent households. Age was measured using an interval scale; sex was measured using a nominal scale. Income was measured at the scale level, because they were real numbers. Single and two parent households were measured by using a nominal scale.

The dependent variable is attendance, which was measured by reviewing statistical information in the MAPP files; the MAPP files contained monthly printouts of attendance on MAPP participants. Attendance was number of absences measured using a scale measurement. This study also required interviewing the social worker assigned to the children to gain a greater understanding of the types of interventions performed and pertinent information that could not be gathered from reading case records.

Procedures

Case records were used to look at interventions used and levels of intervention needed per student. Data were gathered from case records and each chart was looked at for a six-month period. Monthly attendance reports were analyzed for the entire six-month period to determine if attendance had increased. Attendance records were sent to the Public Defenders' Office by the School District monthly for students referred to the MAPP program. Social work interventions were categorized to better assess if attendance correlates with services provided and to see if intensity of intervention played a role in the increase. Chart notes were reviewed to gain a greater understanding of interventions used and frequency of interventions.

All participants' charts, opened and closed, were reviewed. Data collection took place at the Office of the Public Defender. The researcher collected the data.

Protection of Human Subjects

Data were collected from case records and the identity of these individuals was protected by not recording identifying information. Also all information obtained was stored in a locked cabinet and disposed of after the appropriate specified amount of time. Specific

information such as school and specific events was omitted. The Public Defender's Office will keep all charts of MAPP clients and follow their department's confidentiality procedures.

Data Analysis

Quantitative procedures were used to answer the research questions through a secondary data analysis. Bivariate analysis was used to measure the association between the variables, such as attendance and level of intervention. Univariate analysis was used to measure frequency and central tendency. The correlation between the dependant variable and independent variables such as gender, and level of intentions, was examined. Statistical tests used included t-test paired and Anova.

Summary

In this chapter the study design was discussed, as well as the sample set from which the data were collected. Provisions for confidentiality were outlined and the procedure by which data was collected was specified. Data analysis was conceptualized and statistical tests were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Included in Chapter Four is a description of the findings of this study, the data obtained and its significance as determined by statistical tests and analysis. Statistical analysis of subject variables included tests of correlation and comparisons of the means of variables. Additionally these findings are interpreted according to the expectations of this study and outcomes of MAAP program participation.

Presentation of the Findings

This study included 27 subjects (N=27), all youth participating in MAPP. Among participants 13 were male and 14 were female. These youth ranged in age from 7 years old to 16 with an average of 11 years old. Income level of household was measured with monthly income ranging from 0 to 3333 per month, with an average monthly income of 990.60. Single parent households versus co-parenting households were documented with 19 of 27 subjects currently being raised in single parent homes. Absenteeism in the month prior to MAPP participation ranged among subjects from only 2 days to 25, with a mean of 10.6.

Absences were tracked over a six month period among all participants with the mean absences recorded in each month depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean of Absences

Month	Mean
1	4.72
2	3.04
3	2.67
4	4.08
5	3.81
6	3.04

Discreet units of social work intervention were recorded with a range of 2 to 28 independent social work visits recorded among participants during the reporting period of six months with a mean number of visits of 14 among those surveyed.

Absences over the reporting period were recorded with a mean number of absences in month one of 4.7, in month two of 3.0, in month three of 2.6, in month four of 4.0, in month five of 3.8, and in month six of 3.0. The highest mean number of absences recorded was 4.7, during the first

month of MAAP program involvement. The lowest mean number of absences recorded was 3.0, recorded during the second and sixth months of MAAP involvement. This shows a positive association among reduced absenteeism and MAAP participation.

A T-test was performed to compare means among subjects in the month prior to their participation in MAPP to each month of reporting, with outlier's assigned dummy coding in order to exclude their values when running tests. This was done to increase the accuracy of findings by eliminating erroneous data recorded as a function of normal vacillations in calendar school year, and scheduled school vacation time. There were also unanswered questions which could have been assigned a numeric value if not for this adjustment previous to statistical analysis.

The results of this paired samples t-test was that the first month of MAAP participation was positively correlated with the month prior to MAAP participation in terms of absenteeism with a correlation of .528 at the .01 significance level. Subsequent months did not demonstrate as strong a positive correlation as the initial month of measurement. (see Table 2).

Table 2. Paired Samples Correlations

Absences in Month Prior and	N	Correlation	Sig.
Month one	23	.528	.010
Month two	25	.333	.104
Month three	22	.059	.795
Month four	23	.317	.141
Month five	24	.092	.671
Month six	23	.122	.578

A one way ANOVA was performed analyzing the variable of social work intervention, specifically level of social work intervention (low, moderate, or intensive) and absences during MAPP participation. It was found that a positive association exists among intensity of social work intervention and number of absences incurred by the subject. Lastly, absences were examined among subject gender and no significant correlations were found (see Table 3).

Table 3. Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	2.7385	13	2.42876
Female	4.2310	14	3.80334
Total	3.5123	27	3.24542

Summary

In this chapter data resulting from this study was explored, as were the statistical test used to analyze said data. A positive association was found among MAAP participation and reductions in absenteeism. Additionally, an unexpected association was recorded among level of social work intervention and absences, which will be explored in the subsequent chapter. Lastly, no significant finding was noted among gender and absenteeism.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions gleaned as a result of completing the project. Further, the recommendations extracted from the project are presented. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with a summary of future social work implications regarding policy and practice.

Discussion

A primary consideration was viewing the MAPP program effectiveness among the cohort of those observed. In examining the mean absences over a six month period of observation, a positive association was observed among attendance and MAPP participation with the highest overall rate of absenteeism being recorded in the initial month of this study, and subsequent drops in unexcused absence being recorded thereafter. This finding was consistent with the initial expectations of this study and is supportive of the validity of MAPP interventions as an effective mediator of absenteeism. A possible reason for this drop in absences can be attributed to the unique design of the program. The distinctive collaboration of

the Public Defenders Office, the Department of Behavioral Health and the cooperation of the school district, which is responsible for all MAAP referrals. The joined effort from these differing entities is what sets the MAAP program aside from all research gathered on existing solutions to truancy. MAAP moved from its single leveled approach during its initial phase of development and contemplation into a multi-leveled, multi-system intervention program. Social workers early on in the process determined in addition to the student, the family also needed to be assessed and treated.

A biopsychosocial comprehensive assessment tool was utilized at the initial point of contact with students and family to help social workers develop a tailored treatment plan to meet each families needs. Additional information was gathered which was not utilized in data analysis. These types of data included types of serviced received and community referral information.

All 27 charts analyzed received case management services, individual counseling, and family treatment. Case management services included referrals to anger management programs for both parents and students, parenting classes, and free community sports referrals. All families received assistance with beds, school

supplies, clothing, bus passes and hygiene items. Students and parents were also linked to mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment and community support groups.

In addition, 20 of the 27 students received assistance with transportation to: school, convenience stores and medical appointments. Clinical interventions were provided in families' native language. In addition all individual sessions and family therapy were conducted in the participant's homes. I found this to be a unique exception to existing modes of treatment, in which therapy is conducted in a office setting. Social workers in the MAAP program were allotted the opportunity to meet with students and families daily if needed with no time restrictions. Due to the small number of participants in the MAAP program, families received higher specialized, unrestricted care; a characteristic often missing from publically funded programs. The social workers in this program often acted as advocates and accompanied students to meetings with the school principal and at SARB meetings.

As MAAP interventions were found to be effective in reducing absenteeism over the entire subject group, this effect was most strongly observed among participants with less severe absenteeism previous to MAPP involvement. Yet,

we must not discount the unique program design and time each subject received. Prior to MAAP involvement a majority of these students' interactions with school officials were punitive in nature. MAAP involvement helped in the reduction of parental fines in four of the program participants.

When initiating this study, a secondary consideration was whether or not the level of social work intervention recorded among subjects would be positively associated with a decrease in absenteeism. The MAAP program is designed to decrease unexcused attendance issues among identified primary and secondary school pupils, and thus this was a pilot study to examine the effectiveness of this programs interventions. It was found that among students with higher levels of social work intervention there was a negative correlation to absenteeism, a finding not supported by original expectations of this study. One possible heretofore unconsidered implication of this finding is that students with greater need and social service issues received higher levels of intervention, therefore level of social work intervention in this study served as a predictor of need rather than results of intervention. It must be noted that although levels of intervention were not association

positively with decreases in attendance, the nature of social work would predict that those with greater need would receive increased visits and increased services. A notion previously overlooked during research design.

Lastly because levels of intervention were categorized according to number of visits and not type of services received, or time spent at each visit, it is hard to determine if MAAP participants with fewer visits were seen for longer periods of time and if services received were more extensive during these periods. Also it is not specified whether students who received less quantity of visits, received less visits of their own volition. In other words did they not want to see the social worker more than once a week or were they unavailable to meet because perhaps the parent(s) had prior engagements. Data as to whether the parent(s) worked was not collected for the purposes of this study. Yet that variable may be a determining factor in regards to number of visits the family received, especially given the MAAP programs hours of operation.

The final research question relates to gender and its role in absences among surveyed MAAP participants. There were no significant findings among the variable gender and absences. This can simply be explained due to

the nature of truancy. Gender is not a predictor of truant behavior. Therefore it is rational to expect students gender has little bearing on absentee level, instead truant behavior can be attributed to a variety of secondary conditions specified in research uncovered through the literature review. Such as poor grades, substance use, peer bonding, and family systems issues, all of which gender is not a predictor of.

Limitations

The following limitations apply to this study. A small sample size may not provide a true representation of the demographics of this population. Students referred to the MAAP program were referred from a small selection of secondary schools. Secondary data did not specify time spent with the student. This proved to be an obstacle in the ability to determine the association between level of intervention and decreases in absences. Likewise the limitation of demographic data collected made it impossible to rule out exact reasons for number of visits, as discussed in the previous section. Another limitation was the unavailability of options to monitor attendance past this six month study. This was due to relative newness of the program. Outside factors were not

considered when making considerations for increases in attendance. School punishment, fines, or other such situational variables, which occur and resolve independently of social intervention, could not be factored out of this study (e.g. a lack of transportation, or changes in the family system). Perhaps the greatest limitation identified is the lack of uniformed documentation and the absence of attendance records prior to the month before referral.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Truancy is a huge issue facing many of our students. Traditional methods to reduce truancy such as punitive measures appear to have little influence when increasing attendance based on past research. Instead methods which focus on the family system, while employing innovative interventions such as the ones utilized by the MAAP program appear to succeed in meeting the goal of increased attendance. Despite a positive increase in attendance after MAAP involvement in this pilot study, further research is needed to replicate the findings in a larger sample size. Future recommendations for research would include a follow-up qualitative study of the MAAP program, which solely focuses on interviewing family members of the

MAAP program to determine what specific services offered helped reduce the number of absences. Also, a review of initial participant's attendance records past the six month mark to discover if attendance continued to increase. Perhaps a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of education code type interventions, classified as penalties, for the purpose of creating new state legislation which incorporates a holistic approach to combat truancy. Broader implications for the social work professional include uniform policies must be established to address issues of truancy and govern truancy reporting practices.

Conclusions

In conclusion, data extracted from this project brings to light the need for follow up studies to determine the specific types of interventions needed when battling truancy. This study highlighted the importance of collaboration to help increase attendance and the need for uniformed truancy reporting practices. Also, instead of punitive measures such as parental fines or punishment, viewing the child as one piece of a larger system is needed to effect positive change and increases in attendance long term. The ability of social workers to

function in differing roles makes them the best candidate to implement changes needed when addressing issues of truancy.

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