

Addendum to: A Provincial Study of Direct Support Staff who Work with Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Staff who Support Youth

The Experience of Client Aggression and its Emotional Impact on Staff

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Aknowledgements

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The Purpose of this Report

This update follows the report which focussed on Ontario's direct care staff who work primarily with adults who have developmental disabilities. The survey used to collect the data for that report was also completed by a number of staff who work primarily with children and/or adolescents who have developmental disabilities. This addendum report presents the results of the data collected from these staff where differences were found. Only results that were significantly different from the staff who primarily support adults are summarized here, all other findings can be assumed to be similar. This information is intended for agencies and stakeholders but may also be of interest to direct care staff.

Disclaimer: Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous and the opinions of the survey respondents may not necessarily reflect the entire population of direct care staff in the province. This study was not targeted at staff who work with children and adolescents so the number of respondents is small and further limits the generalizability of the results. Due to the small numbers, results are not broken down by region to protect confidentiality. Finally, this is a cross-sectional study and any relationships reported herein are associations only and do not infer causality.

Review of Methods and Data Collection

Agencies in Ontario's developmental services sector were invited to participate in this study. When an agency agreed, they were provided with the link to the anonymous on-line survey and asked to direct their staff to complete it. Hard copies of the survey with a return mail address were provided if requested. With this survey we collected data on the frequency and severity of aggression experienced, rates of burnout using a well validated instrument (the Maslach Burnout Inventory, MBI), impact on work, perceived self-efficacy in dealing with challenging behaviour, positive contributions from the work, availability and use of policies and resources and interest in training and other interventions.

A total of 101 surveys were completed by direct care staff who work primarily with children and/or adolescents.

Key Findings

Compared to direct care staff who work primarily with adults who have developmental disabilities, survey respondents who work primarily with children and/or adolescents:

- Were more often male (27% vs 18%).
- Reported greater exposure to client aggression on a near daily basis (38% vs 25%).
- Reported greater exposure to aggression directed towards themselves as staff (66% vs 47%) or others (75% vs 52%) and to client self-injurious behaviour (86% vs 77%) They also reported greater exposure to property aggression resulting in damage or injury (52% vs 40%).
- Perceived the client aggression that they are exposed to as more severe (mean overall rating of 65 compared to 53; 42% rate as severe vs 24% of staff who support adults).
- Were more likely to have missed time from work due to a physical injury caused by a client (13% vs 6%).
- Were more likely to feel detached from their work and clients as evidenced by higher scores in the depersonalization dimension of the MBI.
- Had higher MBI emotional exhaustion scores (although not different from normative values) suggesting staff who support children and/or adolescents may be more emotionally drained than staff who support adults.
- Had a less pronounced association between exposure to aggression and MBI scores (although a trend was present) which may indicate that other factors are

contributing more in this group. Exposure to aggression was associated with a greater need for effort at work to meet usual standards.

- More often reported having sought resources for emotional difficulties related to the experience of client aggression through their workplace (62% vs 47%).

Summary

Staff who work with youth may be exposed to as much if not more aggression than staff supporting adults.

This may be in part because only a select group of youth are in care rather than with their families. These youth are likely those with the most significant challenges.

Understanding the issues of youth clients and the impact they have on their staff is also relevant to staff in the adult sector because these youth will transition to adult services at some point.

Staff who support youth are likely affected by client aggression in unique ways and require appropriate policies and support. It also appears that staff may be more likely to seek help around these challenges, highlighting the importance of accessible and effective resources and interventions. Further evaluation of staff who support youth is needed to better clarify their experiences as only a small selection responded to this survey. The findings reported here, however, indicate the need for additional study and follow-up.

Who We Are ...

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is Canada's leading Addiction and Mental Health teaching and research hospital, fully affiliated with the University of Toronto. CAMH succeeds in transforming the lives of people affected by addiction and mental illness, by applying the latest in scientific advances, through integrated and compassionate clinical practice, health promotion, education and research.

The Work and Well-being Research and Evaluation Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health is built around four research streams: epidemiology; prevention and promotion; diagnosis and treatment; and disability management of mental disorders at the workplace. It has a strong emphasis on applied research including evaluating the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of workplace interventions and policies that affect the workplace and workers. Program scientists are also involved in projects that examine the impact of work on people with mental illness as well as work's impact on mental health.

The program also seeks to build research capacity in this area. As such, training and mentoring students from a variety of disciplines are also program missions. The program recognizes the contribution of work and the workplace to the quality of life, and understands the importance of knowledge exchange. We are committed to collaborating in partnerships with stakeholders in different sectors and to sharing information with these stakeholder groups. Many projects are partnerships with community partners including employers, unions, workers, occupational health, clinicians, providers and insurers.

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