

WORKING WITH ALL BOYS?

PERCEPTIONS OF STRESS AND JOY
FOR STAFF WHO IDENTIFY AS FEMALE
ON WORKING WITH MALE RESIDENTS

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Assess the pertinent research on female staff working with all-male clientele.
- Examine the stressors of work in the residential treatment setting and how they apply to staff who identify as female, as well as additional stressors they identify.
- Learn about the skills that staff who identify as female feel they possess compared to other staff.
- Explore the suggestions of staff who identify as female for decreasing staff stress and increasing compassion satisfaction.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Participants in this study all identified as “female” and “women” and as such, the terms “female” and “women” will be used throughout this presentation, because that is how the respondents self-identified.

A little about us and LaSalle School



PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WOMEN WORKING WITH MALE CLIENTS

- No published research on women employed at all male residential settings for youth
- Parallel research in corrections, clinical therapeutic services, and all boys' schools

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WOMEN WORKING WITH MALE CLIENTS- CORRECTIONS

Mixed results on stress

- In one study, women report higher levels of job stress
- In another study, there are no differences, though concerns regarding support for equal treatment policies affected male stress
- In another student, men and women were similar in measures of emotional exhaustion and job stress

Perceive prisons as less safe for women

- Also perceive prisons as less dangerous overall than men

Women report resistance among male officers

- “women are repetitively, implicitly, and explicitly reminded of their fragile femininity, physical inferiority, and lack of fit”

Reported higher levels of job-related personal achievement and accomplishment

Women approach the role differently and incorporate femininity

- This is both a liability and a boon

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WOMEN WORKING WITH MALE CLIENTS-CLINICAL THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

Often focuses on treating male sex offenders

- Research is contradictory
 - Some studies suggest that female therapists are more impacted by this work than male therapists
 - Increased suspiciousness and vulnerability
 - Other studies suggest that male therapists are more impacted
 - Vicarious traumatization
 - Still other studies show no differences
 - Burnout and disruption of sexual life

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WOMEN WORKING WITH MALE CLIENTS- EDUCATION

- Teacher beliefs about math and science ability based on gender and how teachers treated different genders mattered more than the teacher's gender
- Female teachers report better relationships with students than male teachers
- Female teachers felt they can make differences in educational and social outcomes for boys
- There are no differences in academic motivation for boys with male teachers compared to those with female teachers

CURRENT STUDY

- Voluntary in-person interviews with staff who identified as female
 - 10-15 minute semi-structured interviews, consent obtained through signature, the majority were recorded
- All departments and all levels were invited to participate
- 30 staff have participated (as of 7/14)
 - Length of employment ranged from 4 months to 38 years
- School, Direct Care, Clinical, and Support Services all represented

WHAT BROUGHT STAFF TO THE AGENCY?

- Wanting a new experience
- Needed a job
- Needed a flexible schedule
- Friend recommended it
- Thought they would be good with the population
- Wasn't feeling fulfilled at their job
- Wanted a challenge and to learn new skills



IS THE WORK WHAT STAFF EXPECTED?

- Many respondents said “Yes & No”
 - Recognized that it would be a challenge
 - Challenges were different-kids needs are more extensive than expected
 - “No one truly understands until they do it”
- Some state it’s better than they expected
 - Feels like family
- Some felt that it wasn’t what they expected because the youth are not in placement long enough for them to make changes
 - Don’t see the “pay off”

ARE THERE THINGS ABOUT WORKING WITH AN ALL-MALE POPULATION THAT MAKES THE JOB MORE DIFFICULT?



ARE THERE THINGS
ABOUT WORKING WITH
AN ALL-MALE
POPULATION THAT MAKES
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DIFFICULT?

- Some respondents did not think that working with males was more difficult
 - Youth were respectful
- Other staff indicated that there were difficult issues to negotiate
 - Boundaries
 - Hormones/Sexuality
 - Students not understanding what is/isn't an appropriate comment
 - Difficulty forming therapeutic relationships because female clinicians “don't understand”
 - Some youth only respond to male authority

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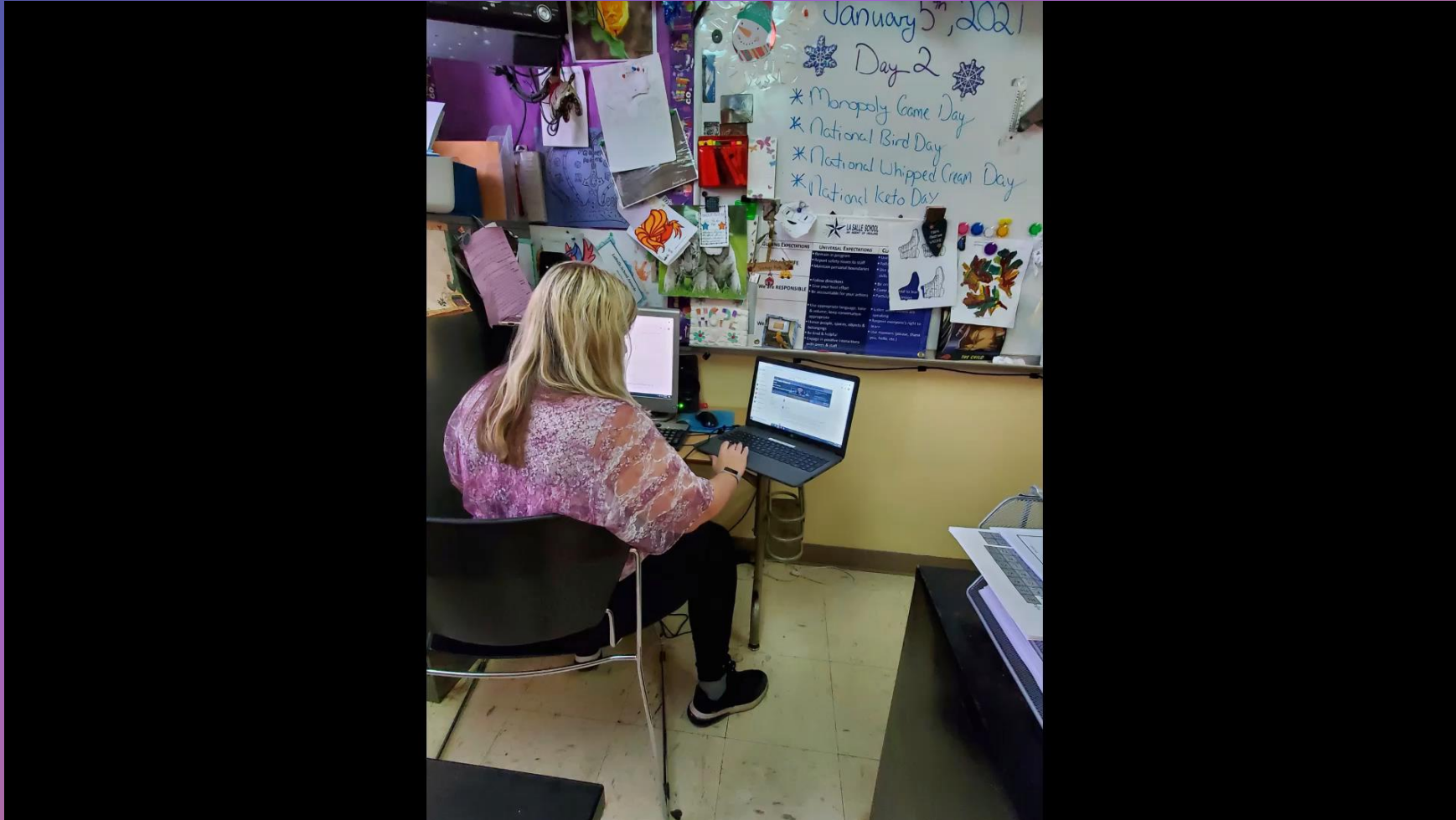


DOES THE POPULATION MAKE THE JOB MORE REWARDING?

- Enjoying the small wins
- Most boys are “very upfront,” will say it to your face
- Boys let things go faster, get more “second chances”
- Connecting with young men who have struggled
- Boys will challenge each other to do better



DO WOMEN HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THESE KINDS OF FACILITIES?



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- All respondents felt women had an important place in residential facilities
- Help students learn appropriate interactions with women
- Different skills
 - More nurturing
- Take on the “mother” role
- Give young men role models for women

HOW WERE YOU RECEIVED BY COWORKERS?

- Most indicated they were well received
- Most indicated they felt that staff “had their back” in difficult situations
- Many of those in education and social work/mental health alluded to the fact that the field is often dominated by women
- Some respondents felt that there were cliques, but that issue was reduced due to turnover
- Some respondents expressed concerns regarding sexual harassment
- Some respondents questioned whether managers were willing to hire/promote female staff for certain roles

HAVE YOU FELT SUPPORTED BY THE AGENCY?

- Most responded that they did feel supported by the agency
- Some indicated that they felt their professional goals were well supported, but didn't always help when employees felt that they aren't working on common goals for kids
- Some indicated they felt they weren't supported at all, particularly in difficult situations

ARE THERE THINGS
MANAGERS COULD DO TO
MAKE YOU FEEL MORE
SUPPORTED?

- More tangible support in crisis situations
- More assistance in problem-solving for high-risk youth
- More discussion on individual youth
 - What works in what settings, what are the triggers
- Listen to all sides of a situation before making judgements
- Spend more time working directly with youth so they don't lose perspective
- Listen to frustrations more
- More input in decision-making

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 8307 6919

 Mentimeter

Are there things agency administration can do to make you feel more supported?



ARE THERE THINGS AGENCY ADMINISTRATION CAN DO TO MAKE YOU FEEL MORE SUPPORTED?

“Communicate, in a positive way”

“Facilitate empathy building between co-workers”

“Open up dialogue for ideas on a larger scale”

“Find ways to reduce turnover”

“More opportunities to develop positive relationships with the boys”

“General recognition for the hard work happening day-to-day”



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Onboarding, ongoing supervision, reactions to inappropriate sexual behavior, walking line between helping staff understand clothing concerns: victim blaming vs setting conditions, videotaping sessions, modeling group dynamics between male and female, walking the line between recognizing trauma based behavior and not accepting inappropriate behavior as “part of what you signed up for”

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Replicate study in different agencies
- Assess student and caregiver perception of female staff
- Interview male staff to determine which concerns were based on gender and which are agency wide concerns

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