

The Impact of Empowering Teens in Camp Program Delivery



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Background

- Camps can be contexts for positive youth development (ACA)
 - It is unclear how young peoples' experiences may differ by age and roles assumed, ie. whether they are campers or leaders/staff.
 - We investigated the effect of age and roles as part of a larger study on youth experiences in California 4-H Camps.
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Study Question

- How does the camp staff experience compare to the camper experience at 4-H camp?



California 4-H Camps



- Camps are locally planned, administered and largely run by volunteers.
 - The California 4-H program does not own camp facilities.
 - A typical camp session is 5-7 days.
 - Camp size is around 100 youth between 9 and 13 years-old.
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California 4-H Camps



- Camp programs include a range of activities.
- High school-aged youth serve as staff and plan and deliver the camp experience with adult support.

*So, youth development happens on two levels:
for campers and for teen staff.*

Teen roles

- High school-aged youth eligible for staff
 - Teens apply for a variety of jobs
 - Adult camp leadership select teen staff 5-7 months prior to camp
 - Camp staff meet monthly with adult leadership to plan camp program
 - Adult volunteers chaperone camp
 - Teens lead program and sometimes living groups
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Theoretical Framework

Youth Development Supports and Opportunities

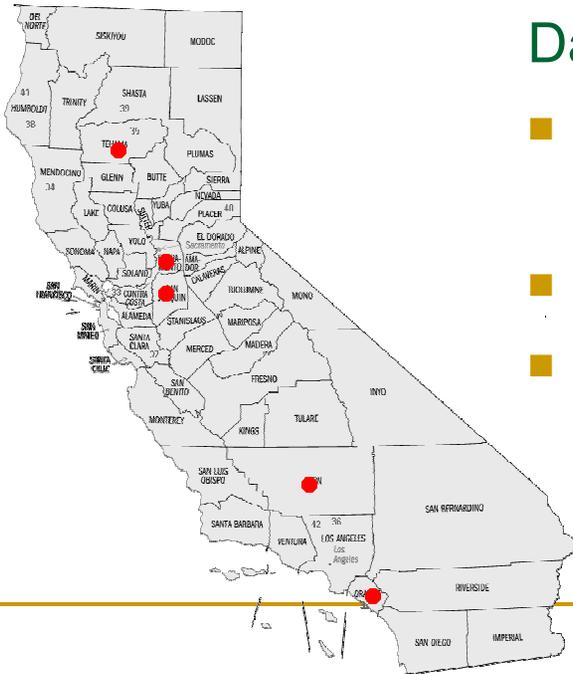
- Supportive Relationships
- Safety
- Skill Building
- Youth Engagement



Methodology

Selection of Camps for Study

- Six camps from different parts of the state
- Resident program operates for at least five days
- Must have 100 or more campers and staff
- Run by teen staff



Data

- A youth survey (YDSI)
 - 342 campers and 72 teen staff
- Camp visits and observation sheets
- Focus group interviews with adults, teen staff and campers

Methodology

- Utilized services of Youth Development Strategies, Inc. who also conducted the ACA study.
 - Multiple constructs for each support and opportunity
 - All questions on a four-point Likert scale
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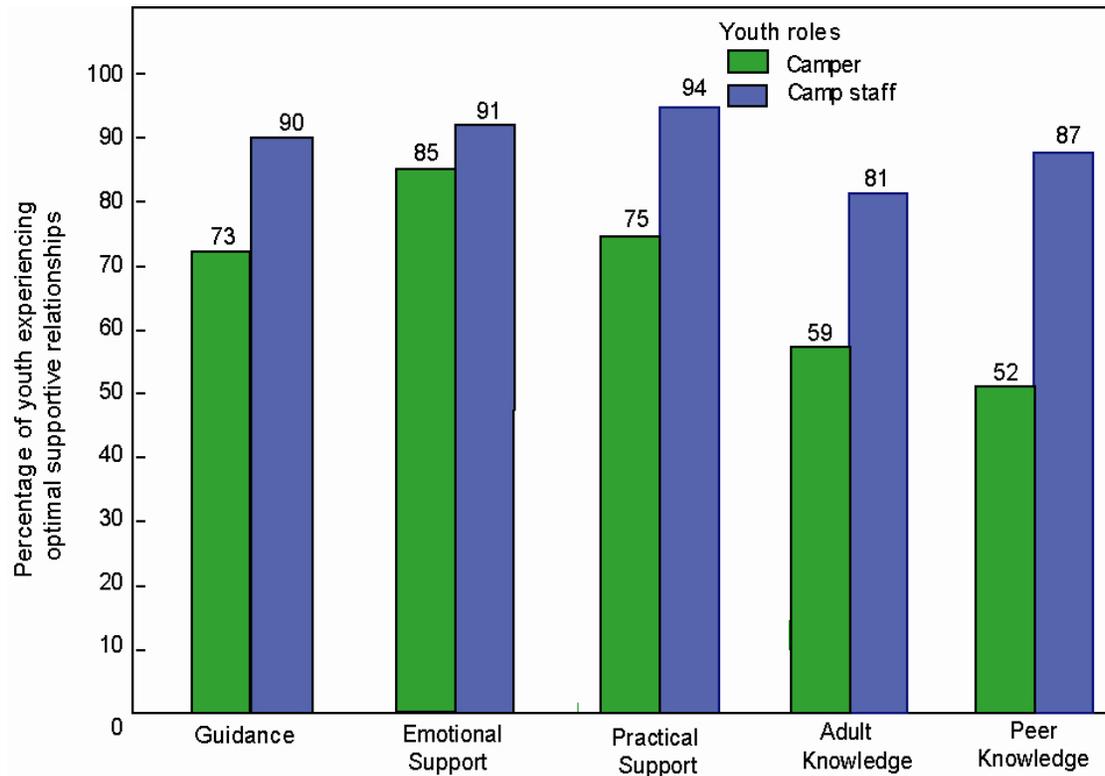
Analysis

- Respondents placed in one of three categories for each construct (optimal, insufficient, mixed)
 - Data analyzed by age and role as camper or staff
 - Logistic regression used, controlling for number of times at camp
 - Focus group responses coded to explore survey findings
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Finding 1

- In every construct, teen staff scored significantly higher in the *optimal* category, and significantly lower in the *insufficient* category than campers.
 - While there was an age effect for campers (older campers scored more optimally) teen staff scored more optimally than teen campers in all constructs.
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Supportive Relationships



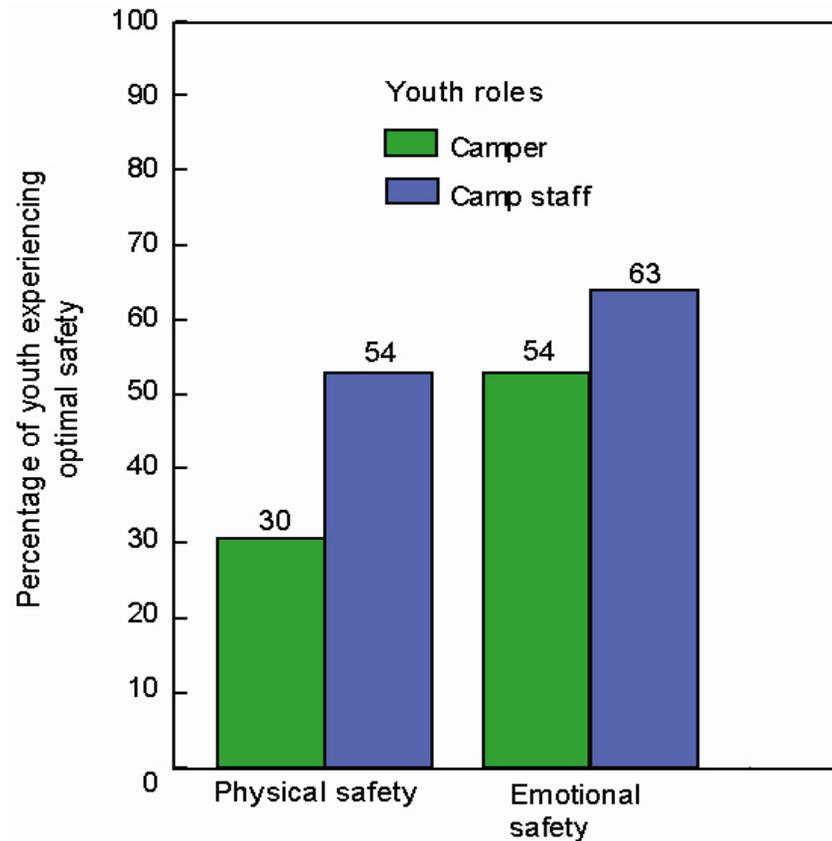
“They (adult staff) listen to you and they give their opinion and they’re really easy to get along with.”

--Teen staff member

Sample Items

- How many staff could you talk to if you were upset or mad about something?
- How many staff would say something to you if something in your life wasn’t going right?

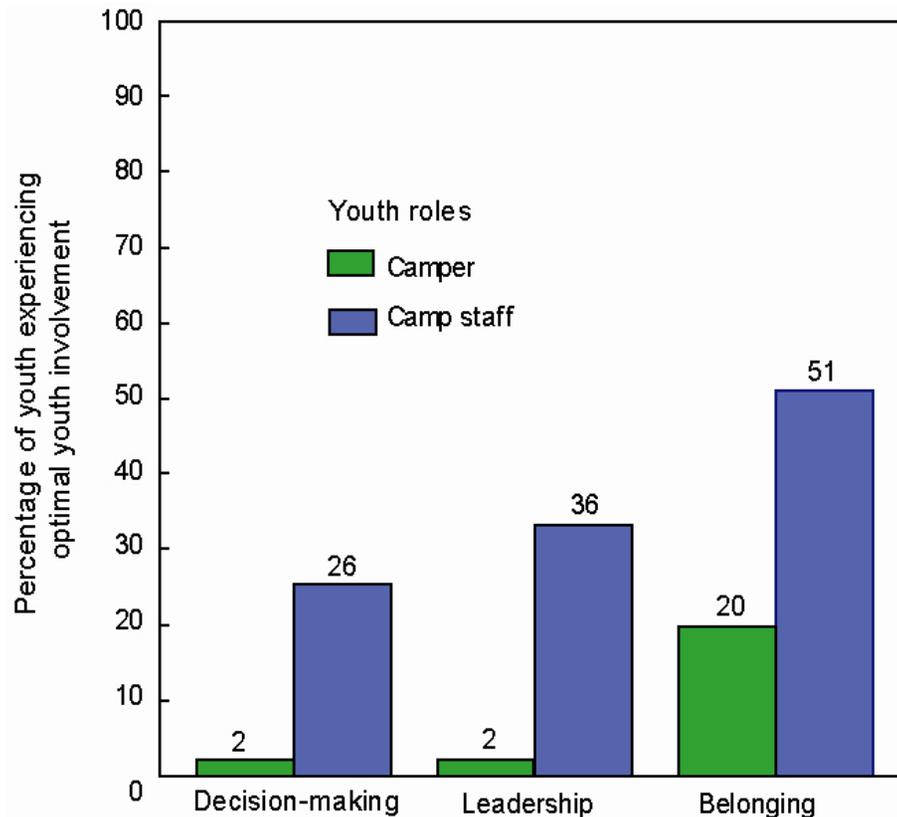
Safety



Sample Items

- Rules of how to treat each other are enforced here
- I feel safe when I am at 4-H Camp

Youth Involvement



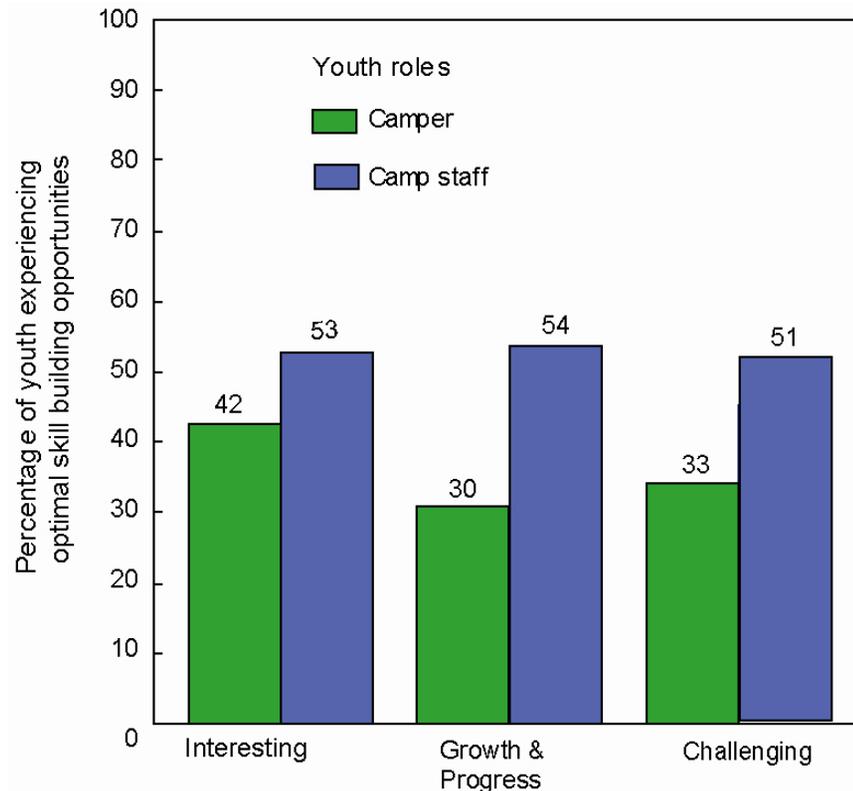
“At the meetings a lot of brainstorming takes place. Everyone throws out all their ideas...so it’s a pool of everyone’s thoughts and ideas that helps make the camp go.”

--Teen staff member

Sample Items

- How often helped decide what happens at 4-H Camp
- How often been in charge of things

Skill Building



“Every part of my leadership grows. My patience—patience has definitely grown. My listening skills—I think the most important quality of a leader is one who listens. Definitely you have to listen. You take what everything of what a leader is and everything—the patience, listening, facilitating and communicating...it just picks everything up.”

--Teen staff member

Sample Items

- At 4-H Camp I am getting better at doing the things I care about
- At 4-H Camp I get to learn how to do things I did not think I could do

Finding 2

- Camps were generally characterized by strong youth-adult partnerships where teen staff felt both empowered and supported



“The adults here try to step back a bit to enable the counselors to make a few mistakes; that is how you learn to be a better counselor and teacher. It’s good that they are not all over us about everything and nice that they allow you free reign to make some decisions and not force their opinions on you.”

--Teen staff member

Youth Adult Partnerships

In all the camps, youth staff saw themselves as playing the role of decision-makers, planners and leaders with the guidance and support of adults.

“They (adults) become your same level. They don’t have a power trip. They really, really meet you half way when it comes to things. They’re very understanding and they listen. They give us a lot of flexibility for what we want to do, and in how they operate. They’re very friendly as well. They’re just kind.

--Teen staff member

Discussion

- While teens in the California 4-H Youth Development Program are given great leadership opportunities in developing their camps, campers do not enjoy this same level of involvement.
 - The youth-adult partnership model, where young people share authority with adults to plan and implement camp, may explain the higher levels of youth involvement for teen staff than has been seen for youth in other camp studies (ACA, 2006).
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Implications

- Teen engagement as camp leaders through successful youth-adult partnership is a cornerstone to improved teen outcomes. How do we create this at camp?
 - What roles do teens have in your camp program and how might you foster greater involvement?
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