

2019 American Camp Association

Research Forum Abstracts

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December 8, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

This book includes 24 abstracts that will be presented at the 2019 American Camp Association (ACA) Research Forum to be held during the ACA annual conference in Nashville, TN from February 19-22, 2019. Twelve of these abstracts have been grouped into logical areas and will be verbally presented in four sessions. All abstracts will be on display as posters.

The Research Forum has grown in quantity and quality over the past decade. ACA's Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation (CARE) has been instrumental in pushing this forum forward. Staff at ACA have been enthusiastically supportive including Amy Katzenberger and Melany Irvin. Sara Johnson and Mat Duerden provided peer-reviewed external evaluations for the selection of these abstracts.

We look forward to presenting these papers at the 2019 Research Forum, but also recognize that many people cannot attend the annual meeting. We hope these short abstracts will provide information for those not able to attend. Please contact the authors if you have further questions.

Best wishes,



Ann Gillard, Ph.D.
2019 ACA Research Forum Coordinator

The proper way to cite these abstracts using APA 6th edition is:

Author name(s). (2019). Title of abstract. *2019 American Camp Association Research Forum Abstracts* (pp. x – x). Retrieved from <http://www.....>

Example:

Bennett, T. (2019). Investigating the effects of camp program quality on outcome achievement across gender and ethnicity. *2019 American Camp Association Research Forum Abstracts* (pp. 4 - 6). Retrieved from <http://www....>

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PARENTAL ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH SUMMER CAMP: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ACROSS CAMP STAFFING MODELS

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Although parents recognize involving their children in out-of-school time (OST) experiences may provide important developmental benefits (Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, & Thurber, 2007), such experiences may also be a source of anxiety (Prezza, Alparone, Cristallo, & Luigi, 2006). Anxiety has been studied within the context of OST experiences, but these studies have examined anxiety within a narrow framework (Kingery, Peneston, Rice, & Wormuth, 2012) or have explored anxiety from the perspective of practitioners and not parents (Garst, Gagnon, & Bennett, 2016). Greater awareness of the range of factors that may contribute to parental anxiety associated with OST experiences can empower practitioners to better serve parents as well as inform future parent anxiety research.

This exploratory study collected responses about causes of parent anxiety associated with summer camp experiences from parents whose children attended camp representing two different staffing models—one staffed by volunteers and the other staffed by employees. The primary purpose of the study was to identify salient categories of anxiety and to examine if anxiety differed based on staffing model. The secondary purpose was to inform the development of a camp-related parent anxiety measure as an intentional future direction following the model provided by Kunz and Grych (2013).

Method

Data were analyzed from an open-ended question included on a post-camp online parent questionnaire distributed to parents whose children attended camp sessions staffed using either a volunteer or employee staffing model. The camp sessions were associated with two different universities located in different U.S. regions, and parents were recruited by the administrators of the camp sessions. Out of 2,191 emails distributed to parents, 656 parents responded to the open-ended question for a 29.9% response rate. Participants tended to be female (80.2%), White (89.6%), married (79.4%), well-educated with either a Bachelor's (36.6%) or Master's degree (27.4%), and have annual incomes between \$100,001-\$150,000. Although a third of participants (33.5%) never attended camp, 21.8% attended camp one or two years.

To measure parent anxiety associated with camp, parents were asked, "What are reasons why parents feel worried about their child attending camp?" An inductive approach (Maxwell, 2013) to content analysis was used advancing from codes to categories to themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Multiple coders strengthened the validity of the interpretation of the data analysis and reduced investigator bias (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Across three coders intercoder agreement was .99 (McHugh, 2012). Salient codes were identified based on frequency, and categories of parent anxiety were determined based on conceptual similarities across salient codes. After salient categories of parent anxiety were identified, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted comparing camps staffed by volunteers and camps staffed by employees to determine if response to the open-ended question was conditioned on camp staffing model.

Results

The first research question (R1) was, "What sources of anxiety do parents associate with their child's summer camp experience?" Eleven categories of parent worries emerged through the content analysis process, including (in order of salience): separation and loss of

communication; not worried or an alternate response; safety and concerns about peers/bullying; lack of trust in camp staff and administrators; lack of parent control and overprotection; child's adaptability for camp and their behavior at camp; child's social needs and enjoyment; lack of parent/child understanding of, and preparedness for, camp; child's health, medical, and physical needs; fear influenced by media and society; and nature-related worry.

The second research question (R2) was, "Does camp-related parent anxiety differ based on camp administration model?" We found no significant difference between camps staffed by volunteers and camps staffed by employees based on anxiety response category: $\chi^2(9) = 14.911$, $p = .093$. Parents were no more likely to perceive anxiety associated with camp when the camp was staffed with volunteers as they were when the camp was staffed by employees.

This study also sought to inform the development of a parent anxiety measure associated with OST experiences. Based on the emergent themes, a set of factors was identified with items developed (or adapted from validated measures) to reflect the categorical themes. These factors include separation; safety (adapted from Fisak, Holderfield, Douglas-Osborn, & Cartwright-Hatton, 2012); trust in staff; overparenting (Gagnon & Garst, 2018); child adaptability and behavior; social support and enjoyment; preparedness; health, medical, and physical needs; media-induced fear (adapted from Bennetts et al., 2018); and nature (Gagnon & Garst, 2018).

Discussion and Implications

The prominence of separation and loss of communication as a primary source of camp-related parent anxiety is consistent with prior literature (Simons et al., 2007), yet few camp studies outside of the homesickness literature (Kingery et al., 2012) have examined camp-related separation. Several of the emergent categories of parent anxiety were consistent with those identified by Fisak et al. (2012), and differences may be explained by the uniqueness of the summer camp (Olsen, Powell, Garst, & Bixler, 2018) when compared with other settings more familiar to parents. Notably, this study found almost no evidence of nature-related anxiety, which is surprising considering literature suggesting parents are fearful of their child's contact with the outdoors (Beyer et al., 2015).

The lack of a statistically significant difference between sources of anxiety based on staffing model (i.e., volunteers vs. employees) is interesting as prior literature suggests volunteers and employees might be viewed differently due to perceptions of trust between parents and staff (Metz, Roza, Meijs, van Baren, & Hoogervorst, 2017) as well as outcomes parents associate with staff (Tomlinson, Sherr, Macedo, Hunt, & Skeen, 2017). This finding is encouraging as it suggests staff performance may be consistent across staffing models, at least within the targeted camps. Thus, this study may offer an empirical rebuttal to the conventional wisdom that employees are better equipped than volunteers when it comes to the provision of quality camp experiences and supports the "interchangeability" of volunteers and employees as suggested by Handy and Mook (2008).

This study can inform parent communication, education, and orientation strategies, particularly for camps and similar OST programs involving overnight separation from parents and interaction with novel people, settings, or experiences. Specifically, this study identifies common sources of anxiety for parents who send their children to summer camp, and practitioners should use the study findings to guide the development of targeted messaging that helps parents better understand successful separation between parents and children; administrative practices supporting youth physical and emotional safety; and procedures for staff screening, training, and supervision. Indeed, many of the study findings represent actionable concerns.

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