

# Parent Perceptions of Anxiety:

*A Comparative Analysis Across Summer Camps*

Barry A. Garst, Ph.D. - Clemson University

Lisa K-P. Olsen - Clemson University

Megan Owens, Ph.D. - Western Illinois University

Ryan J. Gagnon, Ph.D. - Clemson University



# Background

- Although parents recognize that involving their children in play, leisure, and/or recreational (PLR) experiences provides important developmental benefits (Henderson et al., 2007), such experiences may also be a source of anxiety for parents (Prezza et al., 2006).
- Studies of parent anxiety suggest reasons why parents might be worried about their child's PLR experiences.
  - social and environmental worries (Prezza et al., 2005)
  - physical safety and social standing worries (Fisak et al., 2012)



# Background

- Understanding **factors that contribute to parental anxiety** within the context of PLR experiences such as summer camp may help program providers better mitigate parental concerns.
- Garst, Gagnon, and Bennett (2015) examined **camp program provider perceptions of parent anxiety** and found parent anxiety was related to:
  - Parental separation and related loss of communication
  - Parental lack of camp experience
  - **Parental lack of trust in camp administration and staff**
  - Parental tendency to show overparenting behaviors
  - Parental fear for their child's physical/emotional/social safety
  - Parental belief that their child was unprepared for camp

# Background

- Camp staffing models (volunteers vs. paid staff) provides one way to explore parental perceptions of trust in staff and administrators.
- Research in human service settings suggests parents place more “affective trust” in volunteers but more “cognitive trust” in employees (Metz et al., 2017).
- Staffing model has not been used as a lens for understanding parental perceptions of camp experiences.

# Purpose

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**Primary purpose** - to compare parent worry across parents whose children attended residential summer camps that differed based on their staffing model (i.e., employees vs. volunteers)

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**Secondary purpose** - to generate qualitative categories to inform a quantitative measure of parent anxiety to guide future research in PLR settings

# Research Question

Does camp-related parent anxiety differ based on camp staffing model?

- **H<sup>1</sup>- Parent anxiety will differ based on camp staffing model (using paid employees versus volunteer staff).**



# Data Collection Procedures

- In the Summer of 2016, data were collected from **954 parents** whose children attended residential summer camps administered by one of two different state-level camping organizations that differed based on staffing model.
- Parents were asked to complete an **online Qualtrics survey** administered 1-2 weeks following their child's camp session to share their perceptions of their child's camp experience.
- Out of these parents, **693 responded** to an open-ended question about parent perceptions of anxiety associated with their child attending camp:

*"We want to better understand why some parents are anxious about experiences like summer camp. Based on your own thoughts and feelings about camp, what are reasons why parents feel worried about their child attending camp?"*

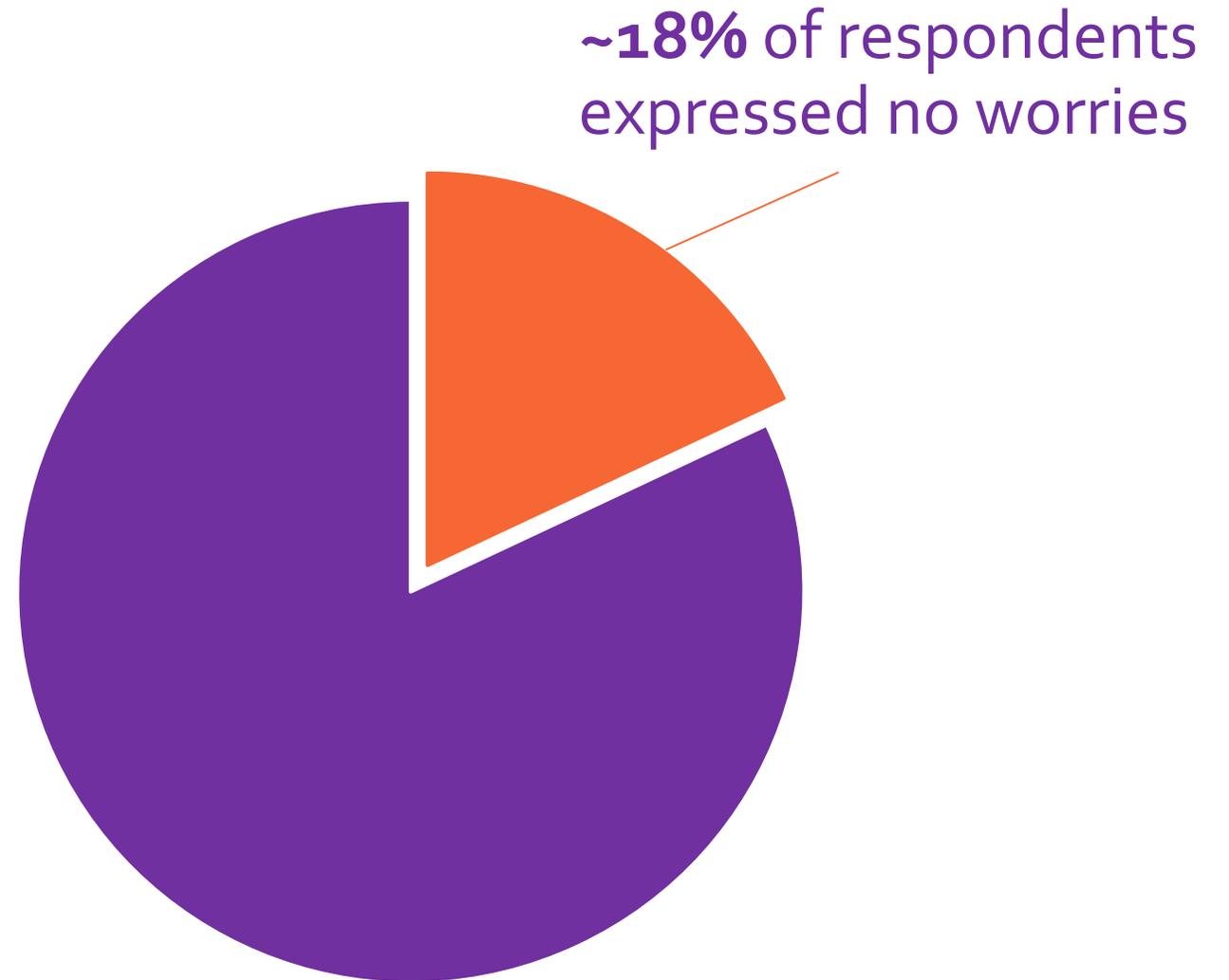
# Sample

- Respondents tended to be **female** (89.8%), **White** (90.2%), and **married** (79.7%).
- Most respondents represented households with **annual incomes ranging from \$75,001 to \$100,000** (16.7%) or **\$100,001 to \$150,000** (27.6%).
- Respondents tended to have either a **Bachelor's** (36.9%) or **Masters degree** (28.7%).
- Although a majority of respondents attended camp as a child, **30% had no camp experience**.

# Analysis

- **Conventional content analysis** (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was used by three research team members to code the qualitative responses to the open-ended question.
- **Process:** Independent coding of 20% of the data and creation of initial codebooks by each coder → team discussion of codes → creation of final codebook with codes, definitions, and exemplary quotes → coding of all data using final codebook → team discussion of coding to determine agreement (Inter-rater agreement was **99%**.)
- After the final codebook was developed, patterns and associations across the initial codes were identified to construct **10 categories of anxiety**. Trustworthiness procedures included **triangulation across multiple coders** and **researcher reflection** to minimize bias.

# Results



# Results

Count	Categories of Parent Anxiety Associated with Camp
159	Separation and loss of communication
100	Safety and concerns about peers/bullying
74	Concerns about, and lack of trust in, camp staff and administrators
57	Parent control and overprotection
55	Concerns about child's adaptability for camp and their behavior at camp
44	Concerns about child's social needs and enjoyment
41	Lack of parent/child understanding of, and preparedness for, camp
23	Concerns about child's health, medical, and/or physical needs
9	Parental fears associated with the influence of media / society
2	Concerns associated with nature

# Results

- H<sup>1</sup>- Parent anxiety will differ based on camp staffing model (using paid employees versus volunteer staff).
- Our findings indicated across the 10 categories of anxiety there were no statistically meaningful ( $p \leq .05$ ) differences across organization A (with camps staffed by volunteers) and organization B (with camps staffed by employees).

# Discussion

- Non-significant effects of camp staffing model suggest that parent perceptions of anxiety **did not differ** based on whether their child's camp was staffed by volunteers or employees.
- Parent anxiety was most often associated with separation and a **lack of communication and contact** between parent and child, **concerns about safety**, and a **lack of trust in staff**. These are areas that PLR program providers should target in parent outreach strategies.

## Discussion

- Reasons for **parent anxiety associated with camp settings were broader** than those suggested by other studies (Prezza et al., 2006), yet reflective of Garst, Gagnon, and Bennett's (2015) study of camp program providers' perceptions of parent anxiety.
- Although suggested by previous studies in the PLR literature, **parent anxiety associated with nature was negligible** in this study, even though many of the activities provided by the camps took place outdoors.

## Future Directions

- The secondary purpose of this study was to develop and validate a measure of parent anxiety in PLR settings. The 10 categories of parent anxiety identified in this study provide a starting point, based on a large sample of parents across two state camping programs, for the development of such a measure.
- Examine parent anxiety across other camp types [e.g., medical specialty camps; camps accredited by national governing bodies and associations], as well as other PLR settings (e.g., after-school programs, play settings)

# References

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Please contact [bgarst@clemson.edu](mailto:bgarst@clemson.edu)  
for more information about this project.

