

Does 4-H Parent Volunteering Impact Retention of High School 4-H Members?

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Introduction/Need for Research

4-H helps youth develop life skills, academic skills, self-esteem, resiliency, and citizenship; lower risky behaviors; and contribute to the development of communities (Avent & Jayaratne, 2017). 4-H membership is declining- the number of members enrolling is fewer than the number of youth leaving (Newby & Sallee, 2011). Specifically, teenage membership, starting around age 11, is decreasing at an alarming rate (Bartoszuk & Randall, 2011). Many 4-H clubs rely on parents as resources for projects, and parents frequently act as 4-H volunteers (Radhakrishna et al., 2013). Parents were found to have the greatest influence on 4-H member enrollment (Gill et al., 2010). Parent interest may also factor into the higher rates of enrollment seen from ages 8 – 11, while the steady decline in member population begins at age 12 and continues on through age 18 (Harder et al., 2005). The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent gender, parental education and involvement in 4-H programs explained differences in retaining high school age 4-H members. Specific research questions included (1) Describe the gender, community size, and parental education of the sample, (2) Describe the involvement in 4-H of parents of high school agriculture students, and (3) Determine to what extent gender, parental education and parental involvement in 4-H programs explained differences in retaining high school age 4-H members.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) of motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Relative to this study, subjective task values refer to the choice of certain tasks or activities for which students are intrinsically motivated to complete (Loh, 2019). Subjective task values and related expectancy for success are found positively correlated and interactively linked to students' achievement and academic choices (Loh, 2019).

Methodology

Researchers collected data at the Lincoln University District FFA Contest in Jefferson City, Missouri in the spring of 2020. A paper and pencil survey was distributed to all FFA student attendees. This purposive sample was chosen based on their age and active involvement in extracurricular activities. The survey contained five demographic questions and seven questions pertaining to 4-H and FFA membership. 547 of 607 students returned completed surveys for a response rate of 90.1%. The survey was reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of experts prior to distribution and researchers received IRB approval. All students were active participants in their high school secondary agriculture education program, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years of age.

Results/Findings

Thirty-one FFA Chapters were represented in the research group. As a group, 218 of the 545 students (40%) responded they had been or were currently in 4-H; 38.1% of male FFA

students said they had been or were currently in 4-H, and were active in 4-H activities in a range of ages from 5-17. Of the female FFA students, 61% said they had been or were currently in 4-H, and began enrolling in 4-H activities as young as age 3 and as old as age 16. When asked about keeping 4-H membership while in FFA, only 7% of male respondents and 25% of females remained as active 4-H members while in FFA.

Only 4-H member data were included for objectives 2 and 3. For objective 2, researchers calculated what proportion of current and former 4-H members' parents served as volunteers. One hundred and thirty three current and former 4-H members (61.1%) responded at least one parent served as a 4-H volunteer, and 77 (35.3%) responded their parents did not volunteer.

For objective 3, researchers conducted a log linear analysis to determine to what extent the data fit the model of gender, parental education, and parental involvement differences in 4-H members' persistence into high school. Preliminary modeling violated the assumption of minimum frequencies for expected case sizes, so researchers removed parent education as the least contributing factor in the model, and data were collapsed. The revised model of parental involvement, gender, and 4-H retention on met the assumptions for log analysis. The likelihood ratio of this model was $\chi^2(2) = 4.24, p = 0.12$. Researchers found a non-significant three way association $\chi^2(1) = 3.10, p = 0.078$ between member gender, parental involvement, and retention in 4-H. Researchers found significant two-way interactions between retention of 4-H membership and parental involvement $\chi^2(1) = 64.58, p < 0.01$ and parental involvement and gender $\chi^2(1) = 5.75, p < 0.01$. The main effects of gender $\chi^2(1) = 12.14, p < 0.01$ and parental involvement $\chi^2(1) = 14.18, p < 0.01$ were significant. The odds of an FFA member staying in 4-H during their FFA career was 2.17 higher for males and 4.69 higher for females whose parents served as 4-H volunteers. The researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis for the full model. Of the 46 male FFA students who continued in 4-H, 39 had parents who volunteered. Of the 37 male students who left 4-H after they become involved in FFA, 16 parents were not involved in their 4-H experience. There were 74 female FFA students, who continued in 4-H, and 63 of their parents volunteered. Of the 61 female students who left 4-H after they become involved in FFA, 45 had parents were not involved in their experience.

Conclusions/Recommendations/Impact on profession

For this sample, there seems to be a strong association between high school 4-H retention and parental volunteering in the club. Whereas many males stayed in 4-H when there was no volunteer, parental involvement was a substantial predictor of female students staying in 4-H. Results should not be inferred to other groups. Successful 4-H youth experiences depend on parental participation and involvement, particularly for female 4-H members, In order to keep high school youth involved, parents need to remain involved as well. We encourage 4-H leaders to recruit, equip, and coach parents of teens to become volunteers to facilitate 4-H teen membership.

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