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Parental Anxiety Associated with Summer Camp Experiences: A Comparative Analysis Across Volunteer and Employee-Staffed Camps

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Parent anxiety can limit a parent's willingness to involve their child in out-of-school time experiences such as summer camps. Researchers have studied anxiety within the context of camp, but these studies used narrow frameworks of anxiety. In this exploratory study, we collected open-ended responses about causes of parent anxiety associated with summer camp experiences from 656 parents whose children attended one of two Extension-administered camps. The camps represented different camp staffing models—one primarily staffed by volunteers and the other primarily 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 develop a camp-related parent anxiety measure informed by the anxiety categories. Eleven categories were constructed from the data, which both affirmed and expanded existing literature on parent anxiety associated with camp experiences. No differences in parent anxiety were found based on staffing model, suggesting that parents were no more likely to perceive anxiety associated with camp when the program was staffed with volunteers as they were when the program was staffed by employees. Implications for practice and future directions are examined.

Keywords: parent anxiety, summer camp, staffing model, qualitative research, volunteers, employees, separation, out-of-school time

Introduction

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 for parents (Prezza, Alparone, Cristallo, & Luigi, 2005). While literature regarding parental perspectives of their child's OST experiences has evolved (Bultas, Steurer, Balakas, Brooks, & Fields, 2015; Clary & Ferrari,

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2015), only a handful of studies have examined parental anxiety¹ (PA) within these settings (Gagnon & Garst, 2019; Kingery, Peneston, Rice, & Wormuth, 2012; McFarland, Hammon, Zajicek, & Waliczek, 2011). These studies provide frameworks for how PA associated with OST experiences has been conceptualized, including separation-related anxiety (Kingery et al., 2012; Simons et al., 2007), social versus environmental anxiety (Prezza et al., 2005), child-focused versus family-focused anxiety (Ogston, Mackintosh, & Myers, 2011), physical safety versus social standing anxiety (Fisak, Holderfield, Douglas-Osborn & Cartwright-Hatton, 2012), and people versus nature anxiety (Gagnon & Garst, 2019).

Beyond these frameworks, research supports alternative reasons parents may be anxious about their child's involvement in OST experiences. The context in which a child is participating in an OST experience may influence whether a parent is anxious about that experience. For instance, nature can be a source of PA (Beyer et al., 2015), as many OST experiences take place in an outdoor context. In this frequently novel nature-based setting, youth and their parents may encounter plants, animals, or terrain not experienced during a typical day (Olsen, Powell, Garst, & Bixler, 2018), and these potential encounters may be a source of concern for parents. PA associated with OST experiences may also be influenced by the degree to which parents have previous experience with the activity. For instance, findings from Garst, Gagnon, and Bennett's (2016) study of potential contributors to PA from the perspective of camp directors, suggested a lack of prior parental experience in the camp setting was a common characteristic of those expressing anxiety about their child's participation in camp. Further, researchers have associated the extent to which parents display excessive levels of control and protection behaviors (i.e., overparenting) with PA within the context of these OST experiences (Gagnon & Garst, 2019).

Managing PA within OST settings such as summer camp has emerged as a critical issue for practitioners (American Camp Association, 2013). Research in this area suggests an ongoing need to better manage PA influences on camp directors' program administration decisions, such as the development of parent communication strategies, policies and procedures, or alternative staffing approaches to address anxious parents' expectations and concerns (Garst et al., 2016). Despite the emerging concerns among OST practitioners, few studies have examined PA within OST settings; furthermore, few empirically validated measures capturing PA and its covariates within this context are available. Some, such as the Parent Worry Measure (PWM; Fisak et al., 2012), were developed for academic contexts (e.g., elementary and preschools). Others, such as the Parental Anxiety associated with Outdoor Experiences and Overparenting (PAOEO) scale (Gagnon & Garst, 2019), assess parental anxiety within a relatively narrow framework (e.g., anxiety related to people or nature). Thus, the emergence of practitioner concerns regarding PA as a factor that constrains a child's participation in an OST program, such as summer camp, and the need to understand factors that may influence parental anxiety in these alternative contexts,

¹ Here and throughout the manuscript, the term "parental anxiety" is referred to in the non-clinical sense. The literature supports use of the terms "anxiety" and "worry" interchangeably when referenced in a non-clinical context.

informed the present study. Importantly, a deeper understanding of PA within OST settings may empower program providers to better serve parents with diverse perspectives, as well as drive future research into the influences, causes, and consequences of PA associated with OST experiences (e.g., parental separation, novelty of the experience; see also Thurber & Sigman, 1998).

Parent Anxiety Associated with Program Staffing Models

As suggested by Garst et al. (2016), PA is an emerging and important concern impacting dimensions of program administration, including parent communication, policy and procedure development, and staffing approaches. With these dimensions in mind, camps can be categorized based on how they are administered and staffed using primarily *volunteer* or *employee* staffing models. Camp volunteers are unpaid, generally work shorter-duration camp sessions, and receive fewer days of pre-camp training (i.e., up to 1 day of training; Epley, Ferrari, & Cochran, 2017). Conversely, camp employees are paid staff, generally work longer-duration camp sessions, and typically receive additional days of pre-camp training compared to their unpaid volunteer peers (i.e., up to 5 days of training; American Camp Association, 2012).

Although the camp literature has not fully examined how camp staffing models may influence PA, studies comparing volunteer versus employee staffing models illustrate how parent perceptions of these programs might differ. For example, Metz, Roza, Meijs, van Baren, and Hoogervorst (2017) studied users of social services to better understand perceptions of trust toward volunteers and employees. In their study, user relationships with volunteers were distinguished by “affective trust” (i.e., empathetic, less judgmental) while user relationships with employees were reliant on “cognitive trust” (i.e., qualified, more expertise). Other studies also suggest parent perceptions of volunteer versus employee-staffed programs may differ based on participant outcomes (Mishara et al., 2016; Tomlinson, Sherr, Macedo, Hunt, & Skeen, 2017). For instance, in an examination of how volunteers and employees influenced youth outcomes within the context of community-based programs, Tomlinson et al. (2017) demonstrated youth attending programs staffed by employees experienced better cognitive development when compared to youth attending programs staffed by volunteers. In contrast, Mishara et al. (2016) found in post hoc analyses that volunteers were more likely than employees to be associated with positive program outcomes. Specifically, in their study, Mishara et al. (2016) illustrated when compared with employees, volunteers were viewed as more empathetic and respectful toward those receiving services and received higher scores on a crisis outcomes scale.

Taken together, these studies suggest two reasons why PA levels might differ based on camp staffing model. First, recognizing that a lack of trust can influence PA associated with camp experiences (Garst et al., 2016), parental perceptions of anxiety may differ based on employee versus volunteer models (Metz et al., 2017) and whether parents have trust in the individuals responsible for supervising their child. Second, as suggested by Tomlinson et al. (2017), parents

may report greater levels of outcome for their child when programs are staffed by employees versus volunteers. Put differently, parents may favor employee models over volunteer approaches if the parent perceives employees as more competent and more likely to facilitate safe, high-quality programs for their child.

Study Purpose and Contribution

Parental anxiety (PA) is an increasing concern for those charged with managing and facilitating OST experiences. Thus, to better understand PA and its potential subdimensions within the context of a common OST experience, camp, this study had three purposes. First, this study explored categories of PA parents associated with their child's participation in summer camp (e.g., separation-related anxiety [Kingery et al., 2012]; social vs. environmental anxiety [Prezza et al., 2005]) through a content analysis of parental reports of anxiety. Second, this study examined potential differences in camp-related PA based on camp staffing model (i.e., comparing employees versus volunteers; see Metz et al. [2017]; Mishara et al. [2016], and Tomlinson et al. [2017]). Third, given the limited measures of PA within OST experiences administered by either employees or volunteers, this study used the results of the content analysis to develop a measure of camp-related PA (e.g., see Kunz & Grych [2013] and Rowan & Wulff [2007] for other examples of measures emerging from content analyses).

Method

Study Design and Context

As part of a larger 2017 study exploring parent perceptions of their child's camp experience, responses to an open-ended question about parental anxiety were collected from parents whose children attended one of two university-affiliated camp programs. The camps were located in two regions of the U.S. and affiliated with Extension programs. The concept of "Extension" is based on the idea of extending university-based knowledge (from state land-grant institutions) to local communities through the dissemination of research-based practices (USDA, 2018). One camp program used a volunteer staffing model (i.e., Extension model), and the other used an employee staffing model (i.e., Extension-Enterprise model). In the Extension model, 15 residential camp sessions, lasting 4-7 days each, depending on camper age, were administered by local county Extension educators with support from their land-grant institution. Volunteers recruited and trained at the local level by the county Extension educator led the camp sessions. These volunteers received 30 hours of pre-camp training through the state 4-H program. In the Extension-Enterprise model, eight residential camp sessions lasting five days each were administered by one university program unit and staffed entirely with paid employees. These employees were required to complete five to seven days of training before they could take custodial care of campers. In addition, employees supervising high-risk areas (i.e., aquatics, adventure) were required to receive an additional three to five days of specialized training.

Study Sample and Recruitment

Administrators of the Extension and the Extension-Enterprise model programs recruited parents into the study. Prior to data collection, the research team obtained Institutional Review Board approval for the study through the two universities, and informed consent was obtained from the study participants. One week following their child's camp experience, parents received an email from camp administration with a link to an online Qualtrics questionnaire and instructions for completing the questionnaire. One week later (two weeks following completion of their child's camp experience), camp administration sent a reminder email to parents along with a prompt to complete the questionnaire if they had not already done so. Parents received an incentive for survey completion through an opportunity to collect one of six \$100 gift cards.

Camp administrators distributed a total of 929 emails to parents whose children attended the Extension model camp. Out of these 929 emails, 214 parents responded to the questionnaire and completed the open-ended question for a response rate of 23%. Similarly, a total of 1,262 emails were distributed to parents whose children attended the Extension-Enterprise model camp. Out of these 1,262 emails, 442 parents responded to the questionnaire and completed the open-ended question for a response rate of 35%. Across both sites, 656 parents responded to the open-ended question for a response rate of 30%.

The questionnaire collected demographic data from all respondents (see Table 1). Parent respondents tended to be female (89.6%) and white (89.8%). The largest percentage of participants (26.5%) reported an annual income between \$100,001-\$150,000, and more than two thirds (79.7%) indicated they were married. Participants were well educated, with most reporting either a Bachelor's degree (36.9%) or a Master's degree (28.7%). Although close to a third of participants (29.1%) had not attended camp as a child, 21.7% had attended camp either 1 or 2 years, with an average of 3.91 years of previous camp attendance as a child.

Table 1. Parent Descriptives Across the Two Participating Camps

Demographic Characteristics: Percentage (Frequency)
Parent Gender
Female = 89.6% (588)
Male = 10.2% (67)
No response = <1% (1)
Parent Race
White = 89.8% (589)
African American = 4.4% (29)
Latino = 1.5% (10)
Asian Origin = 1.4% (9)
East Asian (Indian) = <1 (2)
Multiple Race = 1.5% (10)

Demographic Characteristics: Percentage (Frequency)

Parent Income

0-\$12,500 = <1% (3)
\$12,501-\$25,000 = 1.5% (10)
\$25,001- \$35,000 = 2.1% (14)
\$35,001-\$50,000 = 4.6% (30)
\$50,001-\$75,000 = 10.7% (70)
\$75,001-\$100,000= 16.0% (105)
\$100,001-150,000 = 26.5% (174)
\$150,001-\$200,000 = 13.1% (86)
\$200,001-\$250,000 = 6.4% (42)
\$250,001 and up = 5.8% (38)
Prefer not to respond = 8.8% (58)
No response = 4.0% (26)

Parent Relationship Status

Single = 3.7% (24)
Divorced = 7.6% (50)
Widowed = <1% (3)
Married = 79.7% (5236)
Remarried = 4.0% (26)
Separated = 1.2% (8)
Long-term relationship = 3.4% (22)

Parent Education

High school diploma or equivalent = 2.7% (18)
Some college (no degree) = 9.9% (65)
Technical degree or certification = 4.1% (27)
Associates degree = 7.3% (48)
Bachelor's degree = 36.9% (242)
Master's degree = 28.7% (188)
Doctorate or Ph.D. = 10.2% (67)

Parent Experience with Camp

Did not attend camp as a child = 29.1% (191)
1 year = 11.6% (76)
2 years = 10.1% (66)
3 years = 9.9% (65)
4 years = 9.9% (65)
5 years = 9.3% (61)
6 years = 4.7% (31)
7 years = 2.4% (16)
8 years = 3.2% (21)
9 years = 1.4% (9)
10 years = 3.4% (22)
11+ years = 1.4% (9)
No response = 3.7% (24)

Data Collection and Analysis

Parents responded to the question, “What are reasons why parents feel worried about their child attending camp?” The research team used an open-ended, inductive approach to content analysis (Maxwell, 2012), defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), to analyze responses. Similar content analysis coding approaches—moving from codes to categories to themes—have been used to understand open-ended question responses (Carr & Williams, 1993; Pritchard & Havitz, 2006). In this study, conventional content analysis guided the data analysis, which was appropriate because the purpose of this study was to describe a specific phenomenon (i.e., parent perceptions of anxiety) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

After the research team identified themes, frequency effect sizes (see Table 2) were calculated for each theme following the recommendations of Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) to identify the number of participant responses within a theme that contained a finding divided by the total number of responses. In general, frequency effect size provides a way to determine and compare the magnitude of an effect, in this case, the salience of parent anxiety. The calculation of frequency effect sizes has been used in other qualitative studies to assess and report the relative magnitude of qualitative thematic findings (Sandelowski, Barroso, & Voils, 2007).

The research team used multiple coders to strengthen the trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data analysis and reduce investigator bias (i.e., investigator triangulation; Creswell & Miller, 2000), consistent with the approach used by Pritchard and Havitz (2006). Furthermore, coders were blind to the camp staffing model (i.e., Extension or Extension-Enterprise) while coding. The research team followed a systematic coding process outlined by Hruschka et al. (2004) to ensure intercoder reliability (i.e., intercoder agreement) across the coders, including “segmentation of text, codebook creation, coding, assessment of reliability, codebook modification, and final coding” (p. 310). First, each coder independently coded 20% of the open-ended responses; that is, each coder identified segments of text (i.e., words, phrases, sentences) representative of one concept based on the meaning of that text segment. While coding, each coder created an independent codebook. Coders then met to discuss the initial set of codes and assess reliability. Next, coders merged the independent codebooks to create one final codebook that reflected coder agreement. After all open-ended data were analyzed using the final codebook, the coders met again to assess reliability.

With regard to intercoder reliability, Hruschka et al. (2004) stressed that the use of multiple coders strengthens the reliability of the codebook. Across the three coders, intercoder agreement was .99, which McHugh (2012) described in the category of “above .90 almost perfect” (p. 280). Salient codes were then identified based on frequency, and categories of PA were determined based on conceptual similarities across salient codes. In addition to investigator triangulation,

the coders strengthened the validity of the study findings through careful attention to disconfirming evidence during the coding process (i.e., data suggesting parents were not anxious about their child attending camp; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

The first study purpose was to explore categories of PA associated with their child's summer camp participation. Eleven categories of PA emerged through the coding process (see Table 2). These categories included (in order of frequency): 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. Frequency effect sizes ranged from 0.24 (for "parental separation and lack of communication" to 0.003 (for "nature-related concerns). Representative quotes presented in Table 2 provide evidence of the emergent categories.

Table 2. Evidence Supporting Parental Anxiety Themes Associated with Summer Camp Experiences

Categories	Frequency	Frequency Effect Size	Representative Quotes
Separation and loss of communication	159	0.24	<p>"When a child attends camp, it is often the first time they are away from their family for an entire week and there is no opportunity to talk with them..."</p> <p>"We are so conditioned, as parents, to know what our kids are doing every moment that it produces anxiety when we don't."</p>
Not worried or alternate response	122	0.18	<p>"I don't have any worries about our kids attending camp. As a family, we spend a lot of time doing outdoor activities and we are comfortable with that."</p>
Safety and concerns about peers/bullying	100	0.15	<p>"Safety...nobody watches your kids like you do. It's something every parent worries about."</p> <p>"I think most parents feel fear for the safety of their children - we worry that something bad will happen...injury, sexual abuse, bullying..."</p>
Lack of trust in camp staff and administrators	74	0.11	<p>"Parents worry if they don't know staff members or don't have information on the credentials and screening of staff members."</p> <p>"Leaving your child with a complete stranger"</p> <p>"...that the counselors are not experienced enough to handle the kids."</p>

Categories	Frequency	Frequency Effect Size	Representative Quotes
Lack of parental control and overprotection	57	0.08	“Because they don't have control over what their kids do...” “Some parents have difficulty letting go of control.” “They cannot control or protect their child.”
Child's adaptability for camp and their behavior at camp	55	0.08	“We were worried that she would become homesick.” “I was mainly worried about how my child would adapt and being homesick.” “You are never quite sure he will cope.”
Child's social needs and enjoyment	44	0.06	“Unsure my child will ‘fit in’ and make friends.” “I want my child to feel included...and well liked. Letting her go into an experience like this was difficult.”
Lack of parent/child understanding of, and preparedness for, camp	41	0.06	“Not knowing exactly what is going on.” “[Parents] don't know enough about who's going to be there, where it is, what is going to happen.”
Child's health, medical, and physical needs	23	0.03	“My child has ADD and needs reminders to remember daily self-care.” “I am...worried about health issues specific to my child's allergies.” “I wasn't sure if he had been paying attention to the lessons we had been trying to teach him about taking care of himself...if he would actually brush his teeth and put on deodorant.”
Fear influenced by media and society	13	0.02	“We are bombarded with stories about kids in dangerous situations by the news media.” “...the media shares negative experiences with school, summer programs, and daycares.”
Nature-related worry	2	0.003	“I only worry about bug bites and sunburn.” “I worry about mice in their cabin. Mousetraps going off all through the night.”

The second study purpose was to determine how camp-related PA might differ based on camp staffing model. Based on the results of the content analysis (Table 2), the research team tested the categories to examine possible differences between the Extension (volunteer) and the Extension-Enterprise (employee) model camps. Specifically, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted, comparing Extension and Extension-Enterprise camps to determine if response to the open-ended question was conditioned on program staffing model (i.e., volunteer vs. employee driven; see Table 3). At a global level, the research team found no significant difference between the Extension camp and the Extension-Enterprise camp based on whether they responded to the open-ended question: $\chi^2(9) = 14.911, p = .093$. Further, the research team found no significant between-group differences for most categories identified in Table 2: “separation and loss of communication” ($b = -.154, \text{Wald } \chi^2(1) = .310, p = .578$), “lack of trust in camp staff and administrators” ($b = -.204, \text{Wald } \chi^2(1) = .317, p = .573$), “parent control and overprotection” ($b = -.092, \text{Wald } \chi^2(1) = .064, p = .801$), “child's social needs and enjoyment” (b

= -.467, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 1.301, p = .254$), “lack of understanding and preparedness for camp” ($b = .173$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = .193, p = .660$), “child’s health, medical, and physical needs” ($b = -.903$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 2.324, p = .127$), “fear associated with the influence of media and society” ($b = .467$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = .697, p = .404$), or “not worried or provided an alternative response” ($b = .216$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = .584, p = .445$). In one instance, the research team found a statistically significant between-group difference, “concerns about child’s adaptability for camp and their behavior at camp” ($b = -.940$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 4.893, p = .027$). Another category (“concerns about nature”) was not included in the analysis as it only had two responses, both at the Extension-Enterprise camp, thus between-group comparisons were unavailable.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis for Between-group Differences of Extension (Volunteer) and Extension-Enterprise (Employee) Camps

Extension (Volunteer) vs. Extension Enterprise (Employee)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>p</i> value	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
separation and loss of communication	-.154 (.277)	.578	.498	.857	1.475
lack of trust in camp staff and administrators	-.204 (.361)	.573	.402	.816	1.657
parent control and overprotection	-.092 (.366)	.801	.445	.912	1.867
child’s social needs and enjoyment	-.467 (.410)	.254	.281	.627	1.399
lack of understanding and preparedness for camp	.173 (.395)	.660	.549	1.189	2.577
child’s health, medical, and physical needs	-.903 (.593)	.127	.127	.405	1.294
fear associated with the influence of media and society	.467 (.560)	.404	.533	1.596	4.780
concerns about child’s adaptability for camp and their behavior at camp	-.940 (.425)	.027	.170	.391	.898
not worried or provided an alternative response	.216 (.283)	.445	.713	1.241	2.159

Note: $R^2 = .023$ (Cox & Snell), $.023$ (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(9) = 14.911, p = .093$; b = regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; p value = probability value.

The third study purpose was to generate items to inform a measure of PA to guide future research. Specifically, this study proposed Likert-type items (i.e., 1-7 scale where 1= very untrue and 7= always true) to inform a PA measure based on the categories generated from the results of the content analysis described in Table 2. The research team identified a set of factors with items developed (or adapted from validated measures) to reflect the categories in Table 4. These factors include separation; safety (adapted from Fisak et al., 2012); trust in staff; overparenting (Gagnon & Garst, 2019); 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 (adapted from Gagnon & Garst, 2019).

Table 4. Proposed Items for a Parent Anxiety Associated with Summer Camp Scale Developed from Emergent Categories

Scale	Items
Separation	I worry about being away from my child.
	I worry about not being in contact with my child.
	I worry when I can't communicate with my child.
	I worry about not seeing my child.
Safety (Adapted from Fisak et al., 2012)	I worry that something bad will happen to my child.
	I worry that my child will be injured.
	I worry that someone will harm my child.
Trust in staff	I worry that my child will be bullied.
	I worry about how staff will manage my child.
	I worry about how my child will be supervised by staff.
	I worry that the staff are not properly trained.
Overparenting (Gagnon & Garst, 2019)	I worry that staff will not pay attention to my child.
	I make important decisions for my child.
	I have told my child that he/she needs my support to succeed in life.
Child adaptability and behavior	I try to protect my child from negative influences.
	I worry that my child won't follow the rules.
	I worry about my child's behavior.
	I worry about how my child will act.
Social support and enjoyment	I worry about my child getting into trouble.
	I worry that my child will be disliked by others.
	I worry that my child won't make friends.
	I worry that my child will be rejected by others.
Preparedness	I worry that other children won't accept my child.
	I worry that my child won't know what to expect.
	I worry because I don't know what my child will do.
	I worry that my child won't be prepared for the activities.
Health, medical, and physical needs	I worry that my child won't have everything they need.
	I worry that my child's health needs won't be taken care of.
	I worry about my child's medical condition(s).
	I worry about my child's personal hygiene.
Media-induced fear (Adapted from Bennetts et al., 2018)	I worry about my child's physical health.
	I worry about my child when they are out without an adult.
	I worry about letting my child go anywhere without an adult.
	I worry about my child when they are out somewhere familiar without an adult.
Nature (Gagnon & Garst, 2019)	I worry about letting my child go out anywhere without me.
	I am afraid that my child will get lost outside in nature.
	I am afraid of wild animals or insects outside in nature.
	I am afraid of my child getting hurt if he/she plays outside in nature.

Discussion

This study explored sources of parent anxiety and compared PA across parents whose children attended summer camps that differed based on staffing model (i.e., primarily volunteers or primarily employees). Eleven categories of camp-related PA were identified. The prominence of separation and loss of communication (between parent and child) as a primary source of camp-related PA in this study is consistent with prior literature (Simons et al., 2007). Indeed, the frequency effect size for this dimension of PA was of a much greater magnitude ($r = 0.24$) when compared with that of other categories. Few camp studies outside of the homesickness literature (Kingery et al., 2012; Thurber & Sigman, 1998) have examined separation associated with summer camp experiences. Thus, this study responds to Simons et al.'s (2007) call for more camp-related research on parental anxiety concerning separation from their child.

The findings of this study can also be compared with those from Fisak et al. (2012), who also asked parents open-ended questions related to sources of PA. Some categories of PA that emerged in this study were conceptually similar to categories identified by Fisak et al. (2012). For instance, Fisak et al.'s "wellness/physical well-being" is reflective of this study's "child's health, medical, and physical needs" and Fisak et al.'s "social competence/social adjustment" is similar to this study's "child's social needs and enjoyment." However, "life success/achievement" was a prominent category in Fisak et al.'s study yet was not identified in this study. This difference may be explained by the uniqueness of OST experiences, such as summer camp, when compared with other settings that may be more familiar to parents (Olsen et al., 2018), or because Fisak's study asked parents to identify sources of anxiety globally, while in this study questions were specific to the summer camp experience.

The study findings support and expand upon the work of Garst et al. (2016), who measured camp director perceptions of PA. For example, separation, lack of trust in staff and administrators, and safety concerns emerged as salient causes of PA in both studies. Notably, this study found almost no evidence of nature-related causes of anxiety, which is surprising considering literature suggesting parents are fearful of their child's contact with the outdoors (Beyer et al., 2015; Gagnon & Garst, 2019). The lack of nature-related PA in this study suggests that nature-related PA may be a characteristic of specific parent populations rather than a widespread characteristic of most parents.

The lack of a statistically significant difference between sources of anxiety due to camp staffing model, as evidenced by the multinomial logistic regression, is interesting considering prior literature suggesting volunteers and employees are viewed differently due to trust and/or parent perception of outcomes (Metz et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2017). These findings might reflect the familiarity some parents have with Extension or existing trusting relationships between parents and volunteers. If parents perceive volunteers and employees differently, then the results of this study suggest that such perceptions do not necessarily increase parental anxiety. From the

perspective of those responsible for program delivery, it is encouraging that parents did not perceive differences across Extension and Extension-Enterprise camps based on whether they were staffed by volunteers or employees. This may suggest that staff performance is consistent across these camp 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 youth programs and supports the “interchangeability” of volunteers and employees, as suggested by Handy, Mook, and Quarter (2008). However, due to the significant variability in camp volunteer training and preparation, more research is needed to confirm this study’s findings in other samples of camp staff.

This finding of no statistical difference may also be explained by parents’ lack of awareness of differences between camp staffing models. That is, parents may not perceive differences between a volunteer and an employee (i.e., as someone who might differ based on their camp experience or amounts of pre-camp training), assuming such differences exist. Further, anxiety-producing characteristics of the camp experience, although sometimes related to a staff domain (e.g., lack of trust in staff and administrators), may be associated with differences parents cannot easily detect during camper drop-off and pick-up, or may be informed by other parents’ impressions and therefore may not be captured in post-camp measures. In short, parents may be equally likely to be anxious (or not) across Extension volunteer and Extension-Enterprise employee staffing models because their anxiety is more closely related to more proximal factors such as separation and loss of communication.

Future Directions

An intentional future direction was to generate items that could inform a measure of PA to guide future research. Informed by studies using qualitative data to guide scale development (Kunz & Grych, 2013; Rowan & Wulff, 2007; Shoffner, Newsome, Barrio Minton & Wachter Morris, 2015), the current study sought to expand existing measures of PA. In doing so, this study extends the literature related to parental anxiety by broadening the categories of anxiety parents may report within the context of OST experiences (e.g., lack of trust in camp staff and administrators; a child’s health, medical, and physical needs). Although the frequency effect sizes for some of the PA categories were small, their presence in a large sample of parents across camps representing two different camp models suggests important factors when evaluating sources of camp-related parental anxiety.

Another future direction is examining PA within the context of camps serving children with disabilities and/or special medical needs. Research suggests a child’s ability level can influence PA (Antle, Mills, Steele, Kalnins, & Rossen, 2008; Ogston et al., 2011). For instance, Antle et al. (2008) found parents of children with disabilities most often worried about their child’s safety as their child became increasingly independent, as well as how their child would be productive in life and develop the necessary social supports to be successful. Further, Ogston et al. (2011)

stressed that “parents face great responsibility in caring for their children, but this responsibility is heightened for parents who have a child with a disability. It is important to understand the experience of . . . worry in mothers of children with disabilities” (p. 1379). Such a study of PA within the context of camps serving children with disabilities and/or special medical needs would inform whether such camp experiences elicit unique anxieties in parents.

Implication for Practice

This study can inform messaging for parent communication, education, and orientation programs, particularly programs such as youth camps and similar OST programs that involve 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. Program providers could use the study findings to guide the development of targeted information that helps parents better understand topics such as successful separation of parents and children; administrative practices providing for youth physical and emotional safety; and procedures for staff screening, training, and supervision. Indeed, many of the study findings represent actionable concerns. For example, camp program providers can take specific steps to build relationships with parents to reduce anxiety associated with lack of trust in program staff and administrators. Thurber (2005) offered strategies for addressing camp-related anxiety among children, and several have implications for parents, such as normalizing separation-related anxiety; providing parents and their children with “sneak preview” access to what the camp experience will be like to increase familiarity and reduce novelty; educating parents about supportive and unsupportive behaviors prior to and after camp-related separation; and practicing time away from home so parents and children can better cope with separation. Program providers can also supply parents with information about how camp staff are trained and prepared for their roles and responsibilities, as well as an opportunity to meet camp staff, to facilitate parent trust in staff.

Limitations

Although this study provided insights into PA associated with summer camp experiences, a few limitations are recognized. First, as a qualitative study, the findings are limited to the targeted population of parents. However, the large sample size and the collection of data across camps reflecting two staffing models in two different U.S. regions offer a credible glimpse into PA in camps. Second, the findings were based on a homogenous sample of parents comprised primarily of well-educated White mothers. Although such homogeneity is common in camp-related parent research (Gagnon & Garst, 2019), it may be that the causes of PA identified in this study are germane to this homogenous population of parents. What about the anxieties of parents representing differing groups? For example, although nature was not a salient cause of anxiety in this study within this population of parents, some literature suggests African Americans may view nature as a source of anxiety (Chapman, Kertz, Zurlage, & Woodruff-

Borden, 2008). Third, self-report bias on the part of parents may have influenced the accuracy of the study findings; however, the similarities in findings between this study and Garst et al. (2016) suggest that different informants (e.g., camp directors and parents) perceive similar sources of PA.

Conclusions

Recognizing the role parents and caregivers play as decision-makers regarding children's out-of-school time experiences, it is important to consider factors, such as anxiety, that may influence parental decision-making. This study was one of the few examinations of camp-related PA in a large sample of parents of early adolescents, which is particularly relevant in an era of parental overprotection and excessive control that may be fueled by PA (Fisak et al., 2012; Gagnon & Garst, 2019). This study was also the only known examination of PA in camps based on a comparison of volunteer and employee staffing models, providing evidence that PA may be unrelated to differences in these models. As this study broadens the understanding of the categories of camp-related anxieties parents perceive, it can guide the development of parent messaging and education interventions designed to reduce camp-related parental anxiety. Furthermore, because exploratory research, such as the current study, is an important step toward the development of confirmatory research, this study is positioned to inform improved measurement of PA in out-of-school time programs such as summer camps.

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