Self-efficacy and Perceived Organizational Support by Workers in a Youth Development Setting

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Abstract: The efficacy levels of workers in the youth development field can significantly impact the work done with youth. These levels may be impacted by workers' perceptions of administrative occupational support at their organization. To date, limited research exists that examines youth work efficacy levels, and no research studies exist analyzing the relationship between youth workers' efficacy levels and perceived organizational support. The current study examined the relationship between self-efficacy and the perceived organizational support felt by workers in a youth development setting. A total of 198 surveys were completed; results indicated that youth work efficacy was significantly related to perceived organizational support. This study is important to enhancing the body of knowledge regarding self-efficacy levels of workers in a youth development setting, as well as understanding motivation and self-confidence of youth development professionals.

Introduction

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capabilities to perform certain tasks (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy has been the focus of research for over 35 years, with empirical studies related to the coaching, education, leisure services, and management fields guiding organizational and individual behaviors (Denham, & Michael, 1981; Feltz, Chase, Moritz, & Sullivan, 1999; Gibson, & Dembo, 1984; Malete, & Feltz, 2000). Only recently, has the analysis of self-efficacy levels of workers in the youth development field become an important topic of discussion. Using self-efficacy theory as the foundation, youth work efficacy is the confidence youth workers have in their abilities to effectively work with youth (Kowalski, Gassman, & Konecny, 2011). Youth workers play a vital role in children's development, and whether it is teaching life skills or effectively designing creative play opportunities, it is important that child and youth care workers believe in their own abilities when guiding children.

A possible mitigating factor in the assessment of a youth workers' efficacy levels is the perceived organizational support felt by workers. Perceived organizational support (POS) is the extent to which staff members feel their employer is concerned with their well-being and the value of their contributions to the organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). As Speritzer (1995) noted, the way staff members view their own abilities in the workplace is a result of POS; the POS also impacts the level of competence employees feel in shaping their behaviors at work. Ideally, an interdependent workplace relationship between staff members and the supervisors of an organization creates a supportive environment, in turn, positively impacting self-efficacy and staff members' performance (Vogt, & Murrell, 1990).

Self-Efficacy, Youth Work Efficacy and Perceived Organizational Support

Self-efficacy is the belief one has in the successful performance of behaviors needed to produce certain outcomes. Self-efficacy is grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory; this theory describes human motivations, behaviors, attitudes, and the impact on individual's environment (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Maddux, 1995). Further self-efficacy is multifaceted and incorporated into research areas such as program management, organizational leadership, and group dynamics (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy expectations are an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to engage in a specific behavior; these expectations vary along three specific dimensions – magnitude, generality and strength (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Behaviors differing in magnitude are ranked depending on the difficulty level. The generality of a behavior refers to whether or not the expectations are associated with multiple situations or if they are situation specific. The final dimension, strength, refers to one's determination or perseverance in the face of obstacles and barriers.

The four main sources of information that can impact self-efficacy are performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Performance accomplishments are based on previously successful personal experiences. Vicarious experience, or witnessing others perform a desired behavior, may lead to envisioning successful or unsuccessful accomplishment of a task. Verbal persuasion includes the support significant others (i.e., friends, family) provide when attempting a behavior. Finally, physiological and affective states impact anxiety levels in response to stressful or challenging situations. Being physically healthy and reducing stressful and emotional situations are ways to avoid low self-efficacy levels (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Youth work efficacy (YWE) is the confidence youth development professionals have in their abilities to effectively care for youth (Kowalski, et al., 2011). It is important to understand youth work efficacy, as there are several factors associated within a youth worker's interpretation of their role that could enhance the work of practitioners and researchers in the profession. Edginton, Kowalski and Randall (2005) noted that youth work combines theory and practice, as well as the practical application of the body of knowledge associated with youth development.

The youth work professional body of knowledge is comprised of three components: theory, professional values, and applied or engineered skills (Edginton, et al., 2005). Theories supporting youth work may be found in a variety of disciplines such as philosophy, psychology and sociology. The theories inherent to these disciplines may help interpret the interactions between workers, youth, and other staff members, the philosophical and historical foundations of youth work, and the developmental stages of youth (Connell, & Kubisch, 2001; Edginton, et al., 2005). Professional values are the benchmarks that youth workers strive to achieve. Professional values "provide a beacon and compass to guide our [youth workers] efforts" (Edginton, et al., 2005, p. 261). For example, youth workers value nurturing relationships, the power of informal educational opportunities, ethical decision-making, promotion and protection of human rights, and empowerment (Banks, 1999; Edginton, et al., 2005; Jeffs, & Smith, 2005). The first two components, theory and professional values, create the opportunity for the third component, applied or engineered skills (Deschenes, McDonald, & McLaughlin, 2004; Edginton, et al., 2005). A large portion of applied skills are gained via on-the-job experience and staff development. Staff development can occur prior to working in the field through orientation, or during one's time in the field through in-service training. The combination of theories, professional values, and applied skills provide the foundation for individuals to become effective youth development professionals.

As stated earlier, POS is the extent to which employees feel their employer is concerned with their well-being, as well as the value of the employee's contributions to the organization (Eisenberger, et al., 1986). POS also includes employees' perceptions of whether the organization is willing to adequately support them in the following areas:
   a) monetary compensation for work done,
   b) aid during a time of need, such as illness or a work-related issue,
   c) interesting and stimulating work, and
   d) adequate working conditions (Eisenberger, et al., 1986).

The employees' ability to be innovative and spontaneously and creatively problem solve using the skills and techniques related to the job may also be linked to POS (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Praise, approval, and even constructive critique of workers' abilities impact the perception of organizational support. Employees' perception of organizational support would raise expectancy levels that the organization rewards greater effort linked to meeting organizational goals, known as effort-outcome expectancy. If an employee believes that organizational support exists, that belief strengthens employees' effort-outcome expectancy and affective attachment to the organization, resulting in greater efforts to fulfill the organization's goals. Konczak, Stelly and Trusty (2002) illustrated through their research that enhancing one's feelings of occupational self-efficacy can occur by identifying factors that may

impede the development of one's confidence associated with workplace duties, and then eliminating those factors through organizational support.

Using the existing research associated with youth work efficacy and POS, the purpose of this investigation was to examine if possible relationships exist between youth workers' POS levels and efficacy levels. As Hashemi, Nadi, Hosseini and Rezvanfar noted, "there is scant literature focusing on the relationship between POS and personnel's perceptions of their job self-efficacy" (2012, p.85). Currently, there are no research studies that examine youth workers' efficacy levels and the overall perception of organizational support in the youth development field. The researchers of the current study hypothesize that POS will be significantly related to the three indices of YWE – theory efficacy, professional values efficacy, and applied skills efficacy – as well as overall youth work efficacy. This research has a far-reaching impact on several factors associated with youth work and organizational development, including the creation and adherence to an organizational philosophy and management, staff development, programmatic leadership, and motivation in the workplace.
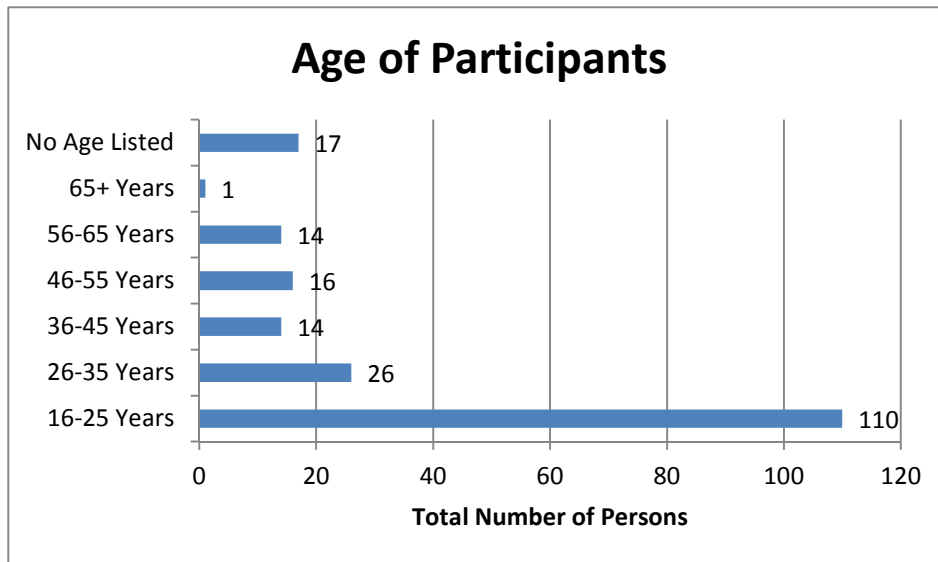
Method

After gaining Institutional Review Board approval, the researchers provided a survey to participants at an annual Midwestern state conference on youth development (see Appendix). The participants voluntarily completed a survey associated with youth work efficacy and perceived organizational support. Those individuals who completed the survey were ensured all responses would be kept anonymous and confidential. The survey consisted of multiple sections, with the first section including demographic questions. The second section incorporated questions associated with Eisenberger, et al. (1986) concept of perceived organizational support. This section included questions associated with the support provided to the participants and their youth development organization by parents, children, administrators, and other community members. The questions were in a Likert scale format ranging from 0-9, with 0 representing "poor" to 9 representing "excellent." The final section of the survey was the Youth Work Efficacy Scale, or YWES (Kowalski, et al., 2011), which consisted of questions pertaining to youth worker's efficacy levels. These questions were also in Likert scale format, ranging from 0-9, with 0 representing "not confident at all" to 9 representing "extremely confident". The YWES consists of three indices associated with youth worker efficacy: (a) theory efficacy (TE), (b) professional values efficacy (PVE), and (c) applied skills efficacy (ASE).
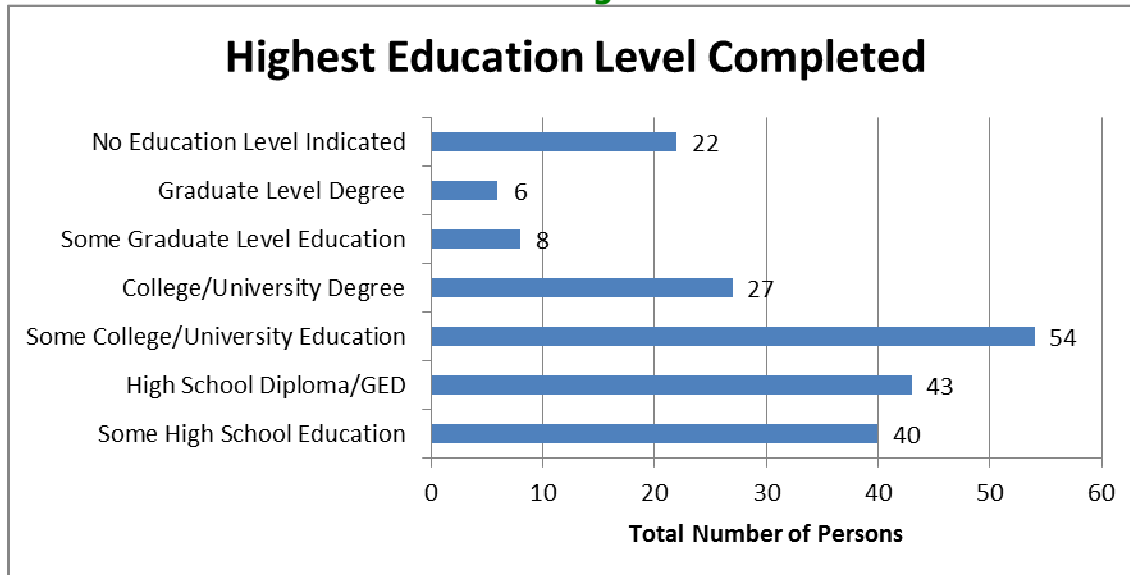
Results

The participants involved in the study were 198 youth development professionals. There were 31 males (15.7%) and 159 females (80.3%) who participated in the study; eight participants (4%) chose not to indicate their gender. The average age of participants involved in the study was 28.57 years. Study participants' age ranges are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Age of Participants

Age	Total Number of Persons
No Age Listed	17
65+ Years	1
56-65 Years	14
46-55 Years	16
36-45 Years	14
26-35 Years	26
16-25 Years	110

Total Number of Persons

There was a wide array of education levels completed by the participants in the study, as indicated in Figure 2. Over 60% of the participants in the study had completed some high school education, a high school diploma or their general education development (GED) diploma, or engaged in college/university education. A small percentage of participants (11%) chose not to indicate their highest educational level attained.

Figure 2

Highest Education Level Completed

Education Level	Total Number of Persons
No Education Level Indicated	22
Graduate Level Degree	6
Some Graduate Level Education	8
College/University Degree	27
Some College/University Education	54
High School Diploma/GED	43
Some High School Education	40

Total Number of Persons

Out of the 198 participants, 97 (49%) had no previous education or training and 79 (39.9%) had received some type of training or educational session in the field of youth development. Examples of such trainings include 4-H training, mandatory child abuse reporting, coaching education classes, behavior management training sessions, and various camp counselor

trainings. Twenty-two participants (11.1%) chose not to indicate if they previously attended an education or training session in youth development prior to participation in the study.

Cronbach's alpha levels were calculated to determine the internal reliability of each index of questions associated with the YWES. Overall, all three indices associated with the YWES exhibited high internal reliability. Table 1 displays the participants' responses on the scale related to the three indices.

Table 1
Reliability Statistics

	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Range of Responses	*M*	*SD*
TE	5	.89	3.20 – 9	7.27	1.31
PVE	9	.93	3.44 – 9	7.52	1.14
ASE	11	.92	3.09 – 9	7.19	1.23
YWE	25	.83	3.36 – 9	7.33	1.16

The results associated with POS questions indicated that the perceived occupational support provided by the parents, children, administrators, and other community members for the organization were all relatively level. The statistical results for each group of individuals were between 6.8-6.9, indicating that the participants felt the four groups provided strong positive support for their work at the youth development organization.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated for theory efficacy, professional values efficacy, applied skills efficacy, youth worker efficacy, perceived occupational support, age, previous attendance at an education session, and highest level of education to examine if significant relationships existed between these variables. A number of significant relationships were found among the dependent and independent variables (Table 2).

Table 2
Correlations of Independent Variables

	TE	PVE	ASE	YWE	Age	Educational Level	POS	Previous Attendance
TE	-							
PVE	.863**	-						
ASE	.838**	.884**	-					
YWE	.921**	.961**	.968**	-				
Age	.024	.086	.059	.064	-			
Education Level	.045	.076	.065	.067	.313**	-		
POS	.545**	.578**	.549**	.582**	-.070	-.132	-	
Previous Attendance	.057	.117	-.041	.036	-.006	-.209**	.072	-

Note. ** $p < .001$

Independent samples t-tests were conducted using previous attendance at a youth development education session, TE, PVE, ASE, YWE, and POS to see if significant relationships existed between the independent and dependent variables. No significant relationships were identified through the independent samples t-tests. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted with gender, TE, PVE, ASE, YWE, and POS since there was not a normal distribution of males and

females in the participation population; the results of the test did not yield any significant relationships. Multiple linear regression tests were conducted as well using gender, age, previous attendance at a youth development education session, and highest education level attained to see if the combination of independent variables significantly predicted TE, PVE, ASE, YWE, and POS. The results of the regression tests did not significantly predict TE, PVE, ASE, YWE, or POS levels.

Summary and Discussion

As the researchers hypothesized, youth workers' POS were significantly related to the three indices of youth work efficacy, as well as overall youth work efficacy. These results align with previous research associated with POS and self-efficacy conducted by Eisenberger, et al. (1986; 1990) and Konczak, et al. (2002). For example, youth workers who believe administrators are backing their efforts to create a safe, learning environment for youth may feel more support from the organization. Administrative steps to support youth workers may include staff development or in-service trainings, extra pay for overtime spent at work, providing a variety of professional development opportunities for staff members, and adherence to curriculum or accreditation standards (Edginton, et al., 2005). As Eisenberger, et al. (1990) pointed out, these genuine and sincere efforts to embrace and support staff members impacts POS.

A unique component of youth work is the spontaneity and creativity that children exhibit during the day; these spontaneous and creative moments also involve workers who serve as guides and mentors for children (Malekoff, 2014). These moments include creative leadership by the worker, especially if a topic arises that was not covered in staff development or in-service training. Youth workers who take risks, step outside of their "comfort zone", and try new techniques when working with youth help creatively problem solve and effectively guide children. Administrators who support staff during these types of moments, inclusive of constructive criticism regarding their efforts, positively impact the POS of workers (Eisenberger, et al., 1990). The culmination of these steps will be workers who feel secure, safe, and in control while working with youth. The feelings of uselessness and powerlessness dissipate, resulting in staff members who are proactive, innovative, and positive role models for young people. Working to eliminate detrimental feelings in the workplace and replacing them with administrative support, coupled with opportunities for staff members to grow personally and professionally, positively impacts self-efficacy (Konczak, et al., 2002).

As the body of knowledge expands within the youth development field associated with self-efficacy and organizational variables such as perceived organizational support, there are various research studies that could be conducted. First, examining the tripartite relationship between youth workers' self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and an organizational variable (such as occupational valence) could yield relevant results associated with motivation, staff development, and morale. Second, analyzing the effectiveness of staff development opportunities or training sessions associated with a particular area of the youth development field (i.e., behavior management, crisis intervention) in conjunction with perceived organizational support and self-efficacy levels of staff members could also provide insight into key components of training that may or may not be present. Third, investigating the relationship between staff members' self-efficacy, perceived organizational support and the youth work setting (i.e., early childhood, adolescence) may provide valuable results highlighting workers' effort-outcome expectancy, affective attachment to the organization, and desire to

fulfill organizational goals. These three studies are just a few examples of future research opportunities that would continue to positively enhance youth development practitioners' understanding of the organizational climate, as well as the far-reaching effects employees' confidence in their abilities has on an organization's mission, vision and philosophy.

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Appendix – Survey Instrument

Occupational valence refers to the attractiveness of a job to an employee. Think about the attractiveness or appeal of your current job. Please rate the importance for each of the items below. Your answers will be kept completely confidential.

How important is it to you to have a job which:

	Not Important				Very Important
requires originality or creativeness?	1	2	3	4	5
makes use of your specific educational background?	1	2	3	4	5
encourages continued development of knowledge and skills?	1	2	3	4	5
is respected by other people?	1	2	3	4	5
provides job security?	1	2	3	4	5
provides the opportunity to earn a high income?	1	2	3	4	5
makes a social contribution by the work you do?	1	2	3	4	5
gives you the responsibility for taking risks?	1	2	3	4	5
requires working on problems of central importance to the organization?	1	2	3	4	5
involves working with congenial associates?	1	2	3	4	5
provides ample leisure time of the job?	1	2	3	4	5
provides change and variety in duties and activities?	1	2	3	4	5
provides comfortable working conditions?	1	2	3	4	5
permits advancement to high administrative responsibility?	1	2	3	4	5
permits working independently?	1	2	3	4	5
rewards good performance with recognition?	1	2	3	4	5
requires supervising others?	1	2	3	4	5
is intellectually stimulating?	1	2	3	4	5

How important is it to you to have a job which:

	Not Important				Very Important
satisfies your cultural and aesthetic interests?	1	2	3	4	5
has clear cut rules and procedures to follow?	1	2	3	4	5
permits you to work for superiors you admire and respect?	1	2	3	4	5
permits a regular routine in time and place of work?	1	2	3	4	5
requires meeting and speaking with many other people?	1	2	3	4	5
permits you to develop your own methods of doing work?	1	2	3	4	5
provides a feeling of accomplishment?	1	2	3	4	5

Social support refers to the physical, emotional, and mental comfort provided by family, friends, coworkers, and others. Social support also involves the existence of resources provided by other people – those people who let us know that they care about, value and love us.

In comparison with your perception of the ideal youth development organization, how would you rate:

	Poor								Excellent	
the support given to you by the caregivers of the children involved with your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
the support given to you by the children involved in your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
the support given to you by the administrators of your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
the community support for your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Youth work self-efficacy, or youth work confidence, refers to the extent to which staff members believe that they have the capacity to effectively lead youth and fellow staff members in the youth development field. Think about how confident you are as a staff member. Please rate your confidence for each of the items below.

How confident are you in your ability to:

	Not at all Confident								Extremely Confident	
maintain confidence of youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
handle conflict between staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
communicate safety issues to youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
lead a safety training for staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
inform youth of educational opportunities outside of your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
build the self-esteem of youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate the skills associated with working with youth to staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate the importance of inclusion and understanding differences among youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate how to plan and implement an an activity for youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate how to handle conflict among youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
serve as a mentor to new staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
act as a professional representative for your organization?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
display empathy with a staff member?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
effectively communicate tasks to youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
build the self-confidence of the staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
assist with staff members' skill development when working with youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

How confident are you in your ability to:

	Not at all Confident								Extremely Confident	
assist with organizational training for staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
help staff members feel like they are part of a team at work?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
promote a strong work ethic among staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate empathy with a youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
prevent burnout among staff members?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
assist a staff member in developing his or her career in youth development?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate the importance of multiculturalism to youth?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
demonstrate the principles and practices associated with youth development?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
illustrate to youth the values and ideals associated with healthy youth development?	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

I am _____Male   _____ Female

I am _____ years old

For the following table related to work experience, please answer in all columns that apply, including your current organization:

Name of Organization	Number of years employed

Have you attended a training or educational session in the youth development field outside of your organization?

___Yes   ___ No

How many hours, on average, do you work in a week?

___ 1-10 hours
___ 11-20 hours
___ 21-30 hours
___ 31-40 hours
___ 40+ hours

What would you consider the main source of communication between supervisor and staff member(s)?

___ Email
___ Staff meetings
___ Face-to-face communication
___ Other (please list) _____

What level of education have you completed? (Select one)

___ Some High School   ___ College Graduate   ___ Technical School
___ High School Graduate   ___ Post Graduate Work   ___ Other_____
___ Some College   ___ Post Graduate Degree

Thank you for your participation!