CHILCARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF FEMALE SINGLE PARENT STUDENTS

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In 1986, 62.8% of American working women had children under 18 years of age. Within this group, the number of women with very young children is rapidly increasing. One in every five of this group is single, divorced, separated, or widowed. Nationwide, over 6.4 million women are single parents (National Commission on Working Women, 1986). According to Hooper and March (1980), these female single parents are returning to universities in increasing numbers. Swift, Mills, and Colvin (1986) cite inadequate campus child care facilities as a problem for these students. This assessment focuses on the child care needs of single female students at a large midwestern university. Results are discussed and the implications of the study are examined.

POPULATION

According to the Office of the Registrar, 53% of the students at this university are female. The population surveyed is that subgroup of female students who are single parents and have sole responsibility for the care of their children.

METHODOLOGY

Three research tools were used in this assessment:

1. A literature review which included (a) current articles, (b) literature from the local Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C) Association, (c) literature about current programs from the city Human Resources Department, and (d) the 1985 city child care needs survey.

2. Personal interviews with (a) administrators involved in the campus Child Care Coalition, (b) members of the Single Parent Student Support Group, (c) community members involved in the local 4-C Association, and (d) city officials from the Human Resources Department.

3. A survey. A child care questionnaire was randomly distributed among female single parent students during the week of October 26, 1987. The questionnaire asked a series of questions about the adequacy of the respondent's current child care situation and the relationship between an adequate, inexpensive, conveniently-located child care situation and respondents' ability to continue their education.

LIMITATIONS

An exploratory survey was conducted due to time constraints. The survey data is based on 12 responses. Because of the small sample size, generalizations are not made.

FINDINGS

In this survey, 83% of the respondents are full-time students and 17% are part-time students. The majority (67%) work part-time, 25% do not work, and 8% work full-time. Finally, 58% of the respondents are undergraduate students, and 42% are graduate students.

According to the 1985 city survey and student affairs administrators involved in family housing, there is a need for infant/toddler (birth-24 months) child care. The 1985 city survey and this questionnaire indicated that there is a need for flex-time child care. Flex-time care is defined as time when care is needed outside normal hours of operation (6am-6pm, Monday-Friday) of most providers. The 1985 city survey identified the need for before/after school care. However, the local school corporation's Extended Day Program and the Family Student Council's Schools Out Program seem to be relieving the "itchy" child problem. About 9% of the time children spend alone occurs in the evening hours (Rodman & Pratto, 1980, in Cole & Rodman, 1987). This study identified isolated cases when young school age children were left alone for short periods of time. Respondents indicated they need evening, night, and weekend child care. Odd work schedules and the need for study time away from their children are reasons that respondents indicated care of sick children is needed. Current services do not provide care for sick children.

Respondents are concerned about the cost of child care. Respondents with preschool children (ages 2-5) spend an average of $40 per child weekly. Good child care is expensive and many respondents must rely heavily on financial aid. They are worried about entering the job market, at traditionally lower salaries, with a large educational debt. Second, when asked if their current provider was conveniently-located, some respondents indicated a recent move to be closer to their providers. In some cases, respondents indicated that it became necessary to purchase an automobile. Finally, all respondents strongly indicated that the availability of child care was important to their ability to continue their education.

IMPLICATIONS

The implication of this study for student affairs administrators is that there is a growing population of students who need adequate on-campus child care. Administrators should come to a decision as to whether or not the role of the university in the student's life is also to include assisting the student both in finding and providing adequate child care. With this limited sample, the need for child care cannot be fully documented. What is needed is an in-depth detailed study. Although limited, this study implies a connection between inadequate
child care services and student enrollment and retention. Further research needs to be done to examine the relationship between an adequate, inexpensive, conveniently-located child care situation and students' ability to continue their education.

REFERENCES


Shirley F. Barrow received a B.S. in history from Indiana University in May, 1984. She is currently working toward the M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Her interests lie in international services and university development. This summer she will establish a data bank of international alumni for the Indiana University Office of International Services.

The purpose of this article is to inform graduate students in student affairs of the circumstances surrounding the adjustment to the first professional position. The authors' goal is to promote awareness, rather than prescribe a course of action.

The transition from graduate school to the first student affairs position involves more than physical relocation. Social and institutional factors also play a prominent role in this transition. The first job provides an opportunity to apply the theories learned and practiced in the student affairs graduate program. However, the first year professional may find this knowledge is less important than management, interpersonal, and budgeting skills (Spencer & Carlson, 1987).

Preparation programs stress one or more of three areas: student development, administration, and counseling (Saddlemire, 1987). For example, the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Service/Development Programs (1986) advocates that a curriculum with a student development emphasis include coursework in Organizational Behavior, American College Student and Environment, Helping Relationships, and Career Development. Some graduates discover that in their new positions few colleagues are familiar with student development theories and, therefore, they often are not incorporated into departmental goals (Julian, 1987).

The political environment of a university may affect the use of student development theory (Julian, 1987). Webster defines politics as "the total complex of relations between people and society." Another definition is offered by Ambrose Bierce: "the conduct of public affairs for private advantage" (Julian, 1987). For example, chief administrators establish goals for the institution but, the motive behind these goals and the manner in which they will be operationalized may not be clear. In addition, goals differ throughout units of the organization. The use of student development theory in student affairs units may not be effective if the institution is not committed to the welfare of the student.

Graduate students often fail to realize the importance of politics in an organization when entering the first position because they lack training in how to be effective managers. As new professionals, an awareness of the elements of an organization is essential. The political environment of an organization influences the institution's receptiveness to one's ideas. For instance, both