CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Youth workers' experiences of challenging behaviour: lessons for practice
Authors	Jenkinson, Hilary
Publication date	2011-02-01
Original Citation	Jenkinson, H; (2011) ``Youth workers' experiences of challenging behaviour: lessons for practice''. Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 16 (1):35-46. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2011.545605
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2011.545605 - 10.1080/13632752.2011.545605
Rights	© 2011 SEBDA. This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published in Hilary Jenkinson (2011): Youth workers' experiences of challenging behaviour: lessons for practice, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 16:1, 35-46 , available online at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13632752.2011.545605
Download date	2026-11-16 13:30:28
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/764



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Youth workers' experiences of challenging behaviour: lessons for practice

Abstract

This study analyses the experiences of youth workers in dealing with challenging behaviour among young people. The findings from a qualitative approach to the collection and analysis of data from 45 research participants are presented. The paper begins by briefly exploring the context of youth work in Ireland and outlining the research process. This is followed by a discussion of the nature of challenging behaviours experienced by youth workers including the emergent area of challenging behaviour involving new technology. Other significant themes arising from the research data are discussed. These include issues such as the audience factor, the importance of individual work, the significance of understanding background factors leading to difficult behaviour, and the need to support staff through challenging encounters. Particular attention is given to highlighting the practice implications of the research in developing effective practice in the area of challenging behaviour.

Keywords: youth work; challenging behaviour; SEBD

Introduction

Whilst research in the area of challenging behaviour is well developed in the spheres of both mainstream education and learning disability, its examination in the context of youth work/informal education is relatively unexplored. This paper analyses the experiences of 45 youth workers in dealing with challenging behaviour. It is based on qualitative research carried out by the author, and draws on the experiences and reflections of youth workers located in a wide variety of youth work/informal education organisations across Ireland. Many young people engaged in these services are those who have left school early either voluntarily or through exclusion, and in many cases have been involved in offending behaviour.

The paper begins with a brief discussion on the context of youth work in Ireland. It then outlines the research process involved in gathering and analysing the data. This is followed by a discussion of the nature of the challenging behaviours experienced by youth workers, highlighting in particular the emergent area of challenging behaviour involving computers and new technology. The paper explores further significant themes arising in the research such as the 'audience' factor, the importance of one to one work when addressing behavioural difficulties in young people; the need and desire among youth workers to get to know and understand the background factors at play in the young person's behaviour; the need for consistency among staff and at an organisational level in implementing behaviour policies. Finally the importance of supporting staff in dealing with challenging behaviour is discussed. In light of the analysis of the research findings, the paper explores and identifies key implications for effective practice in addressing challenging behaviour among young people in youth work settings.

The context of youth work in Ireland

The origins of youth work in Ireland can be traced back to the early 1900s. Similar to developments in Britain, early youth work initiatives were philanthropic in nature and, for the most part, church based. In contrast to developments in Britain where the youth service was placed on a statutory footing in 1939, youth work in Ireland has only relatively recently been the subject of legislation giving responsibility for its development and coordination to the State. This was in the form of the 2001 Youth Work Act. However the road leading up to this point was a long and difficult one for voluntary youth organisations and has been characterised by numerous policy reports on youth work being commissioned, published, and ***not*** being implemented (Bruton Report 1977; O'Sullivan Report 1980; Costello Report 1984; Report of the Consultative Group on the Development of Youth Work 1993). Some of the possible factors contributing to this 'inaction' include a lack of political will to take the needs of young people seriously and also a reluctance on the part of political parties to take on board the recommendations of a previous government, if that government was led by a different party. The strong tradition and commitment to the principle of volunteerism in Irish youth work has been used historically by the State as an excuse not to take financial responsibility for youth service provision. This has resulted in a youth work sector which is has had to constantly strive for funding, and professional recognition. Over the years youth work in Ireland has been working hard to develop an identity of its own as opposed to being seen as an offshoot of social work, probation work or even sport and recreation activities (Jenkinson 2000, 106). In more recent years there has been an increased professionalization of the youth work sector and increasing specialisation in youth work intervention i.e. working with specific groups of targeted youth such as offenders, young women, travellers, homeless young people, young immigrants etc. Bradford refers to this trend as a move away from "universal social education" towards targeted work with "at risk young people" (Bradford 2004, 249). Today the youth work sector accesses funding from an array of sources including various government departments, the state lottery, grant schemes, and fundraising efforts on the part of organisations themselves. Like most sectors affected by the current economic downturn, youth work agencies have had their budgets downsized which contributes to significant challenges in providing much needed services.

The Irish Youth Work Act defines youth work clearly and succinctly:

> 'In this Act "youth work" means a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is –
> a) complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training; and
> b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations
>
> (Youth Work Act 2001, Part 1, Section 3)

Youth work in Ireland spans a wide range of organisations and includes youth clubs, after school projects, training programmes aimed at early school leavers, and justice projects targeting offenders or those at risk of offending. Young people in these settings are often those who have found it difficult to conform to the structures of main stream education and require a more flexible, supported approach. Managing behaviour within these environments raises issues and challenges particular to such settings. Addressing challenging behaviour is a common aspect of the youth worker's

practice and demand for training is high in this area. A common dilemma reported by youth workers is that the young people who they consider to be in most need of the particular service are often those young people whose behaviour is most disruptive and difficult to manage. In particular, youth workers are loath to implement sanctions which may result in the young person leaving or being excluded from the project, as in many cases they have reached the end of the line in terms of suitable available services.

The research process

The research carried out in this study was qualitative in nature where 'the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants' (Bryman 2004, 266). The study sought to explore the participants' own understandings of their experiences of challenging behaviour through the use of a self-completion questionnaire.

Sampling

The author used 'purposeful sampling' as a method of identifying potential respondents. This approach is commonly used in qualitative studies and entails researchers purposely choosing subjects who, in their opinion, are relevant to the project (Sarantakos 2005, 164). In this instance participants at three training events in the area of 'responding to challenging behaviour among young people' were given the opportunity to take part in the research. Two of these training events were run by The Irish Youth Work Centre, and another was run by The National Council of YMCAs in Ireland. Each one day training event was facilitated by the author and took place in Dublin, Ireland. The IYWC events were advertised among youth work organisations nationally and youth workers across a wide variety of agencies booked and attended the training. The YMCA event was advertised among all YMCA centres in Ireland and interested parties attended. Of a potential 68 participants, 45 chose to be involved in the research (approximately two thirds). Involvement in the research was entirely voluntary and participants received and signed a consent form outlining the aims and purpose of the research. It was also made clear to them that they could withdraw from the process at any stage. Research questionnaires were completed by participants in advance of the training input. This was in order to gather an account of their experiences independent of the training material which may influence their responses. The research was carried out over a period of two months, in September and October 2009.

Questionnaire

In addition to asking respondents their gender, the type of agency they worked in and the target group of their agency, the questionnaire asked a number of open ended questions in order to elicit the issues which were of significance to youth workers in relation to their experiences of challenging behaviour. The use of open ended questions, according to Bryman, has a number of advantages. It allows participants to answer in their own terms and does not suggest a certain kind of answer to the respondent; therefore issues of most salience to the respondents will emerge. It has the added advantage of allowing replies the researcher may not have anticipated (Bryman 2004, 145). In this research participants were asked to describe in detail a specific example of challenging behaviour which they had encountered. They were then asked how they and their agency responded to the behaviour and if, on reflection, there was anything they would do differently. They were also asked what their current needs

were in relation to addressing challenging behaviour (see figure 1 for example of interview questions).
Prior to the gathering of research data, the author piloted a questionnaire among a number of youth workers in relation to their experiences of challenging behaviour. The feedback from this phase was incorporated into the design of the subsequent final research questionnaire.

Figure 1
Example of questions asked:

1. Please describe a specific example of challenging behaviour you have experienced in your project/programme.
2. In what ways did you and your agency respond to this behaviour?
3. On reflection, is there anything you would do differently?
4. What are your current needs regarding addressing challenging behaviour?

Analysis
On the basis of the data generated through the questionnaire, the author engaged in a process of thematic analysis of the material. Thematic analysis, according to Gomm (2004), is commonly used to analyse data gained from qualitative research methods and involves reading and rereading participants' responses in order to identify the primary themes and issues arising. When analysing the data the author reproduced all the responses to each question together. E.g. the responses to, 'Please describe a specific example of challenging behaviour you have experienced in your project/programme' were all transcribed under this question so as to aid the analysis and comparison of the material. Similar themes in the responses were identified through the use of coding. The author undertook this process in relation to each of the questions asked in the survey. This thematic analysis resulted in the material falling under two main headings. The first relates to the nature of challenging behaviours experienced by workers and is informed primarily by the responses to the first question concerning a description of challenging behaviour. The second heading relates to particular issues arising for workers. These issues were identified as a result of analysing the responses to all four questions. In the discussion relating to particular issues the author identifies which questions gave rise to the issues discussed. This paper provides a discussion of the major themes occurring in the research and draws from relevant literature and research studies in order to further elucidate issues arising and explore relevant practice implications.

The nature of challenging behaviours experienced by youth workers

In their feedback, all respondents (n=45) gave a detailed account of challenging behaviour they had experienced. Of the total sample 76% involved boys and only 11% involved girls. A further 13% either involved both or didn't specify the gender of the young people concerned. This gender breakdown reflects the findings of other studies which indicate that boys are more likely to exhibit overtly challenging

behaviour where as girls may become withdrawn or depressed, and their behaviour, while detrimental and concerning, is less actively disruptive than boys (Kaiser and Rasminsky 2009).

The examples of challenging behaviour which respondents encountered can be themed under a number of headings. These are: verbal aggression, defying/disregarding instruction, physical aggression, damage to property, low grade disruption, and behaviour involving computers and new technology. It is important to note that while some examples fall into a single category, many span a number of themes.

Verbal aggression:
By far the most common type of behaviour described was verbal aggression; this was a significant factor in over half the examples cited (51%). A closer examination of the data reveals that in just over half of these cases (52%) the aggression was directed at the worker and in over a third of instances (35%) it was aimed at other young people. In 13% of cases the verbal aggression was aimed at both workers and young people. Essentially this demonstrates that youth workers were at the receiving end of this type of aggression in 64% of these cases. In many cases verbal aggression towards workers occurred when the young person was challenged about an issue, or refused permission to do something. Most often aggression towards other young people took place in the context of an argument or perceived insult. In a study carried out by Lyons and O'Connor (2006) verbal aggression was among the behaviours deemed most serious by the teachers they surveyed. This is indicative of how challenging it is for youth workers to face such encounters, which, in this study, appears to be not uncommon. It is also of concern that, in this study a significant number of young people in the care of youth workers experience the verbal aggression of others.

Defying/disregarding instruction:
The second biggest category of challenging behaviour outlined by youth workers involved defying or disregarding instruction. This accounted for 27% of examples cited and typically followed from the worker requesting the young person to either desist from the behaviour they were engaged in (e.g. playing poker on a computer, kicking a grapefruit around, interfering with the emergency doors on a bus) or carry out a task (e.g. set a table, come on a group daytrip). In a significant minority of cases in this category (30%), the behaviour involved the young person/people refusing to leave the premises when requested to do so. Refusing to follow instruction is a common feature of challenging behaviour (Ofsted 2005).

Physical aggression
One in five instances (20%) of challenging behaviour involved physical aggression. All of the instances in this study were directed towards other young people, usually in the context of a fight breaking out. In no cases were the actions deliberately aimed at workers. This finding is reflected in research carried out by Ofsted (2005) in the UK which found that violence is mostly directed towards other young people rather than staff. Behaviours described by workers in this category include hitting, fighting, kicking, throwing objects at others such as furniture and pool balls.

A further 11% of the sample involved threats of physical aggression and usually consisted of physically threatening gestures or actions (e.g. picking up a chair and

holding it over ones head, swinging a hockey stick around), or a verbal threat of physical assault. A combination of these results demonstrates that just about a third of the challenging behaviour scenarios identified by youth workers involved actual physical aggression or a threat of such action.

Low grade disruption/messing

Disruption which did not involve physical or verbal aggression but could be described as 'messing' accounted for 22% of the scenarios described. In these instances young people were not paying attention to the activity at hand and were providing a distraction for themselves and others. Examples of this kind of behaviour included flicking objects at others during a group session, or a number of young people sitting with their backs to the rest of the group with their feet up on a desk during training.

Damage to property

Of the descriptions of challenging behaviour encounters, 9% involved damage to property. These included throwing bricks at windows, flooding premises, and kicking doors. One such scenario involved a group of young males at a drop in centre on a Friday evening. Initially their behaviour consisted of sexual comments and developed into throwing items around and lifting sofas. They then proceeded to flood the premises and refused to leave when requested. Eventually they did leave but kicked in the door and broke a window in the process. Whilst instances involving damage to property only accounted for four of the cases described by respondents, it is apparent from this example that these situations are highly charged and pose considerable risks to workers and other young people. This example also demonstrates the gradual escalation of behaviour which is often a feature of challenging behaviour involving violence (Jamieson et al, 2000).

Challenging behaviour involving computers and new technology

Descriptions of challenging behaviour involving computers or new technology accounted for 16% of the sample (n=7). This was an unexpected finding in the research and raises important questions about this emerging dimension of challenging behaviour and the challenge this poses for professionals working with young people. In most of the examples given, the behaviour arose in the context of youth information centres where access to the internet is part of the service provided to service users, and youth training settings where computer and internet use are part of the curriculum. All cases, apart from one, involved young people accessing inappropriate websites such as gambling sites and sites containing pornography, or social networking sites prohibited under the guidelines of the particular centre. Whilst efforts are made to block sites containing inappropriate content, workers expressed their frustrations that the young people seemed to be 'one step ahead' and able to get around the restrictions applied. This indicates a strong need for the up-skilling of staff in relation to developments in new technology. It also highlights the need for youth organisations' computer systems to be up to the task of being in control of what young people can access.

The other case involving new technology is worth recounting due to the serious nature of the incident. This involved a youth worker receiving anonymous texts saying that the sender was in danger and that they were going to run away from home with a crowd of strangers. The youth worker tried to establish through texting (phone calls weren't being answered) if the young person was in danger and the identity of the

young person. The worker arranged to meet the texter but they didn't turn up. Eventually the young person's identity became known and when she texted to say that she was going to commit suicide, the social workers and police were notified. It later came to light that during the same period, this girl had made a Bebo pact with another girl to take their lives at the same time. Whilst the girl at the centre of this example didn't make an attempt, the other girl did, although fortunately she was not successful.

These examples highlight the increasing complexity of youth workers' relationships and communication with young people. The expediential growth in communication arenas provided by advances in new technology are being inhabited and employed extensively by young people (Sefton-Green 1999; Weber and Dixon 2007). This is the terrain in which they operate naturally and competently. If youth workers are going to engage with young people effectively then they need to possess a high level of competence, familiarity, and ease of use, within these new communication arenas. However this is only part of the challenge; youth work and informal education organisations need to possess clear policies and procedures regarding internet use, social networking sites, and mobile phone communication. Who knows what is on the new technology horizon? At the moment there is a sense of agencies running to catch up and perhaps developing policies only in response to crises such as the one outlined above. Agencies have a responsibility and a duty of care to young people to have a high level of expertise, training, and up to date agency systems and guidelines commensurate with this developing and rapidly unfolding new technology arena.

An exploration of issues arising for workers

The audience factor

A striking aspect of the research results was the degree to which respondents identified the presence of other young people to be a factor which exacerbated and fuelled challenging behaviour. This was a dynamic which featured spontaneously in over half the incidences described (51%) which is significant given the open ended nature of the research questions. Respondents referred to young people being 'egged on' and encouraged by peers. Some identified that they separated the person concerned from the rest of the group as a strategy for addressing the behaviour. Others expressed that, on reflection, they would have removed the young person from the audience and that this would have prevented the situation from escalating. There is a sense of difficult behaviour being given oxygen by the presence of admiring spectators. These sentiments are echoed by O'Brien (1998) who refers to the 'free theatre' dimension of challenging behaviour which occurs when the audience factor is unaddressed. An obvious practice implication in this regard is the importance of removing the audience aspect of the conduct. However Kaiser (2009) emphasises that the manner in which this is done is crucial. If the young person is asked to leave, it should be pitched as an opportunity for the young person to regain control and communicated in a manner which is calm and respectful. It is detrimental for the worker to require the person to leave in an angry or threatening tone. A few research participants referred to how beneficial it was to have a 'chill-out' space, where young people could go in order to 'cool off'. O'Brien (1998) asserts that a young person who is angry or upset should not be left on their own and that s/he should remain in the presence of a staff member. A common dilemma experienced by youth workers in this

regard is one of resources. Having the luxury of an extra worker to accompany a young person in this situation is often not one which is affordable within the realities of limited staff numbers. Workers feel they have to make choices which could compromise them having adequate cover for the rest of the group. This is an issue which should be addressed at organisational level, ensuring adequate cover, and not one which individual youth workers have to call in the midst of fraught and sometimes unsafe circumstances.

One to one work

Closely related to removing the young person from the 'audience' is working with the young person on a one to one basis. This was quite a strong theme arising in the research with nearly a third (31%) of all respondents identifying that on reflection it would have been beneficial to have engaged in individual work with the young person concerned or to have increased the amount of one to one work which occurred. The importance of engaging in individual work and the development of the worker/young person relationship is well documented in youth work literature (Taylor 2003; Smith 1994; Sapin 2009; Yates 2009). Positive behaviour is encouraged when this relationship is strong and the young person knows they are genuinely cared about and respected. In an evaluation of a schools based programme aimed at addressing the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour, young people identified that being listened to and being given individual time was particularly important to them (Hayden 2007). Visser (2003) also identifies individual work with young people who display EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties) as a key element of effective intervention. Working individually can facilitate the young person to share their story or perspective and be heard. It can be a space where they are listened to and their feelings validated and acknowledged. Taylor asserts that the 'most valuable' aspect of youth work intervention can be the opportunity to 'engage in a supportive one-to-one relationship based on mutual respect' (Taylor 2003, 6). When considering what constitutes effective practice in dealing with challenging behaviour, the case for incorporating 'one to one' time into youth work programmes is compelling.

Understanding background factors contributing to challenging behaviour

Our discussion of individual work and developing a relationship with young people leads in to another strong theme which arose in the research. That is the view expressed by many youth workers that having a greater understanding of what was going on for the young person can be very helpful for the worker in terms of developing empathy for their situation and a positive approach towards the individual concerned. This was an issue identified by one in four of all respondents; some expressing this in terms of their current needs in relation to dealing with difficult behaviour, and others related how having this understanding was extremely beneficial in responding to particular situations. An example of this latter point is an account related by a worker, of a boy (10) whose behaviour at a summer camp was extremely disruptive. He was fighting with the other children, was very non-cooperative and had to be monitored all the time. The worker describes how her attitude changed towards him when she discovered that he had experienced a family trauma three years beforehand when his mother had been killed crossing the road. Since then his father had a new partner and they had recently had a baby. The worker relates 'when I found this out I could clearly see the reason behind his behaviour….I treated him in a different, more tolerant way after that'.

Often young people who demonstrate difficult behaviour are encountering considerable challenges in their own lives. According to Jamieson et al (2000) challenging behaviour is strongly linked with low self esteem and that those who engage in such behaviour often have a poor sense of self worth. Young people who exhibit difficult behaviour frequently come from socially and economically disadvantaged communities strongly affected by unemployment and poverty (Hamill and Boyd 2001). It is also the case that those who have encountered considerable challenges in life such as family instability, substance misuse, violence at home, or neglect, are more likely to display challenging behaviour. According to Humphreys this is a normal response to abnormal and difficult circumstances (Humphreys 1996). Having insight into specific reasons behind challenging behaviour not only helps in terms of our attitude towards the young person, it also provides signposts for appropriate interventions. This may provide the focus for individual work with the young person, or, if more specialised intervention is needed, it forms the basis of an appropriate referral. It is beneficial to have strong links between helping agencies and good referral systems in place. According to Taylor, the success of a referral in terms of the young person being able to receive help is significantly influenced by the level of trust and strength of the relationship with the referring staff member (2003). She states that by engaging in a supportive one-to-one relationship based on mutual respect;

> 'they may learn how to relate, to be able to voice their problems and to extend trust….Thus, the most troubled young person who may have otherwise rejected or shied away from help may, eventually, be able to ask for professional advice or engage in counselling or treatment' (2003, 6)

This reinforces the importance of individual work and developing strong trusting relationships with young people.

Consistency and common organisational policy

Having a consistent approach and a common organisational policy regarding discipline and challenging behaviour is a familiar theme in SEBD (Social, Emotional, and Behavioural Difficulties) literature. This was an issue identified by 20% of the research respondents and all of them spoke about it in terms of what could have been done differently upon reflection, or in terms of their current needs in relation to addressing challenging behaviour. Some identified the fact that where there were inconsistencies in how different staff members responded to the behaviour it compounded the problem both in the short and longer term. It contributes to an environment where the same behaviour is eliciting various responses from different staff members. This leads to frustration among workers and confusion and increased levels of challenging behaviour among young people. In this study, one worker insightfully notes that 'being vigilant about acceptable behaviour can be tiring'. However, pivotal to managing challenging behaviour and promoting constructive conduct is having a clear, easily understood policy around expected behaviour and disciplinary measures. Each setting should have a few important rules and sanctions which are applied consistently by *all* staff members. O'Brien (1998) suggests that these rules should be framed positively, in conjunction with young people, and should identify what they should do rather than what they are not allowed to do. It is vital that rules, and consequent logical sanctions, are applied consistently and fairly as if

they are not, this will create resentment amongst the group. Research carried out by Ofsted identified that:

> 'When there are inconsistencies, those who have more difficulty in moderating their own behaviour are unclear about boundaries' (Ofsted 2005, 10)

Therefore, it is those young people who display challenging behaviour who are particularly disadvantaged when rule enforcement and sanctions are applied erratically.

In this research, participants also articulated the need for there to be an agency-wide policy regarding acceptable behaviour and clear guidelines regarding consequences and disciplinary measures. Sometimes workers feel it is left up to themselves with no apparent overall organisational policy. This mitigates against consistency among staff and highlights the importance of having clear agency policies, where written accessible guidelines around behaviour and behaviour management are made available to staff. If a clear policy does not exist in an agency it would be important for the management and staff to dedicate an adequate amount of time to focus on developing a policy appropriate to their setting.

Support for staff

The issue of staff support was a significant theme arising in the research with one in five workers (n=9) highlighting it as an issue. Some emphasised the positive role the support they received from management and other staff played in dealing with the behaviour. One respondent says 'Our line manager was with us all the way and supportive of our decisions. Management was also concerned for our well-being.' Other respondents identified staff support as a current need they had regarding addressing challenging behaviour. In relation to this, one worker writes 'I think support is the main issue, someone to bounce things off'. Both one-to-one support and team building/cohesion were identified as being important elements in this regard.

Briggs writes about the effect working with teenagers who are troubled can have on the individual worker and says that this can be extremely difficult and demanding. It is vital therefore 'that in painful and stressful work staff need to be given the space to think about the anxieties stirred up by the work and the effect of these anxieties on them' (Mawson 1994, 73 cited in Briggs 2002, 92). Good practice in youth settings necessitates staff members accessing regular individual supervision in order to process and reflect on the achievements and challenges of their work. This, according to McKay, is an 'ethical requirement not a desirable luxury' (1987, 20).

As we can see from the above quote, managers have a key role in developing an effective environment to deal with challenging behaviour. According to Ofsted, 'The most difficult behaviour is almost always managed well…where strong senior managers give clear direction and reassuring support to staff' (2005, 11). This positive effect is compounded if the manager is a regular presence and actively involved at ground level. The manager is also extremely influential in terms of setting the tone in the agency and has a primary role in determining a positive supportive ethos for young people and staff.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to portray the realities for a sample of youth work practitioners in relation to their experiences of dealing with challenging behaviour. In analysing issues arising in the research, it has also sought to highlight practice implications relevant to youth settings. In outlining the types of difficult behaviour encountered by youth workers we saw that behaviours involving verbal aggression were the most prominent. Other categories of behaviour experienced included defying instruction, physical aggression, low grade disruption and damage to property. The incidents of challenging behaviour involving new technology was a significant and unexpected feature of the research findings and the paper highlighted the need for youth work agencies to be on top of this ever advancing brief in terms of policy and technological acumen. The article proceeded to analyse the issues arising for workers in the research. The 'audience factor' was discussed, highlighting the exacerbating effect this can have in relation to difficult behaviour and the importance of dealing with this in a constructive manner. The paper also stressed that responsibility needs to be taken at an organisational level to ensure adequate resources are made available in order to facilitate a safe environment for workers and young people. The discussion proceeded to explore the need for, and benefits of, individual work with young people in youth settings, underlining the particular relevance of this when responding to challenging behaviour. Developing relationships with young people also contributes to gaining insight into the background factors which may be triggering disruptive behaviour. This is beneficial both in terms of developing empathy towards the individual concerned and also identifying and implementing appropriate interventions. The issues arising in the research to this point focus on the interpersonal dimension of youth work. The discussion then developed to address issues with a more organisational and policy focus. The research draws attention to the necessity of consistency among staff in their approach to managing behaviour. However, policy in this regard must be developed and implemented at an organisational level in order to be effective. Finally the topic of staff support is discussed, acknowledging the significant toll that working with difficult behaviour will have on the worker. The research identified the positive effect receiving support had for some respondents and also the need for support identified by others. Good practice necessitates that support for staff should be implemented in a structured manner ensuring the provision of regular supervision and team development. Managers have a vital role in setting a positive and supportive tone in their agencies.

This research has provided a number of key insights into the nature of challenging behaviour encountered by this group of youth workers. In its analysis of issues arising the paper sought to highlight important practice implications which it is hoped will of benefit to those managing and working in youth settings.

References

Bradford, Simon. 2004. The management of growing up: Youth work in community settings. In Jeremy Roche, Stanley Tucker, Rachel Thompson, and Ronny Flynn, *Youth in society,* 2nd Edition, 245-254. London: Sage Publications in association with The Open University

Briggs, Stephen. 2002. *Working with adolescents.* London: Palgrave Macmillan

Bryman, Alan. 2004. *Social research methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Costello Committee Report. 1984. *The national youth policy committee final report.* Dublin: Government Publications

Department of Education. 1977. *A policy for youth and sport.* (Bruton Report) Dublin

Department of Education Consultative Group. 1993. *Report of the consultative group on the development of youth work.* Dublin: S.N.S.L.

Gomm, Roger. 2004. *Social research methodology, A critical introduction.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Government of Ireland. 2001. *Youth Work Act 2001* Dublin

Hamill, Paul and Brian Boyd. 2001. 'Rhetoric or reality? Inter-agency provision for young people with challenging behaviour', *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,* 6:3,135-149

Hayden, Carol. 2007. *Children in trouble: the role of families, schools and communities.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Humphreys, Tony. 1996. *A different kind of teacher* Dublin: Newleaf

Jamieson, John, David Leadbetter and Brodie Paterson. 2000. Coping with physical violence: some more suggestions. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,* 5:3,3-11

Jenkinson, Hilary. 2000. Youth work in Ireland: The struggle for identity. *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* Vol:2 No:2 Spring 15-25

Kaiser, Barbara and Judy Sklar Rasminky. 2009. *Challenging behavior in elementary and middle school.* New Jersey: Pearson Education

Lyons, Claire W and Fiona O'Connor. 2006. Constructing an integrated model of challenging behaviour: A starting point for intervention. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,* 11:3,217-232

McKay, Alison. 1987. Non-managerial supervision. In M. Marken and M. Payne.. 1987. *Enabling and ensuring; supervision in practice*, 11-20. Leicester: National Youth Bureau and Council for Training in Youth and Community Work

O'Brien, Tim. 1998. *Promoting positive behaviour.* David Fulton Publishers: London

O'Sullivan Committee. 1980. *The development of youth work services in Ireland.* Dublin: Government Publications.

Ofsted. 2005. *Ofsted Report: Managing Challenging Behaviour.* London: Crown Copyright

Sapin, Kate. 2009. *Essential skills for youth work practice.* London: Sage

Sarantakos, Sotirios. 2005. *Social research.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Sefton-Green, Julia. 1999. *Young people, creativity and new technologies.* London: Routledge

Smith, Mark. 1994. *Local education: community, conversation, praxis.* Buckingham: Open University Press

Taylor, Angela. 2003. *Responding to adolescents: Helping relationship skills for youth workers, mentors and other advisors.* Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

Visser, John. 2003. *A study of children and young people who present challenging behaviour* Ofsted: London

Weber, Sandra and Shanly Dixon, eds. 2007. *Growing up on-line: young people and digital technologies.* London: Palgrave and Mamillan

Yates, Scott. 2009. *Good practice in guidance: lessons from Connexions.* In Jason Wood, and Jean Hine, eds. 2009 *Work with young people,* 176-186. London: Sage