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Paraprofessionals in Oregon: an exploratory study of the status of associate degree human service workers

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PARAPROFESSIONALS IN OREGON;
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE STATUS OF
ASSOCIATE DEGREE HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS

by

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A practicum submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The concern in human services as to how to provide skilled manpower of sufficient training and in sufficient numbers to meet public demand has been a source of experimentation and controversy over the past decade. In recent years the rapid growth of social and mental health services has provided a multitude of programs and services for both the poor and non-poor. Traditional services of social welfare--health care, education, housing and employment--have been increasingly supplemented by new forms of services (e.g., community organization, youth work, recreation, and personal growth therapy), thus vastly expanding the numbers of actual and potential recipients of such services.

The changing nature of social services in recent years has stimulated within the helping professions serious discussion over the proper training and utilization of manpower. The new roles and functions that social workers and other professionals are entering into in order to effectively challenge old and new problems have led many in and out of the professions to call for the development of new levels

and types of social service workers.¹

A major response to this call has been the development of a new type of worker, the paraprofessional. Known variously as non-professionals, indigenous workers, sub-professionals and the like, this new breed of worker is meant to fill the gap between low level entry positions in the human services and the more specialized components and job tasks in the field.

The development of the paraprofessional movement has sparked considerable controversy and study. Attempts to define and identify the precise elements involved in these new middle level positions--the skill levels and task expectations of such positions--and the social and political dynamics involved in their creation, have been primary focuses of such debate and study.² Issues such as the relationship between paraprofessionals and professionals, the content and nature of paraprofessional training, the establishment of meaningful career ladders, and the relative effectiveness of these new workers have also invoked close scrutiny in the field.³

¹For example, see Arthur Pearl and Frank Riessman, New Careers for the Poor (New York: Free Press, 1965), and Charles Grossner, Non-Professionals in the Human Services (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 1969).

²Ibid., and Southern Regional Education Board, Roles and Functions for Human Service Workers (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1969).

³Ibid.

To this point, the examination of such generic issues has suffered from considerable imbalance. In recent years, research into paraprofessionalism has tended to concentrate on the recruitment and training aspects. As such, information concerning where paraprofessionals are employed and what they do once in the field is sadly lacking.

This is an exploratory study intended to provide such a profile. It is meant to examine paraprofessional human service workers from three graduating classes of the Human Resources Technology program at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. The study is interested in examining the employment status of these workers, what roles and functions they serve in their agencies, the monetary and career mobility opportunities in those agencies, and the educational status and aspirations of the graduates. The study also intends to examine their personal views and experiences concerning issues of paraprofessionalism, professionalism, and their role as new workers in the human services.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

One of the problems involved in discussing paraprofessionalism concerns the nature of its terminology. Not unlike the language of the professional world, terms often take on several definitions and meanings. The term "paraprofessional" is a primary example of this phenomenon. As previously noted, several titles have been used

interchangeably to describe this new worker: "sub-professional," "non-professional," "indigenous worker," and so on. Such terms have been coined at different times to describe generally those employed in human services who have less than a baccalaureate degree.

At this point, the author wishes to join with those who have expressed dissatisfaction with the term "paraprofessional" and other such terms. Such titles seem to downgrade or ascribe non-function to workers, describing more what they are not and do not do than what they can or should do. A more positive label such as "new professional" would seem more in keeping with the thrust of the movement. However, the use of the terms paraprofessional and non-professional have become so wide-spread and accepted that they will be used interchangeably throughout the review of the literature. However, it should be noted that for the purpose of the actual study, "paraprofessional" is defined as those workers possessing an Associate of Arts degree in human service training.

Another source of confusion concerns the exact nature of the "human services." At its most general level, the word can be invoked to describe any occupation that in some way provides services to people. Such a broad definition is inappropriate since it would reasonably include within its boundaries such occupations as janitorial work, restaurant and hotel work, etc. Therefore, this study shall adopt

Edward Brawley's definition:

The term human services is used here to denote the growth-promoting and rehabilitative services that are provided primarily through individuals who carry a facilitative role based upon inter-personal relationship skills. This definition includes such areas as social welfare, child care, mental health, recreation and corrections.⁴

For the purposes of this paper, the term "social services" will connote the same meaning as "human services," and the two terms shall also be used interchangeably. Likewise, the term "helping professions" refers to those professional bodies of work which fall within the realm of Brawley's definition.

⁴Edward Brawley, The New Human Service Worker: Community College Education and Social Services (New York: Praeger Press, 1975), p. 5.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review traces the modern history of paraprofessionalism from its early roots in the Progressive Era into its development as a "new career" within social services. The changing nature and function of human services within the United States has implicitly led to the construction of new tasks and roles for all levels of human service workers. The exact nature of these new roles and functions has not been clearly defined, nor has it been well understood. The literature, therefore, discusses the actualities and potentials for paraprofessionals, the issues and problems inherent in their position in the human services continuum, and ways in which paraprofessionals can become more firmly rooted in this continuum.

THE HISTORY OF PARAPROFESSIONALISM

The utilization of paraprofessionals is not a recent phenomenon within the social services. The training and employment of indigenous non-professionals was an integral part of the early settlement house effort.⁵ Projects such

⁵Alan Gartner, Paraprofessionals and Their Performance: A Survey of Education, Health and Social Service Programs (New York: Praeger Press, 1971), pp. 4-5.

as Henry Street House, Hull House, the Chicago Area Project, and urban YMCAs all used employees recruited from the population they meant to serve. It was believed that the employment of project residents would serve to better link the projects to the community. Indigenous workers who had a thorough knowledge of the community's history, culture and morés could move more easily among the people than outside professionals. These indigenous workers could command a high degree of respect and trust among the community and serve to transfer this trust over to the projects as a whole. In addition, settlement workers hoped that successful indigenous workers would serve as a positive example for the community to emulate.

During the Great Depression and the period of the New Deal, tens of thousands of persons were employed and trained as paraprofessionals.⁶ The Federal Emergency Relief Act provided funds for the training and employment of thousands of non-professional emergency relief workers to supplement professional social workers in meeting the unprecedented numbers of unemployed and poverty-stricken seeking relief. As the immediate crisis of the depression lessened however, such programs were dismantled and many paraprofessional workers were laid off and forced to seek employment in other fields.

Again in the 1950s, acute manpower shortages,

⁶Ibid.

especially in the field of education, stimulated the training and employment of paraprofessionals. The Ford Foundation took the lead in this area, funding programs for the training of teacher aides for use in the public schools.⁷

Despite these early experiments, it would not be until the mid-1960s that the concept of paraprofessionalism as a "new career" within the social services would emerge. The development of paraprofessionalism in the 1960s and 1970s can perhaps be best explained as a function of two important and related "discoveries" of the early 1960s: (1) the massive character of poverty in the United States; and (2) the critical shortage of manpower that existed in the social services.

The re-discovery of poverty in the U.S. in the 1960s would cause a major stir within the economic and social fabric of the nation. With the publication of such exposés and studies as Michael Harrington's The Other America in 1963, and the growing influence and presence of the Civil Rights movement, the focus of government programs and funding would increasingly center upon the study of poverty and its solutions.

The launching of the "War on Poverty" in 1964 created a relatively massive influx of funds and programs into public social services. Programs designed to re-distribute social and mental health services to minorities and other

⁷Ibid.

disadvantaged groups challenged both the ingenuity and resources of the helping professions. In addition to an acute shortage of professionals available to provide the magnitude of services demanded by the poor, debate within professions over the proper roles and functions of professionals in providing such services increased. Many professionals argued that the world of the predominantly white, middle class professional was so far removed from that of the poor, particularly minorities, that their ability to serve them was seriously in question.⁸ Other professionals claimed that routine and "non-professional" demands of their jobs took time and energy away from the new and complex roles professionals could and must be engaging themselves in.⁹ Still others questioned the very nature of professionalism and pushed forward concepts of community and personal self-help.¹⁰

Debate over such practical and theoretical aspects of effective manpower training and utilization eventually resulted in proposals of action, by far the most influential of which was the "New Careers" proposal put forth by Frank Riessman,

⁸Pearl and Riessman, New Careers for the Poor, pp. 195-198.

⁹Francine Sobey, The Non-Professional Revolution in Mental Health (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 4.

¹⁰Michael Harrington, "A Major Social Reform," in Up From Poverty, ed. Hermine Popper and Frank Riessman (New York: Harper Row, 1968), pp. 15-18.

Arthur Pearl and others.¹¹ Riesman and Pearl argued that the poor and unemployed should be employed on a massive scale as paraprofessionals in the helping professions. They posited that such a program would provide meaningful careers--not just jobs--for the poor. They believed that such a program would both meet the needs of the poor and the needs of professionals in that it would

markedly reduce the manpower shortage in education and social work . . . provide more, better and "closer" services for the poor . . . rehabilitate many of the poor themselves through meaningful employment and free the professional for more creative or supervisory duties.¹²

The passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 with its dual charge to (1) provide services to the poor and (2) provide "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in the planning and implementation of social service programs gave legislative life to the New Careers concept.¹³ Early pilot projects such as Richard Cloward's work in the Mobilization for Youth project in New York's Lower East Side (training juvenile delinquents to be youth workers), rapidly gave way to more systematic and large-scale training of paraprofessionals in all fields of the social services: law, education, health, medicine and social work. Major organizations such as the National Committee on Employment

¹¹Pearl and Riessman, New Careers for the Poor.

¹²Ibid., pp. 249-250.

¹³Ibid., pp. 249-251.

of Youth, the National Institute for New Careers, and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) utilized federal grants to establish training programs and employment of paraprofessional human service workers. In addition, they engaged in extensive research into the effectiveness of paraprofessional work and their potential uses.

After a series of conferences in 1966, the Southern Regional Education Board applied to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) for a five-year grant to promote the development of community college mental health worker programs. This project was followed in 1973 with a two year faculty development grant from NIMH for the coordination of the now two hundred plus community college mental health worker programs that had sprung up throughout the nation. As of 1974, it was estimated that some 10,000 paraprofession workers had been graduated from two year A.A. degree programs. By 1980, SREB estimates that another 10-15,000 graduates will enter the human service fields.¹⁴

ROLES, FUNCTIONS, ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

As the training of paraprofessionals in special outreach projects gave way in the early and mid-1970s to one and two year Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree programs in

¹⁴Southern Regional Education Board National Faculty Development Conference, notes taken by author, St. Louis, Missouri, August 18-21, 1975.

community colleges, the success and performance of these programs and their graduates take on increased significance today. Where such graduates are employed, what services and functions they perform, what skills they possess and utilize, what opportunities for career mobility and advancement exist, and what views they hold towards themselves and professionals are issues and questions that are for the most part largely unexplored and unanswered.* However, there is a considerable body of literature and research within the field which, if not directly, at least theoretically provides a framework within which the kinds of questions this study seeks to explore may be placed.

Discussions concerning the roles and functions of paraprofessionals have often been couched in problematic terms. Indeed, the concept of a new type of non-professional worker trying to find his place within fields traditionally populated by professionals appears on the surface to be fraught with contradictions. A 1969 SREB study summarized

*At this point, it should be noted that another aspect of the change in training emphasis has been critically raised. The changing nature of paraprofessional training away from the New Careers concept of jobs for the poor and disadvantaged, towards a more open public educational setting, as well as the ideological twists and turns of paraprofessional training, has led to strong attacks by some social theorists. Although the author shares some of these attacks and the import of their criticisms, it is not the purpose of this paper or the proper place for an exposition of such critiques. Interested readers should see Phillip Priestly's "New Careers: Power Sharing in Social Work" in Towards a New Social Work, ed. Howard Jones (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 122-137.

some of these conflicts:

Throughout the nation there have been many efforts to develop new levels of workers for mental health. Some have grown from the New Careers movement and have stressed providing employment for the "indigenous non-professional," others have trained mature housewives for mental health work, and some have considered various aide, assistant, or technical level workers who might be trained in junior colleges or four year colleges.

In most of these efforts the focus has been on the training programs rather than on defining the roles in which these persons might function. Because of this imbalance of emphasis, nearly all of these programs met with considerable frustration and resistance when the new workers came up against established agencies and professions. There were sometimes no jobs available, or jobs at only the most menial levels, or jobs with no direction or challenge. The established professions have often considered these workers to be cut-rate "non-professionals" or "sub-professionals" who were there as a temporary expedience, to be replaced as soon as full professionals became available.¹⁵

In a similar vein, Francine Sobey in her book, The Non-Professional Revolution in Mental Health, points out the related problems of planning and status vis a vis the professional and paraprofessional:

Looking strictly at objectives in the use of non-professionals in mental health, one finds a questionable mixture of conflicting goals, often lacking in priorities. Unable to wait for research-based knowledge, some large scale programs have emerged, combining ambitious and often contradictory goals . . .

The professions have spent years in carefully developing strict educational standards and fighting non-specific qualifications which lead to personal and political favoritism. For many (such as the professional social workers of the Veteran's Administration) it has been an uphill fight to achieve recognition of professional status and

¹⁵Southern Regional Education Board, Roles and Functions for Mental Health Workers, pp. 1-2.

to keep up with the higher status of physicians, psychologists, and other professional teammates. Competition from non-professional social workers, arriving at a time of newly achieved professional status for social workers within the system, is not likely to be welcomed.

Conflict is sharpest as the nonprofessional moves closer in training and job responsibility to his professional colleague. That is, the professional feels threatened by the prospect of a career line which may rival his own, as between the professionally trained (master of social work degree) social worker and the college graduate social worker, especially when both are assigned similar job responsibility.¹⁶

ISSUES OF EMPLOYMENT

Such general concerns about the availability of meaningful employment for paraprofessionals have tended to be borne out in the literature. A major U.S. Department of Labor study in 1969 on career mobility among one hundred and eighteen paraprofessionals found that many of the workers were in "dead end" jobs.¹⁷ The study found that opportunities

¹⁶Francine Sobey, The Non-Professional Revolution in Mental Health, pp. 36-37 and Preston Dyer, "How Professional is the BSW Worker?" Social Work, XXII (November 1977), pp. 487-492. It is interesting to note that in reference to Sobey's latter point, the profession moved to reduce such conflict among the MSW and BSW through its recent decision to allow the BSW workers into their professional organization, the National Association of Social Workers, thus recognizing the BSW as the first level of professional social work practice. However, this has in no way lessened controversy within the profession over this decision. For a discussion of this conflict, see Dyer's article. Similarly, such conflict can be seen in Oregon in the recent effort among social workers to combat trends towards declassification among public agencies in hiring.

¹⁷National Committee on Employment of Youth, Career Mobility for Paraprofessionals in Human Service Agencies (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1971), p. 113.

for career advancement were "severely limited or completely non-existent."¹⁸ Likewise, Aaron Schmais, in his review of paraprofessional employment, found that "the lack of upgrading has been a problem for almost every program employing non-professionals. This has occurred without relevance to successful performance."¹⁹ Here in Oregon the problems of career mobility and advancement have been forcefully articulated by paraprofessionals themselves. A 1974 conference of paraprofessional human service workers cited the lack of adequate career ladders in both the public and private sectors, and insufficient numbers of entry level positions as two of the most critical problems facing A.A. degree graduates.²⁰

Despite the serious problems of mobility in agencies, it appears that at least through the mid-1970s, employment prospects were good for trained paraprofessionals. In her major study of some ten thousand NIMH-trained paraprofessionals, Francine Sobey found that almost two-thirds of the workers found employment in the mental health field following completion of training.²¹ The 1969 U.S. Department

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Aaron Schmais, Implementing Non Professional Programs in Human Services, Manpower Training Series, no. 1 (New York: New York University, 1967), pp. 15-16.

²⁰"Spring into Action: Conference for Human Service Workers," notes taken by author, Mt. Hood, Oregon, May 16-17, 1974.

²¹Sobey, The Nonprofessional Revolution in Mental Health, p. 168.

of Labor study reported similar employment figures.²² A 1971 follow-up study of graduates of a community college program for mental health workers in Philadelphia found that over 85% of graduates seeking employment had done so within one year of graduation.²³

Despite these seemingly optimistic results, other sources have commented on the questionable stability of such employment. A study by the Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., of paraprofessionals employed in nine major cities found that over 25% of those working were part-time employees.²⁴ While finding high employment figures among those surveyed, the U.S. Labor Department study noted that the extremely stable employee character of the workers was most probably influenced by "the lack of opportunities for paraprofessionals elsewhere."²⁵ In addition, Schmais argues that job discontinuity is a major issue:

Too many of the jobs held by nonprofessionals continue to be supported by "soft money" (grants and demonstration projects), and conversely, few

²²National Committee on Employment of Youth, Career Mobility for Paraprofessionals, p. 131.

²³Sheila Brooks, Starlett Craig and Cheryl Crommell, "A Followup Study of the First Graduating Class of Mental Health Workers at the Community College of Philadelphia," (M.S.S. Thesis, Bryn Mawr College, 1971), p. 67.

²⁴Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., A Study of the Non Professional in C.A.P. (New York: Office of Economic Opportunity, 1966).

²⁵National Committee on Employment of Youth, Career Mobility for Paraprofessionals, p. 113.

have been set up as permanent jobs.²⁶

Edward Brawley notes that some educators have indicated that the generalist nature of paraprofessional training in community colleges has also made the task of developing and filling jobs for paraprofessionals more difficult.²⁷ They argue, reports Brawley, that as specificity concerning paraprofessionals' abilities and task functions is diluted in a generalist framework, it is increasingly difficult to write job descriptions and justify employment of paraprofessionals. Brawley, on the other hand, argues that just the opposite may be true:

. . . it can plausibly be argued that the generalist's model of the associate degree worker may be popular and prevalent precisely because it does not necessitate a clear definition of functions. If this is the case, the generalist model may serve to perpetuate the lack of specificity of service activity and role differentiation that characterizes the human services.²⁸

More current figures and discussions of the employment issues surrounding paraprofessionals are, unfortunately, not available. As previously mentioned, most of the recent research into paraprofessionalism has centered on the training phase: curriculum development, techniques of teaching, and other educational components. Such an emphasis on pre-employment factors has tended to ignore

²⁶Schmais, Implementing Non Professional Program in Human Services, p. 15.

²⁷Brawley, The New Human Service Worker, p. 110.

²⁸Ibid.

follow-up studies of paraprofessionals once they are employed. Accordingly, only general projections and speculation can be utilized in gauging employment possibilities for paraprofessionals today. In 1966, Schmais estimated that some 200,000 paraprofessionals of all levels and types of training were employed in the U.S.²⁹ As previously noted, SREB estimated that as of 1974, some ten thousand associate degree workers were in the field with another ten to fifteen thousand estimated to enter the field by 1980.³⁰

Another possible gauge of employment may perhaps be seen in the relative growth or decline of paraprofessional training programs in recent years. Gartner³¹ notes that in 1969 there were 25 college programs training paraprofessionals. In 1970 the figure rose to 57, and by 1974 it was at over 200. A more recent estimate puts the figure in 1977 at around 287.³² If expanded training programs can be speculated to indicate increasing job opportunities for paraprofessionals, then these figures would tend to indicate such increased opportunities.

²⁹Schmais, Implementing Non Professional Programs in Human Services, p. 14.

³⁰Southern Regional Education Board, National Faculty Development Conferences, notes taken by author.

³¹Gartner, Paraprofessionals and their Performance, p. 106.

³²Edward Jacobs, staff member of Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, Georgia, letter to author, August 2, 1977.

ATTITUDES CONCERNING PARAPROFESSIONALS

A discussion concerning the employment possibilities for paraprofessionals and the roles and functions contained within those jobs must be closely connected to an examination of attitudes towards and conceptions of the paraprofessional. These include conceptions of status, role, and ability as seen by both the professional and the paraprofessional. Participants attending the 1974 Oregon Conference of Human Service Workers reflected the importance of such an examination. A workshop concerned with exploring roles of paraprofessionals in human services identified as major problems the lack of prestige, power and recognition experienced by workers in the field.³³ As one participant put it, "If I can't get respect from the people I work with because I'm considered a 'paraprofessional,' then what's in it for me?"³⁴

While the depth of emotion concerning the relative status and role conceptions of paraprofessionals manifested at this conference cannot be adequately represented in words, a review of the literature reveals that such issues are central concerns. As previously noted, both Sobey and the SREB study pointed out the problems of role conflict and status differentiation felt by professionals and paraprofes-

³³"Spring into Action Conference," notes taken by author.

³⁴Ibid.

working together. The SREB study suggests that such conflict is to be expected as new levels of manpower enter the profession. The study concludes that such a presence is inherently threatening to the profession:

The implication of this whole notion of new levels of manpower and the notion of a generalist is initially threatening to the established professions. In the past, most professional associations opposed the development of aides or assistants, but have changed their policy positions in the past few years and are now encouraging and assisting in the development and use of new levels of manpower. This is encouraging, but some of the older members of the profession are not yet convinced, and can be expected to have some reservations about the 'quality' of the work of aides and assistants for some time to come.³⁵

Studies in role relations provide some insight into explaining this phenomenon. Alvin Zander, Arthur Cohen and Ezra Stotland examined the basis of this reaction in their classic study of members of professional mental health teams.³⁶ They examined inter-group behavior and attitudes among mental health teams having psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and social workers. The investigators discovered that although members of the team often performed identical job functions, clear status and role differentiation remained. They observed that occupants of higher status positions overtly and covertly moved to place

³⁵Southern Regional Education Board, Roles and Functions for Mental Health Workers, p. 67.

³⁶Alvin Zander, Arthur Cohen, and Ezra Stotland, Role Relations in Mental Health Professions (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1957).

in a subordinate position workers of other disciplines who appeared to threaten their status. Clear boundaries of work roles were established by superior status members of the teams, and encroachment upon those boundaries by lower status team members invoked resistance, fear and anger among the higher status workers. In such cases, lower status workers were seen as threatening and their competency was minimized.

The Philadelphia community college follow-up study also illustrates this phenomenon. The study found that as evaluated by their agency supervisors, the jobs paraprofessionals were engaged in could not be seen as significantly different from jobs held by agency professionals. Despite the similarity of jobs, however, a large proportion of professionals insisted on labeling these workers as aides or non-professionals.³⁷

The issues of role conflict and status differentiation are sources of serious turmoil in the helping profession. Most advocates of paraprofessionalism view the movement as one towards a "new career" and not merely a preliminary to entry into the traditional professions. Due to this, many have called for a re-examination of how professionalism shall be defined. Much of this re-examination has centered upon the issues of credentials versus competency. In their

³⁷Brooks, Craig and Crommell, "A Follow-up Study of the First Year Class of Mental Health Workers at the Community College of Philadelphia," pp. 64-65.

text, Human Services: The Third Revolution in Mental Health, Fisher, Mehr and Truckenrod criticize the mental health field's reliance on formal credentials and its subsequent debasement of non-credentialed workers:

. . . a psychoanalyst without a medical degree is a 'lay' analyst; a professional without a medical degree is an 'ancillary' staff member; a staff person without at least a master's degree is a 'paraprofessional'. The idea that by becoming generalists we become less than professionals is perhaps the crux of the matter. We suggest that one does not need a 'professional' degree to be a professional.³⁸

Dr. Matthew Dumont, one of the more militant critics of the professions, declares that the professional reliance on credentials reflects the "contented visage of a credentialed elite pre-occupied with a career oriented toward wealth and prestige, esoteric skills or the defense of jurisdictions."³⁹ Dumont proposes a "new professionalism" completely void of formal credentials.

More moderate attempts to solve the problem have seen the establishment of models of career ladders and lattices combining elements of competency assessment, on the job experience, and credentialed or non-credentialed academic training.⁴⁰ SREB has been a leading proponent of such models for career ladders and training, and as they

³⁸Walter Fisher, Joseph Mehr and Philip Truckenrod, Human Services: The Third Revolution in Mental Health (New York: Alfred Publishing Company, 1974), p. 108.

³⁹Matthew Dumont, "The Changing Face of Professionalism," Social Policy, III (May-June 1970), pp. 23-30.

⁴⁰Southern Regional Education Board, Roles and Functions for Mental Health Workers.

indicate, the process is not a simple one:

A rational model will have great implications for the use of new levels of manpower, the development of career ladders in mental health, and the training of all levels of workers. The state of the art in job analysis is still quite primitive when we talk about work activity that deals primarily with people rather than products. The state of the art in job analysis is also primitive in the area of mental health professions.⁴¹

WHAT PARAPROFESSIONALS DO

As originally conceived by the early proponents of the "New Careers" concept, paraprofessionals would be trained to fill positions that were not only already present in the human services continuum but they would also be prepared to fill creative, new, and previously unestablished positions.⁴² In the early years of the movement, paraprofessionals were predominantly hired in traditional entry or low level positions in public agencies. Such agencies primarily utilized paraprofessionals as teacher aides, health aides, day care aides, hospital aides and the like.⁴³ However, as the movement grew in numbers and influence, and as more specialized training and funding became available, the nature of paraprofessional employment significantly altered.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 3.

⁴²Pearl and Riessman, New Careers for the Poor.

⁴³For example, see various articles in Riessman and Popper, Up From Poverty.

Sobey found in her authoritative study that "non-professionals, to a highly significant degree, are engaged in new roles and functions not previously performed by other professionals or nonprofessionals."⁴⁴ Among the staff categories that paraprofessionals were found to work, significant numbers were in job classifications such as: recreation and group workers, case aides, special skill instructors, community health workers, social worker aides, and community organizers.⁴⁵

In analyzing the specific functions that paraprofessionals performed, Sobey found that the following were duties primarily executed by paraprofessionals in agencies:

- caretaking (e.g., ward care, day care)
- socializing relationships (individual or group)
- activity group therapy
- tutoring
- milieu therapy.⁴⁶

The following were activities paraprofessionals engaged in to an equal or significant degree as compared to professionals:

- individual counseling
- group counseling

⁴⁴Sobey, The Nonprofessional Revolution in Mental Health, p. 97.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 74-77.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 104

--retraining (special skill functions).⁴⁷

In summarizing her findings, Sobey concluded:

Nonprofessionals were viewed as contributing to mental health in two unique ways: (1) filling new roles based on patient needs which were previously unfulfilled by any staff; and (2) performing parts of tasks previously performed by professionals, but tailoring the tasks to the nonprofessional's abilities. The result is that the task gestalt becomes "unique" to the paraprofessional.⁴⁸

In reviewing the research of others, Brawley concluded that paraprofessionals performed or could perform numerous roles.

Among these were:

- outreach worker
- patient/client follow-up
- referral and information services
- individual and group counseling
- program development and consultation
- community organization
- intake/information gathering
- writing reports
- supervising aides and volunteers.⁴⁹

Similarly, SREB concluded that paraprofessionals fit into many roles--outreach worker, client advocate, consultant, teacher, counselor, care giver, data manager, and administrator--all with differing levels of skills and task

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁹Brawley, The New Human Service Worker, p. 86.

expectations.⁵⁰ By emphasizing the generalist framework in their approach, SREB hopes that paraprofessionals can be increasingly seen as middle level technicians working in concert, not in conflict, with professionals.⁵¹

A review of the literature showed that both paraprofessionals and professionals are far from agreement in answering basic questions about the roles and functions that these respective groups should engage in. However, the review indicated that despite disagreement over recent trends in uses of paraprofessionals, associate degree workers are increasingly engaging in a multitude of job categories and tasks, some of which overlap with what have traditionally been considered professional roles and duties.

SUMMARY

This review of the literature has intended to (1) provide a general history of paraprofessionalism in the U.S.; and (2) provide an overview of the issues and problems paraprofessionals face as they enter the work world of the human services. In summary, it appears that this overview indicates the presence of several issues pertinent to study and reflection whenever an analysis of paraprofessional performance is undertaken:

⁵⁰Southern Regional Education Board, Roles and Functions for Mental Health Workers, pp. 41-55.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 62.

- (1) Employment and employability (are jobs available, issues of mobility and advancement, job satisfaction, etc.);
- (2) Issues of status, power and role identification;
- (3) Job performance and skill attainment.

These points and this review provide a basis for the study to follow.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study attempts to identify the current career and educational status of a select group of associate degree paraprofessional human service workers. This study seeks to determine the perceptions and experiences of these paraprofessionals concerning issues and problems commonly identified in the literature: career mobility and advancement; relative status; job satisfaction; roles and functions of work; and evaluation of their paraprofessional training. A review of the literature revealed that considerable discussion concerning these issues has occurred. The search of the literature also revealed that in spite of the intensity of interest concerning paraprofessionals and their performance, little has been published examining the status of paraprofessional graduates once they have left their training programs.

It appears useful to ascertain, therefore, the status and experiences of one such group of paraprofessional graduates. Following is an overview of the research design, a description of the population and discussion of the data-gathering process.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A questionnaire was utilized as the sole source of data collection for this study. The questionnaire began by asking for general characteristics of the respondents: personal characteristics (age, sex, and ethnic origin), current educational status, and current employment status. The questionnaire was then broken into four additional sections, to be answered by the respondents as appropriate: (1) those currently employed in human services; (2) those employed but not in human services; (3) those unemployed and not in school; and (4) students. A fifth section to be answered by all graduates completed the survey. This final section contained questions evaluating the graduates' experiences as paraprofessionals and their evaluation of the training they received from the college program.

The questionnaire was three pages in length with questions on both sides of the pages and contained fifty questions. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

THE POPULATION

The population of this study consisted of the 1973-74, 1974-75, and 1975-76 graduating classes of the Human Resources Technology program at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. The program is an associate degree course aimed at training paraprofessional human service workers for employment

in Oregon. The program utilizes a generalist framework in its training approach. All students admitted to the program must meet special program qualifications of ability and inclination as well as meet the general college admittance requirements.

The Human Resources program began training students in 1973, following receipt of a NIMH grant. The program was assimilated into the normal college budget following termination of the NIMH funding in 1976. Therefore, all graduates in this study received similar training as specified in the NIMH grant.

The population of this study consisted of all 39 graduates of the three classes. There were 28 females and 11 males.

Although the 1976-77 class graduated prior to the start of this study, it was decided to omit their inclusion. This was done, since the time span between their graduation (June 1977) and the beginning of data collection (July 1977) was believed insufficient to reasonably expect the graduates to find employment or make other career choices.

It should also be noted that as originally conceived, the study was also intended to include the first three graduating classes of the Mental Health Worker program at Mt. Hood Community College in Portland, Oregon. Like the Chemeketa program, Mt. Hood's program was funded under the same NIMH grant, and its inclusion in the study would have allowed an examination of graduates from the two major

paraprofessional training programs in the state. However, an inability to obtain updated information in order to contact sufficient numbers of graduates from the program necessitated the abandonment of this project.

DATA-GATHERING PROCEDURE

An initial questionnaire was written in June and July of 1977 and submitted for recommendations, criticisms and suggested changes to the program directors at Mt. Hood and Chemeketa community colleges, as well as to Professor Norman Wyers, Portland State University, School of Social Work. Following subsequent revisions, the questionnaire and cover letter were mailed out in the latter two weeks of July. In late August a second mailing was sent to graduates who had not yet responded.

A total of twenty-five questionnaires were returned (a sixty-four percent response rate). Ten graduates did not return questionnaires and four graduates could not be located. Considering the span of years involved in this study and the relatively impersonal method of contacting graduates, a sixty-four percent response rate appears surprisingly high, indicative of interest, if not strong opinion.

All questionnaire responses were coded and programmed for frequency and percentage distribution. Open-ended questions were manually recorded, as were various solicited and unsolicited comments. The findings follow.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current career status of associate degree human service workers and perceptions of their experiences as paraprofessionals. Twenty-five graduates responded to the questionnaire, eight males and seventeen females. Forty-four percent of the graduates were twenty to twenty-nine years of age, thirty-two percent were thirty to thirty-nine years, sixteen percent were forty to forty-nine, and eight percent were fifty to fifty-nine years of age. Eighty-eight percent of the graduates were Caucasian and twelve percent identified themselves as Chicano or Mexican-American.

The current employment status of the graduates was a particular concern of the study. The survey contained a number of questions exploring this area. Table I shows that eighty-four percent of the graduates were employed at the time of the survey. Sixty percent were employed full time and sixteen percent were part-time workers. Another sixteen percent, or four graduates, reported they were unemployed. Of the four, two said they were unemployed by their own choice and two were unemployed not by choice.

TABLE I
CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARAPROFESSIONAL
GRADUATES, BY NUMBER AND PERCENT

Employment Status	Graduates	
	n	%
Employed full-time	17	68
Employed part-time	4	16
Unemployed (by choice)	2	8
Unemployed (not by choice)	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	25	100

GRADUATES EMPLOYED IN HUMAN SERVICES

Over eighty-five percent, or eighteen of the employed graduates, reported they were working in the field of human services. Table II indicates the major functions of the agencies in which they were currently employed. The largest category of employment by agency function turned out to be education. Forty-four percent, or eight of the graduates, indicated this was the primary function of their agency. Four graduates marked Referral and Information services as the primary agency function, and two cited Community Mental Health. Agency functions of Mental Retardation, Corrections and Public Welfare were reported by one graduate in each category respectively. One graduate reported that his/her

TABLE II
 PRIMARY FUNCTION OF EMPLOYING AGENCY AS REPORTED
 BY PARAPROFESSIONAL GRADUATES
 WORKING IN HUMAN SERVICES

Agency Function	Graduates	
	n	%
Referral and Information . . .	4	22
Education	8	44
Community Mental Health . . .	2	11
Mental Retardation	1	6
Corrections	1	6
Public Welfare	1	6
Mental Hospital Work	-	-
Alcoholism	-	-
Physical Rehabilitation . . .	-	-
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	18	101

NOTE: Percentage total is the result of rounding.

employing agency served an area not included in the question: geriatrics.

When asked to describe the primary nature of their own jobs, a wide variety of answers were solicited from the graduates, as illustrated in Table III. One-third of the graduates indicated that record keeping and teaching were

TABLE III
 PRIMARY NATURE OF JOB ROLES AS REPORTED
 BY PARAPROFESSIONALS WORKING
 IN HUMAN SERVICES

	Graduates (n=20)	
	n	%
Individual Counseling	5	28
Group Counseling	3	17
Family Counseling	5	28
Screening and Evaluation	3	19
Teaching	6	33
Record Keeping	6	33
Crisis Intervention	4	22
Client Advocacy	5	28
Planning and Research	2	11
Clerical	2	11
Community Organizing	2	11
Other	2	11

primary job roles. Counseling, be it individual, group or family oriented, also solicited much response. Five graduates marked some type of one-to-one counseling or therapy as a job role, and family counseling/therapy was marked by the same number. Group counseling/therapy was perceived as a major job role by only three graduates. All other

categories of job roles were also marked (though in lesser numbers) by the graduates. Two graduates additionally indicated that consultation was a major duty in their jobs.

Graduates surveyed were asked to indicate what specific skills and tasks they performed normally in their jobs. Again, this question solicited a wide variety of responses in which all but two of the twenty-two task and skill categories were marked by at least one respondent. Such varying tasks as interviewing, record keeping, writing reports, teaching and counseling were all performed by a majority of the graduates. Thirty-three percent of the graduates reported that providing transportation, and training other workers were job tasks they performed. Home visits, client follow-up, and supervision of other workers were categories marked by twenty-eight percent of the graduates. Very few graduates perform such tasks as recruiting clients, general clerical duties, physical therapy, preparing social histories, or making job assignments. No graduates give medication or have housekeeping duties. Table IV presents a detailed breakdown.

Most of the graduates employed in human services were working in newly-created jobs. A large majority (sixty-one percent) reported that the jobs they held did not exist in their agency prior to their employment. Likewise, sixty-one percent of the workers indicated they had held only one job since graduation. Thirty-nine percent indicated they had held more than one job since graduation, the average being

TABLE IV
 SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TASKS PERFORMED
 IN HUMAN SERVICE JOBS
 BY PARAPROFESSIONALS

Job Tasks and Skills	Graduates (n=18)	
	n	%
Interviewing	12	67
Record Keeping	15	83
Writing Reports	13	72
Organizing Staff Meetings	3	17
Teaching	10	56
Counseling	12	67
Providing Transportation	6	33
General Clerical	1	6
Recruiting Clients	1	6
Testing	4	22
Physical Therapy	1	6
Making Home Visits	5	28
Training Other Workers	6	33
Client Follow-up	5	28
Supervising Other Workers	5	28
Preparing Social Histories	1	6
Making Job Assignments	2	11
Screening Applicants	5	28
House Keeping	-	-
Giving Medication	-	-
Behavior Modification	3	17
Preparing Treatment Plans	4	22

two. Thirty-eight percent were employed in an agency that served as a field placement while they were in the Human Resources program. Time spent working in current jobs ranged from two months to four years, the mean length of employment in their current job being 2.1 years.

Most of the workers have opportunities for advancement in salary and/or job positions in their agencies, as illustrated in Table V. Only one worker indicated there

TABLE V
POSSIBILITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT IN AGENCIES AS
REPORTED BY WORKERS IN HUMAN SERVICES

Advancement	Graduates	
	n	%
Salary Only	8	44
Job Position Only	-	-
Job Position and Salary	7	39
No Possibility of Advancement	1	6
No Response	<u>2</u>	<u>11</u>
Total	18	100

were no opportunities for advancement, and two did not respond to the question. However, most workers cannot advance in their agencies as paraprofessionals. Fifty-five

percent said they needed additional formal education or a combination of additional work experience and formal education in order to advance in their agency. Sixteen percent said that additional work experience only was necessary.

Eight respondents listed obstacles they saw facing them in attempting to advance in their agencies. Three cited a lack of openings for higher positions and five complained of the difficulty of going to school while working.

Finally, graduates employed in the human services were asked to evaluate their jobs and salaries as compared to their expectations upon graduation. The answers are reflected in Table VI. In terms of the work they were doing, sixty-one percent felt it exceeded their expectations. Only three graduates said their work was less than they expected, and four indicated it was the same as expected.

When asked about salary expectation however, the figures are quite different. Eight graduates (forty-four percent) reported their salaries were similar to their expectations. Three indicated it was less than expected, and five thought the salaries were greater than they had expected. Two graduates did not respond to the question.

EMPLOYED BUT NOT IN HUMAN SERVICES

Only three survey respondents fell into this category, and they answered few of the questions directed towards them. When asked to describe their work, only one responded to the

TABLE VI
 EXPECTATIONS OF PARAPROFESSIONALS WORKING
 IN HUMAN SERVICES AS TO TYPE
 OF WORK AND SALARIES

	Graduates	
	n	%
<u>Type of Work</u>		
Greater Than Expectations	11	61
Less Than Expectations	3	17
Same As Expectations	<u>4</u>	<u>22</u>
Total	18	100
<u>Salary</u>		
Greater Than Expectations	5	28
Less Than Expectations	3	17
Same As Expectations	8	44
No Response	<u>2</u>	<u>11</u>
Total	18	100

question. This graduate said she was employed in a secretarial/ clerical position. However, when asked, "Are you currently seeking or do you plan to seek employment in the human services?", all three answered in the negative. None responded to follow-up questions concerning their career choices.

UNEMPLOYED GRADUATES NOT IN SCHOOL

Two graduates fit this category. Both indicated they were currently seeking employment in the human services. They listed as obstacles to their seeking such employment as: lack of jobs available; insufficient education and work experience; and stiff competition for jobs.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE GRADUATES

At the time of the survey, twenty-two of the twenty-five graduates had not obtained credentials beyond the associate degree level. The remaining three had obtained B.A. or B.S. degrees (two in sociology and one in psychology).

Only eight of the twenty-five graduates said they were currently students. Of those eight, four were part-time students and three were attending school full-time. Of the eighteen graduates working in the human services, six indicated they were either part-time or full-time students. Two graduates described themselves as full-time students and not working in any capacity.

Five out of the eight graduates in school were in the process of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. When questioned about their program majors, two said they were in elementary education and three were in sociology or social services. One student indicated he was in a master's program in social work and one student said she was seeking no degree.

Forty-three percent of the twenty-five graduates plan

sometime within the next five years to continue their formal education (see Table VII). Of those currently employed in

TABLE VII
PLANS TO CONTINUE FORMAL EDUCATION IN NEXT
FIVE YEARS AS REPORTED BY PARAPROFESSIONAL
GRADUATES IN CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYMENT

Response	Working In Human Services		Working, Another Field		Unemployed Not In School		Total Of Graduates	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	10	56	-	-	-	-	10	44
No	4	22	1	33	2	100	7	30
Don't Know . . .	3	16	-	-	-	-	3	13
No Answer . . .	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>67</u>	=	=	<u>3</u>	<u>13</u>
Total	18	100	3	100	2	100	23	100

human services, the figure rises to fifty-five percent. None of the graduates employed in a field other than human services and none of those unemployed and not in school indicated any decision to continue their education. Seven graduates said they had no plans to return to school. One graduate said age was a primary factor in her decision not to go back to school. Another answered, "In heaven's name, why?"

A majority of the graduates who planned to continue

their education are seeking professional degrees as an ultimate goal. Six of the graduates said they were or would be seeking bachelor degrees. Three indicated that a master's degree in social work was their ultimate goal.

EXPERIENCES, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

The associate degree workers had mixed reactions concerning their contact with the professional world of human services. Graduates were asked to rate their perceptions of how professionals generally felt about paraprofessionals. Table VIII shows that all twenty-five of the

TABLE VIII

ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS PARAPROFESSIONALS AS REPORTED BY PARAPROFESSIONALS

Professional Attitude	Working In Human Services		Working, Another Field		Unemployed Not In School		Total Of Graduates	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Strongly Support/Accept.	5	28	-	-	-	-	5	20
Mildly Support/Accept.	6	33	-	-	2	50	8	32
Neutral	4	22	3	100	2	50	9	36
Mildly Non-Supportive: . . .	3	17	-	-	-	-	3	12
Strongly Opposed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	18	100	3	100	4	100	25	100

graduates answered the question. A plurality of the graduates (thirty-six percent) believed that professionals were neither supportive or opposed to paraprofessionals. Rather, they reported professionals held a neutral viewpoint. However, the total of graduates who reported professionals held a mildly or strongly supportive attitude equalled fifty-two percent or slightly over half of the total sample. Only three graduates (representing all of those employed, but not in human services) found professionals to hold a skeptical and mildly non-supportive view. None of the sample perceived strong opposition from professionals.

A related question of professional attitude was asked of those graduates working in the human services. They were asked how they felt their agencies responded to paraprofessionals. Fifteen of the affected graduates (eighty-three percent) felt their agency was supportive and accepting of paraprofessionals. Only one respondent felt his/her agency was not supportive or accepting. Two graduates fitting this category did not respond.

There was general agreement among all the graduates that the training they had received from the Human Resources program had helped their career, as Table IX indicates.

As can be seen in Table IX, a substantial majority of the total sample, eighty-four percent, felt the paraprofessional training they had received greatly helped their careers. Additionally, another twelve percent of the total felt it had helped somewhat. Of those employed in the human

TABLE IX
EFFECT OF PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING
ON PURSUING CAREER AS
JUDGED BY GRADUATES

Effect	Employed In Human Services		Working Another Field		Unemployed Not In School		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Greatly Helped . . .	17	94	1	33	3	75	21	84
Helped Somewhat . .	1	6	1	33	1	25	3	12
Neither Helped or Hindered . .	-	-	1	33	-	-	1	4
Hindered . .	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	18	100	3	99	4	100	25	100

NOTE: Percentage total is the result of rounding.

services, ninety-four percent felt it had greatly helped their careers and one hundred percent felt it helped to some degree. Among those three graduates employed in jobs other than human services, one felt it greatly helped, one said it helped somewhat, and another felt it had no effect. All four of the unemployed graduates felt their training had helped them pursue their degrees in some way.

Table X indicates what specific factors in their training helped the graduates in their careers. No breakdown

into sub-categories was made and the figures reflect the total sample population. As is shown, the graduates were in general agreement that the program had developed their basic skills, provided for personal growth, and afforded them the opportunity to gain work experience through their field placements. Less than a third of the graduates listed staff

TABLE X
HELPFUL ASPECTS OF PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING
AS REPORTED BY GRADUATES

Helpful Aspects	Graduates (n=25)	
	n	%
Developed Basic Skills	23	92
Theoretical Understanding of Human Services	20	80
Experiences of Field Placement	19	76
Staff Assisted in Finding Employment	8	32
Personal Growth	20	80
Other	3	12

assistance in finding employment as one of the ways the program had helped their careers.

Three graduates said other factors in the program helped them. These included a better understanding of the political dynamics of social services and personal friendships developed with staff and students. One student remarked that she met

her future husband in the program.

Only one comment was made about the paraprofessional training as a hindrance. This person said he felt over-qualified for most of the jobs he could find.

Graduates were asked to evaluate their experiences as paraprofessional human service workers, the results of which are given in Table XI. In general, a large majority of the

TABLE XI
EVALUATION BY GRADUATES OF THEIR EXPERIENCES
AS A PARAPROFESSIONAL

Reported Experiences	Employed In Human Services		Working, Another Field		Unemployed Not In School		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Satisfied Currently, Hopeful of Future	15	83	1	33	2	50	18	72
Satisfied Currently, Uncertain of Future	1	6	1	33	-	-	2	8
Dissatisfied	1	6	1	33	2	50	4	16
No Answer	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	=	=	=	=	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
Total	18	101	3	99	4	100	25	100

NOTE: Percentage total is the result of rounding.

graduates responded favorably, indicating that they were currently satisfied and hopeful of the future. Two graduates

expressed satisfaction presently but were uncertain of the future. Four graduates expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences.

Among those employed in human services, all but two felt satisfied and hopeful of the future. Only one respondent expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences.

That graduate remarked:

I'm not really satisfied with the work I do. It seems to me that my agency just as often hassles people as it helps them. I find many of my co-workers are even more difficult to work with than the most difficult of our clients, and having to "watch my step" constantly gets exhausting.

Finally, the graduates were asked: "Based on your knowledge and experience, do you see that the jobs available to paraprofessionals adequately utilize the skills obtained in A.A. programs?"

While a majority of the graduates felt available jobs did adequately utilize paraprofessional skills (fifty-two percent--thirteen graduates--"yes", forty percent--ten graduates--"no", and two graduates gave no answer), this question elicited the largest amount of written comment. Most comments were made by those disagreeing with the question and generally echoed the sentiment of this writer: "On the contrary, most paraprofessionals are overqualified for many jobs available to them."

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS

This study has attempted to examine the career status and experiences of a select group of associate degree paraprofessionals. While the study contains a number of interesting results and observations, it also suffers from some clear limitations. These limitations will be discussed before offering conclusions and comments.

LIMITATIONS

One of the difficulties in assessing the impact and experiences of paraprofessionals involves obtaining a sample of sufficient numbers to give weight and validity to a study. Certainly, the problems inherent in any attempt to locate paraprofessional workers some three to four years after their graduation affects such an assessment effort. The inability to use Mount Hood's graduates, some forty to fifty in number, seriously limited the study's potential population. As a result, the original purpose of the study, to assess the impact of paraprofessionals in Oregon, had to be revised to provide a profile of one particular program.

Although the response rate of the survey (sixty-four percent) appears rather high, this figure translates into a total number of twenty-five graduates, a rather low number

from which to comfortably draw conclusions. A related problem of response involves the nature of those who respond and those who do not. A large number of those who responded to the survey reported high degrees of job and career satisfaction. This raises the question of whether persons feeling positive about their experiences are more likely to share these experiences than those with less positive experiences--thus biasing the results.

A more general concern involves the nature of the study design. As a simple exploratory study aimed at providing a profile of graduates from one program, the study results have limited function outside of this context. The question of reliability, or the stability of the measurement process, also arises. The small size of the sample, the possible bias generated by factors of response (raised in the previous paragraph), the survey questions, and the lack of correlation procedures in the design should be taken into account. Similarly, the problem of survey validity exists. Did the survey indeed accurately measure the educational and occupational status of the graduates? Again, the lack of previous studies for comparison and contrast, the lack of statistical measures and tests, and the problems of reliability must be seen as negatively affecting the validity of this study.

These objections and limitations are not meant, however, to lessen in any way the importance and potential uses of this study. The study does provide a relatively detailed profile of the graduates of the Human Resources Technology program

at Chemeketa Community College. This provides valuable information the program directors may use in planning for and evaluating their curriculum and training content. The study also provides insight into how at least one group of associate degree paraprofessionals have fared in human services. Since studies of this type do not exist in any abundance in the literature, this profile takes on even more important status as a source of information and as a springboard for further study.

COMMENTS ON THE FINDINGS

This study found that the vast majority of paraprofessionals continued their involvement in the human services and were largely successful in their attempts to find employment in the field. Indeed, the results indicate that these paraprofessionals were employed in a wide variety of jobs and possessed and utilized a wide array of skills. The graduates were found to be employed not only in types of work most typically linked to paraprofessionals (such as teacher aides, clerical work, record keeping, and the like), but also were working in more highly complex and technical positions: counseling and therapy, planning, research, community organization, and consultation. These findings seem to substantiate claims in the literature that paraprofessionals are increasingly being employed in creative and innovative ways, sometimes in positions that overlap or

compete with jobs traditionally held by professionals.

In performing their jobs, paraprofessionals in this study are also seen to possess a variety of skills. A majority of graduates working in human services reported that basic skills and tasks of interviewing, record keeping, writing reports, teaching, and counseling were specific parts of their jobs. Additionally, other graduates reported various skills ranging from less complex tasks of providing transportation and screening applicants, to highly technical and specialized work such as preparing treatment plans, supervising and training other workers, testing, and performing physical therapy.

Despite the success that these paraprofessionals have had in entering the human services, several obstacles appear to exist. Foremost among these obstacles seem to be the problems of career mobility and advancement. As generally suspected in the literature and confirmed in this study, the ability of paraprofessionals to advance as paraprofessionals in their agencies appears virtually non-existent. A vast majority of the paraprofessionals in this study indicated that their agencies required additional educational training before they could advance. Ironically, most graduates reported that these same employing agencies which restricted paraprofessional advancement were at the same time generally supportive and accepting of paraprofessionals and their work. Thus, the continued insistence by agencies for academic credentials as a requirement for career advancement appears

to, at least from the results of this study, seriously limits the potential for expansion and upgrading of paraprofessional positions.

The tendency of agencies to recognize academic credentials as the primary (and in many cases, the sole) criteria for advancement serves to generate additional problems for paraprofessionals. The general failure of agencies to provide alternative avenues for mobility and advancement preclude any meaningful attempts to create career ladders in which paraprofessionals can participate. Although it is not the focus of this study, the relevance of formal education to actual job tasks in human services seems to be a vital factor in the future growth or decline of paraprofessionalism. If paraprofessionals are performing specialized skills and functions, but are not reaping the career benefits of those roles (i.e., advancement and subsequent prestige), then it would appear likely that the future career and personal experiences of paraprofessionals might well result in frustration, resignation and anger.

Despite such speculation, the graduates in this study reported that they are presently experiencing a high degree of career and job satisfaction. The graduates generally found both the broader professional community and their employing agencies to be accepting and supportive of paraprofessionals. This would seem to conflict with the tendency in the literature to assert a widespread suspicion or resistance felt by professionals towards paraprofessionals.

If such resistance was actually present when the graduates entered the work world, it could be believed that the quality and competent nature of their work appeared to dampen such resistance. In fact, however, most of the jobs held by the paraprofessionals did not even exist prior to their employment, suggesting that agencies took special efforts to employ paraprofessionals and did not resist or hinder their employment.

In a similar vein, paraprofessionals are employed in positions that are generally greater than their initial expectations upon graduation. The wide range of paraprofessional employment appears to indicate a broad acceptance of paraprofessionals in the field, particularly in the areas of education, information and referral services, and community mental health. That such broad acceptance can be found is gratifying, for it reflects the growing professional recognition of paraprofessionals and their contribution to human services.

Paraprofessionals in this study appear to be moving towards professional careers. Although the vast majority of the graduates still possess only an associate degree, over one-half of those currently working in the field are seeking or plan to seek a professional degree. The reasons for this movement towards upgrading credentials are varied and not always clear. Certainly, the need for professional credentials in order to advance in agencies is one factor in

this trend. Other graduates reported a desire to specialize in a particular area of service and felt additional education was necessary.

The trend among the graduates away from paraprofessionalism raises speculation about the stability of this "new career." If advancement and mobility are indeed virtually non-existent without professional credentials, the issues and problems contained within this situation need urgent resolutions. If paraprofessionals are meant to fill only middle level positions in the helping professions, then it would seem incumbent upon the profession and employing agencies to assist, financially and otherwise, those paraprofessionals who have the skill and desire to obtain professional credentials and move into professional level positions. Likewise, it seems only fair that if paraprofessionals are expected to endure the arduous task of obtaining a degree, the need for such a degree in a job should be clearly demonstrated and articulated.

As illustrated in the literature review, the problems of competency, credentials and professionalism are complex and lack any easy answers. Proposals that career ladders be based solely or primarily upon competency assessment as opposed to formal credentials appear to have widespread acceptance among paraprofessionals and their supporters. However, the arguments for formal credentials and the merits of professional training (as a superior process of guaranteeing

accountability and skilled, well-rounded workers) seem equally valid and worthy of support. Clearly, the issues are of great importance to the helping professions, and the eventual resolution of these problems will have dramatic implications for the future training of workers and the process of service delivery.

Despite such controversy, the desire of paraprofessionals to upgrade themselves cannot be faulted. Certainly, additional formal education cannot help but improve any human service worker, and the number of paraprofessionals in this study pursuing or planning to pursue additional training can perhaps be seen as a measure of the commitment these workers feel toward the field, their clients, and themselves.

While the trend toward professionalization among the graduates is not negative in itself, the reasons for this movement and the implications it might contain need to be further explored. Such a study might further delineate the problems of mobility, advancement, and the lack of career ladders facing paraprofessionals.

Finally, this study provides information useful for evaluating the relative success of the Human Resources Technology program. The evidence generated by this study and the evaluation of the program by the graduates give high marks to the training program. The program appears to have prepared its graduates with skills more than just adequate for the jobs they have received. The goal of the program, to train paraprofessional workers for employment

in human services, appears to have been successfully met. The generalist framework employed by the program provided graduates with skills enabling them to find employment in various areas of the human services. The two year program graduated workers who in many ways appear to possess skills equal to those of professionals, or who at least work in positions traditionally held by professionals. Such results are a considerable achievement for a community college program.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the paraprofessionals in this study appear at this point to be highly successful in their work and have achieved positive recognition from their agencies and the professional community around them. Despite serious problems of career advancement (a problem that cannot be over stressed as it could easily stall the paraprofessional movement), paraprofessionals in this study appear to have made a definite and positive impact on human services in Oregon. Their ability to move into creative and demanding jobs points to the important contributions paraprofessionals can and have made in the human services. If the work and successes of paraprofessionals found to exist in this study is in any way reflective of the work of paraprofessionals elsewhere in Oregon and the nation, it would appear an urgent task, therefore, that social work and the other helping professions lead the way in calling for the further development and

strengthening of paraprofessional training and employment.

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APPENDIX

Dear friend:

In cooperation with the Mental Health/Human Resources Technology programs of Mt. Hood Community College and Chemeketa Community College, I am conducting an in-depth study of the current study of the current status of paraprofessional training program upon human service delivery systems in Oregon.

To provide such a picture, your cooperation in this study is absolutely essential. Enclosed in a 56 question survey addressed to you as a graduate of an AA program. In filling out the questionnaire, check the appropriate answers as indicated on the survey sheet. All individual answers are to be held as strictly confidential. The completed study will reflect only summarized and categorized answers as supplied by the survey group. Of course, you are free to leave blank any questions you do not wish to answer.

It should be noted that for the purpose of this study, the distinction between paraprofessional and professional is denoted by formal credentials (paraprofessional is defined as holding an AA degree, professional as holding a BA or above). Please use this definition when responding to appropriate questions.

Again, your cooperation in this study is very important. I hope you will take the time to complete the survey and return it as soon as you can. If you have any questions concerning the study or would be interested in the results, please feel free to contact me: by mail: Richard Hunter

by phone:

Thank you,

Richard Hunter

MENTAL HEALTH GRADUATES STUDY

Section A: General Information

- 1.) Sex: male female
- 2.) Age: 19 or under
 20 - 29
 30 - 39
 40 - 49
 50 - 59
 60 +
- 3). Ethnic Origin:
 Caucasian
 Black
 Chicano
 Native American
 other: _____
- 4). Please indicate your current level of formal education:
 AA or AS degree
 BA/BS what major?: _____
 Masters what field?: _____
 post graduate what field?: _____
- 5). Are you currently a student? no
 yes: full time
 part time
- 6). What is your current work status: EMPLOYED: full time
 part time
 UNEMPLOYED: by choice
 not by choice
- 7). If employed, is your job:
 in the field of human services
 in a field other than human services

SECTION B: IF CURRENTLY EMPLOYED IN HUMAN SERVICES

- 8). Name of agency employed at: _____
- 9). What would you describe as the major functions of your agency? (check all that apply)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental hospital work | <input type="checkbox"/> Information and referral |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alcoholism work | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Welfare |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Retardation | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Mental Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corrections | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Rehabilitation |
- adult:
 juvenile:
 other (please describe): _____

- 10). How long have been employed at your current position?
- 11). How many different positions have you held in the human services since graduation from your paraprofessional training program?
 ___one (current job)
 ___more than one (specify number): ___
- 12). Your current job title: _____
- 13). What is your current annual salary: \$ _____
 What was your starting annual salary at this agency: \$ _____
- 14). Which of the following best describes the primary nature of your job role? (check all that apply):
- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ___one to one counseling/therapy | ___crisis intervention |
| ___group counseling/therapy | ___client advocacy |
| ___family counseling/therapy | ___planning/research |
| ___screening and evaluation | ___clerical |
| ___teaching | ___community organizing |
| ___record keeping | OTHER: _____ |
- 15). Which of the following specific skills or job tasks do you perform in your job? (check all that apply):
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ___interviewing | ___training other workers |
| ___record keeping | ___client follow-up |
| ___writing reports | ___supervising other workers |
| ___teaching | ___organizing staff meetings |
| ___counseling | ___preparing social histories |
| ___provide transportation | ___making job assignments |
| ___general clerical | ___screening applicants |
| ___recruit clients | ___housekeeping |
| ___testing | ___giving medication |
| ___physical therapy | ___behavior modification |
| ___making home visits | ___preparing treatment plans |
- 16). Would you describe your current job as:
- ___a paraprofessional position
 ___a professional position
- 17). What is the composition of your agency?
- ___majority paraprofessionals
 ___majority professionals
 ___about even staffing of professionals and paraprofessionals
 ___don't know

- 18). How would you classify the majority of your immediate co-workers?
paraprofessionals professionals
- 19). Did your position exist prior to your employment?
yes no
- 20). Did this agency serve as a field placement when you were in the paraprofessional training program?
yes no
- 21). What possibilities for advancement exist in your agency
in salary only
in job position only
in job position and salary
no possibility of advancement
- 22). To advance in your agency, do you need:
additional formal education only
additional work experience only
additional education and work experience
other (please describe): _____
- 23). In what ways will your agency help you to advance? (check all that apply)
provides release time for additional education
provides inservice training
provides funds for continuing education
other: _____
- 24). What obstacles do you see facing you in advancing in your agency:
- 25). Within the next five years, do you plan to continue your formal education? yes no don't know
- 26). If yes, what is your ultimate goal (i.e. degree, type of training, etc.):
- 27). If no, what factors or reasons prompt this decision?
- 28). In general, do you feel that your agency is:
supportive and accepting of paraprofessionals
not supportive or accepting of paraprofessionals

29). In terms of type of work, how does your job compare with your expectations upon graduation from the AA program?

- greater than expectations
 less than expectations
 same as expectations

30). How does it compare in terms of salary?

- greater than expectations
 less than expectations
 same as expectations

SECTION C: PRESENTLY EMPLOYED BUT NOT IN HUMAN SERVICES

31). Job title: _____

32). Annual salary: \$ _____

33). Please describe your work: _____

34). Are you currently seeking or do you plan to seek employment in the human services?

- yes no

35). Do you plan to continue your education in the next five years? yes no don't know

36). If yes, in what particular area of service: _____

37). If you are seeking employment in the human services, what obstacles have you met? (check all that apply)

- lack of sufficient educational credentials
 (eg. BS, MS, etc.)
 salaries too low
 lack sufficient work experience
 didn't pass required exams
 no jobs available
 other _____

38). If you are not seeking employment in the human services, why have you chosen to work outside of it?

SECTION D: IF UNEMPLOYED AND NOT IN SCHOOL

- 39). If unemployed by choice, what is your reason:
 family
 health
 personal
- 40). If unemployed but seeking employment, are you:
 looking primarily for jobs in human services
 looking primarily for jobs outside of human services
- 41). If you are seeking employment in the human services, what obstacles have you met (check all that apply):
 no jobs available
 insufficient educational credentials
 salaries too low
 insufficient work experience
 didn't pass required exams
 other (specify): _____
- 42). Have you returned to school since receiving your AA degree? yes no
- 43). In the next five years, do you plan on continuing your education? yes no don't know
- 44). If yes, what is your ultimate goal? (i.e. degree, type of training, etc.)

SECTION D: IF A STUDENT

- 45). What is your program major: _____
- 46). What degree (if any) are you seeking: _____
- 47). Why did you decide to continue beyond the AA level? (check all that apply)
 change to another field outside human services
 to obtain a better job
 to obtain a higher salary
 decision to specialize
 other: _____
- 48). Do you plan on seeking employment in the human services? yes no already employed in human services
- 49). If yes, in what capacity or area of expertise?

SECTION E: PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE FOLLOWING

- 50). Do you feel that your paraprofessional training:
- greatly helped you in pursuing your career
 - helped somewhat in pursuing career
 - neither helped nor hindered
 - hindered pursuit of career
- 51). If it helped, in what ways?
- developed basic skills
 - provided theoretical understanding of human services
 - experience gained through field placement
 - staff assisted in finding employment
 - personal growth
 - other (specify): _____
- 52). If it hindered you, how did it do so:
- 53). In general, how would you classify your experiences as a paraprofessional human service worker:
- satisfied currently and hopeful of future
 - satisfied currently but uncertain of future
 - dissatisfied with experiences
- 54). Since receiving your AA degree, how would you evaluate the general feelings you perceive professionals to hold towards paraprofessionals?
- strongly supportive and accepting
 - mildly supportive and accepting
 - neutral, neither pro nor con
 - skeptical, mildly non-supportive
 - strongly opposed and non-supportive
- 55). Based on your knowledge and experience, do you see that the jobs available to paraprofessionals adequately utilize the skills obtained in AA programs?
- yes no comments:
- 56). What suggestions or changes do you have for your AA program to improve its training?
- field placement or practicum:

56). (continued)

curriculum, types of classes:

types of skills taught:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY -
Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed envelope.
If you have any additional comments concerning your experiences as a paraprofessional, please share them.