

**FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION RATES
OF MINORITY YOUTH 4-H MEMBERS AS PERCEIVED BY ADULT CLUB
LEADERS AND COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS IN TEXAS**

A Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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December 2012

Major Subject: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications

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ABSTRACT

According to enrollment data from the National 4-H Headquarters, minority participation in Texas 4-H clubs has declined over the past five years. This descriptive study measured the perceptions of 4-H adult leaders and county Extension agents about minority youth recruitment and retention in Texas 4-H clubs. An electronic survey was distributed to 168 adult leaders and 58 county Extension agents who have participated in 4-H for at least two years from clubs in 54 counties across Texas that are comprised of at least 50% minority youth members. The results from this study show slight differences in the demographic makeup and project areas that are chosen among the minority youth members. Statistically significant differences do exist between the perceptions of county Extension agents and 4-H adult club leaders. While the county Extension agents tend to focus more on the competition aspects of 4-H, adult club leaders are more concerned with the views and feelings of the youth members along with the relationships that are developed. It is important to acknowledge decline in minority retention rates and develop new techniques for recruitment to improve future enrollment for the sake of the organization and prospective minority youth throughout the state.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my Dad, Lupe Gonzales. I would not be the person I am today had it not been for your continuous support, encouragement, and commitment to my success. I love you for believing in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members and professors at Texas A&M University for supporting me throughout my college education. Dr. Holub, I cannot begin to thank you for always finding the time to help guide me in the right directions. You have been my rock throughout my education. Dr. Ripley, you have taught me to never underestimate my worth. I thank you for giving me the confidence to believe in myself and to accept the success that I have earned. Dr. Larke, meeting you has taught me to take the time to laugh at life. Your positive motivation has always encouraged me to never give up, and not just with aspects relating to school. Finally, Dr. Rutherford, I would like to express my immeasurable appreciation for your help. This research would not have been possible without your experience and patience. You have taught me that some things in life do not have to be as complicated as I may think. Thank you for helping me to achieve this great accomplishment.

I would also like to thank my family. Mom and Dad, your dedication to my success has shaped who I am today. I am very proud to be your daughter. To my sister, Sarah, I cannot express how grateful I am for your help, not just in school, but throughout our lives. I admire your accomplishments and have always looked up to you for guidance. We are a very blessed family who will always dedicate our lives to the good Lord. I love you always.

Finally, I would like to thank my best friend, Cody Osborn. You have always encouraged me to find happiness. Thanks to your patience and support, I have found my happiness with you and have successfully reached my goals. Thank you for always making me laugh.

NOMENCLATURE

- 4-H** Stands for Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. The mission of 4-H is to enable youth to reach their full potential, working and learning in partnership with adult leaders (National 4-H Council, 2011).
- USDA** United States Department of Agriculture – to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management (USDA, 2011).
- MANRRS** Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences - MANRRS promotes academic and professional advancement by empowering minorities in agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences (MANRRS, 2009).
- Minority** A sociological group within a particular demographic, usually one that is under-represented. In the purpose of this study, minority refers to Black/African American and Hispanic ethnicities, non-White/Caucasian (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011).
- Adult Leader** Volunteers who have completed education at the high school level who coordinate local community clubs, plan and conduct local, regional, state, and national 4-H events (National 4-H Council, 2011).
- County Extension Agent** Those employed by the Cooperative Extension Service provide research-based information to agricultural producers, youth, and consumers within their counties and communities. (Cooperative Extension System Office, 2011).

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CHAPTER I

TEXAS COUNTY 4-H CLUBS

Introduction

According to the National 4-H Headquarter data reports, (2010) the decline in minority youth participation within the Texas 4-H organization continues to grow. This descriptive study attempts to research the decline in both recruitment and retention rates among minority youth members in Texas county 4-H clubs. There have been significant membership enrollment changes throughout the Texas 4-H organization in the past five years that could ultimately affect not only the adult leaders, but also the parents and children who are involved. A lack of enrollment could result in a diminishing of the 4-H program all together if the organization is unable to increase participation and continue to recruit prospective members.

The term ‘minority’, when describing a population, can be defined as, “part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011). Talbert and Larke (1995) and Sutphin and Newsome-Stewart (1995) have studied minorities youth involved in agricultural-type settings with similar conclusions, minorities struggle with personal emotions when involved in agricultural surroundings, such as feeling unwelcomed, and also from social standpoints, such as believing that being of a minority ethnicity creates more barriers to enter into the industry.

Background

The 4-H organization can be traced back to the late 1800’s, when local farmers were reluctant to adopt changes in farming techniques that universities were researching.

Youth, however, were interested in learning about new methods that could improve the way of life for everyday farmers (National 4-H Council, 2011). Attempts were made to develop programs that could combine resources for the purpose of supporting rural youth interested in these areas of research. In 1902, A.B. Graham from Clark County, Ohio, was successful in creating a program to do just that. Eight years later, in 1910, Jessie Field Shambaugh created the first clover pin with an encrypted letter “H” on each leaf. Shortly after, in 1912, these programs were referred to as 4-H Clubs (National 4-H Council, 2011).

In 1914, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act that created the Cooperative Extension System in partnership with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2011). The Cooperative Extension System was a program designed to teach various agricultural studies, along with home economic related topics (USDA, 2011). Publicly funded, the Cooperative Extension System utilized resources from federal, state, and local governments. The staff of the Cooperative Extension System is responsible for sharing research-based information to communities in order to help develop new technologies, projects, and programs, helping families to be more self-sufficient.

Since then, 4-H has expanded nationwide, reaching youth in every state. The 4-H organization is well known for emphasizing youth development and leadership skills through a variety of projects and educational activities (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

A key goal of the 4-H organization is to continue to expand enrollment of youth members of all ethnicities throughout the nation; however, according to the National 4-H database, the actual participation percentages demonstrate a lack of minority membership (National 4-H Council, 2011). This issue may be caused by a number of reasons, such as perceptions and influences minorities have of the agriculture industry. Historically, minorities in agriculture have faced struggles (Talbert & Larke, 1995), such as not feeling welcomed or informed in the agricultural industry (Talbert & Larke, 1995).

One example of minorities not feeling welcomed in the agricultural industry can be demonstrated by the establishment of the MANRRS organization. In the early 1980s, an African-American student at Michigan State University decided to begin a support group for minority students interested in agriculture. In the spring of 1982, the Minority Agriculture and Natural Resources Association (MANRA) was established. MANRA has since then extended its reach and became the National Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences, or, MANRRS. MANRRS is a non-profit organization that welcomes people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds to support the personal development of minorities in agriculture (MANRRS, 2009). This society has reached out to countless members nationwide, hoping to spread the word about the difference that minorities can make in every industry of interest, especially agriculture.

African Americans were not the only ethnicity to make an impact on the agricultural industry. Hispanics have also increased their participation and interests throughout agriculture. A 2010 census conducted by the USDA found that the number of

Hispanic farmers has continued to increase throughout the nation (USDA, National Agriculture Library, 2011). In 1982, there were approximately 16,000 Hispanic farmers in the United States, and by 2002 that population grew to more than 50,000 (USDA, National Agriculture Library, 2011). Texas has the largest number of Hispanic farmers with nearly 21,000, followed by California with about 12,000 Hispanic farmers. This increase in agricultural interest from the Hispanic culture is a positive reflection of minorities becoming more involved and interested in agriculture (USDA, National Agriculture Library, 2011).

Recently, the USDA has also participated in supporting minorities in agriculture by creating the U.S. Department of Agriculture Minority Farmer Advisory Committee. The 2008 Farm Bill, administered by the USDA, included the establishment of this organization to increase minority participation in USDA programs and services. The first meeting of this unique organization was in August 2011 (USDA, 2011). Thus far, this committee has had positive feedback from minority participants and the future of their involvement in agriculture, according to existing members (USDA, 2011).

Although minorities have overcome many struggles that may have interfered with their involvement in agriculture, it is the youth who will determine their continuing success within the industry. 4-H is recognized for its positive impact on youth leadership development. Minority families will continue to grow throughout the nation, and every state will experience diversity at new levels. The 4-H organization needs to adjust if it is to continue promoting and supporting diversity.

Texas 4-H organizations have not been as fortunate when data is studied between 2005 and 2010. Both the overall participation and the individual ethnicity breakdowns

show a decline in youth membership. Surprisingly, the White/Caucasian ethnicity has experienced the largest decline in Texas, with a loss of more than 22,600 members.

4-H has continued to improve and expand the programs and activities available to youth participants. The number of possible programs continues to increase. The original 4-H organization offered participants three main programs to choose from. Today, there are more than 40 programs to choose from, with several subcategories to ensure an interest area for each participant, according to the National 4-H Council, (2011).

Despite how much the organization has grown to expand the programs and activities that are offered, 4-H enrollment has declined at the national level. In 2005, there were approximately 6,535,000 youth members enrolled in 4-H nationwide. In 2010, however, that enrollment decreased to roughly 6,330,000 youth members (National 4-H Headquarters, 2010). Such a decrease in youth enrollment in 4-H programs ultimately has a negative impact on the 4-H organization since fewer members are joining.

Individual ethnic groups of 4-H members have experienced inverted results on a national level. In 2005, the total number of White/Caucasian youth members was about 5,037,000 or 77%. The number of Hispanic members was 790,060 or 12%, and the enrollment of Black/African American members was 949,400 at 14.5%. In 2010, White/Caucasian youth members experienced the largest difference, with an enrollment of approximately of 4,680,000, down to 74%. Black/African American youth members also experienced a decrease in membership, however, only slightly, reporting approximately 909,000 or 14.3%. The Hispanic enrollment, however, experienced a significant increase in membership, reporting up to roughly 957,200 or 15% youth members (Research, Education and Economics Information System, 2010).

When focusing on the 4-H programs in the state of Texas, the enrollment data trend is similar to national data. In 2005, Texas 4-H youth members totaled 658,810; 10.08% of the national membership (National 4-H Headquarters, 2010). In 2010, Texas 4-H youth members made up about 10.26% of the national total, registering 649,779 participants that year. Although the percent of state participants increased compared to the national level, the actual number of youth members decreased within the five-year range.

Participation from the adult volunteer leaders in Texas has also experienced a significant decrease. In 2005 the number of adult volunteers was approximately 36,500. In 2010, a decrease of more than 11,000 volunteers occurred, declining to 24,676 adult volunteers in Texas (National 4-H Headquarters, 2010). After analyzing this information, there are found to be 54 counties in Texas where 4-H clubs with more than 50% minority population occurs. Figure 1.1 illustrates the location of those counties.

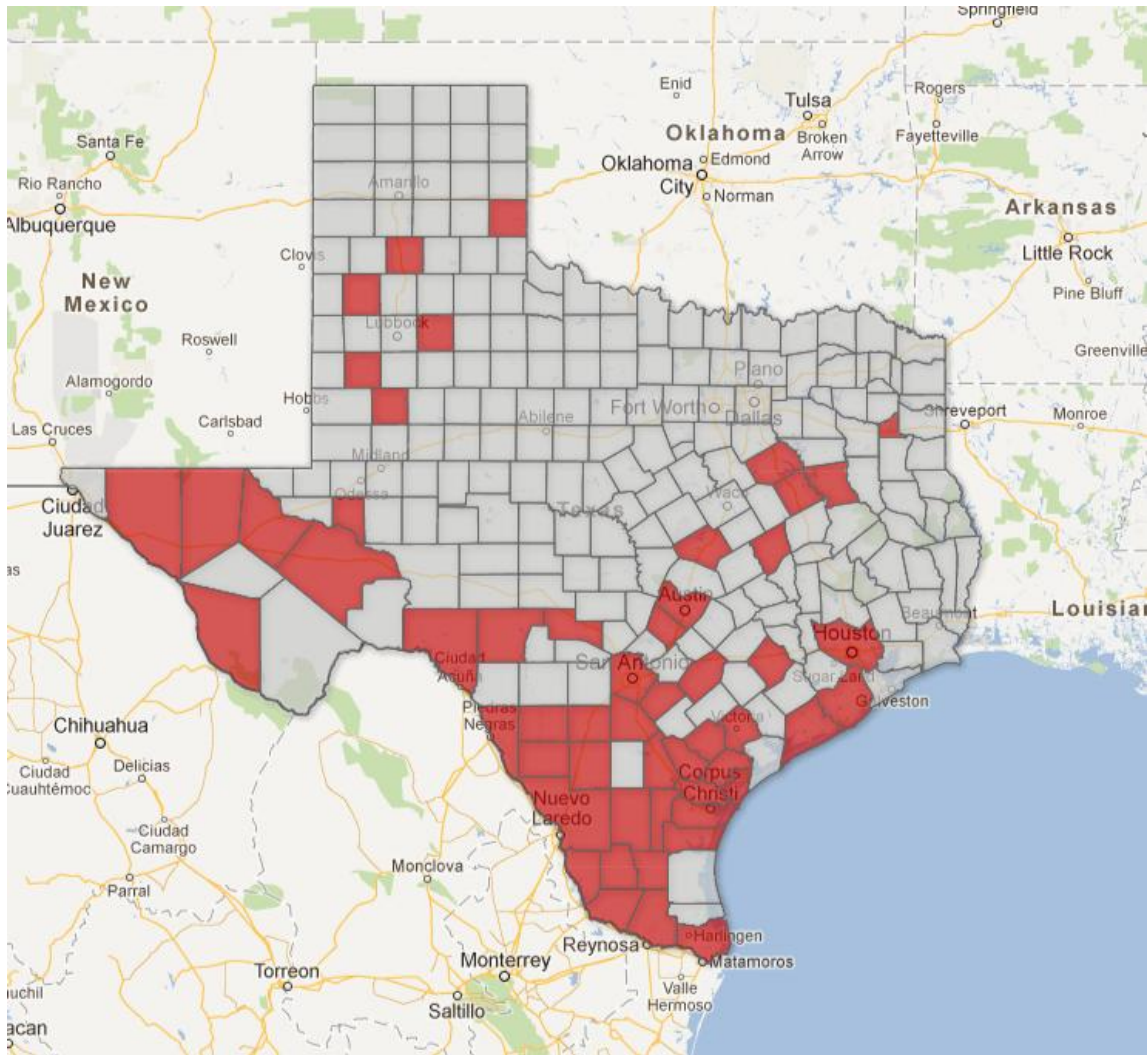


Figure 1.1 Texas 4-H Minority Counties. Texas 4-H Counties with 50% or greater minority youth enrollment. Data obtained from Texas 4-H and Youth Development (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2010).

In a 2006 Texas Cooperative Extension report, the trend of individual ethnicities was similar to the national data. In 2005, White/Caucasian participant enrollment reached roughly 547,000, whereas in 2010 that number declined to 524,600. Hispanic enrollment in 2005 compared to 2010 was recorded at 274,692 and 273,566, respectively. Finally, Black/African American youth enrollment in 2005 was 81,904 and decreased to 73,082 in 2010 (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2010).

Understanding population data from the United States Census Bureau is an important factor when studying ethnic group participation within an organization. Data comparing the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census populations show a significant increase, 9.7%, throughout the decade. The population of individual ethnicities increased as well, the largest being within the Hispanic population, experiencing about a 15 million person increase (U.S. Census 2010; 2011).

Texas population has experienced significant changes as well over the past decade, increasing about 20.6%, which was the largest of any state in the nation. The ethnicity breakdowns in Texas from 2000 to 2010 are as follows; White/Caucasian population increased from approximately 14.8 million to 17.7 million, Black/African American population increased from roughly 2.4 million to 3 million and Hispanic population also increased from about 6.7 million to 9.45 million (U.S. Census 2010, 2011). The data reflecting Texas minority population can be found in Figure 1.2.

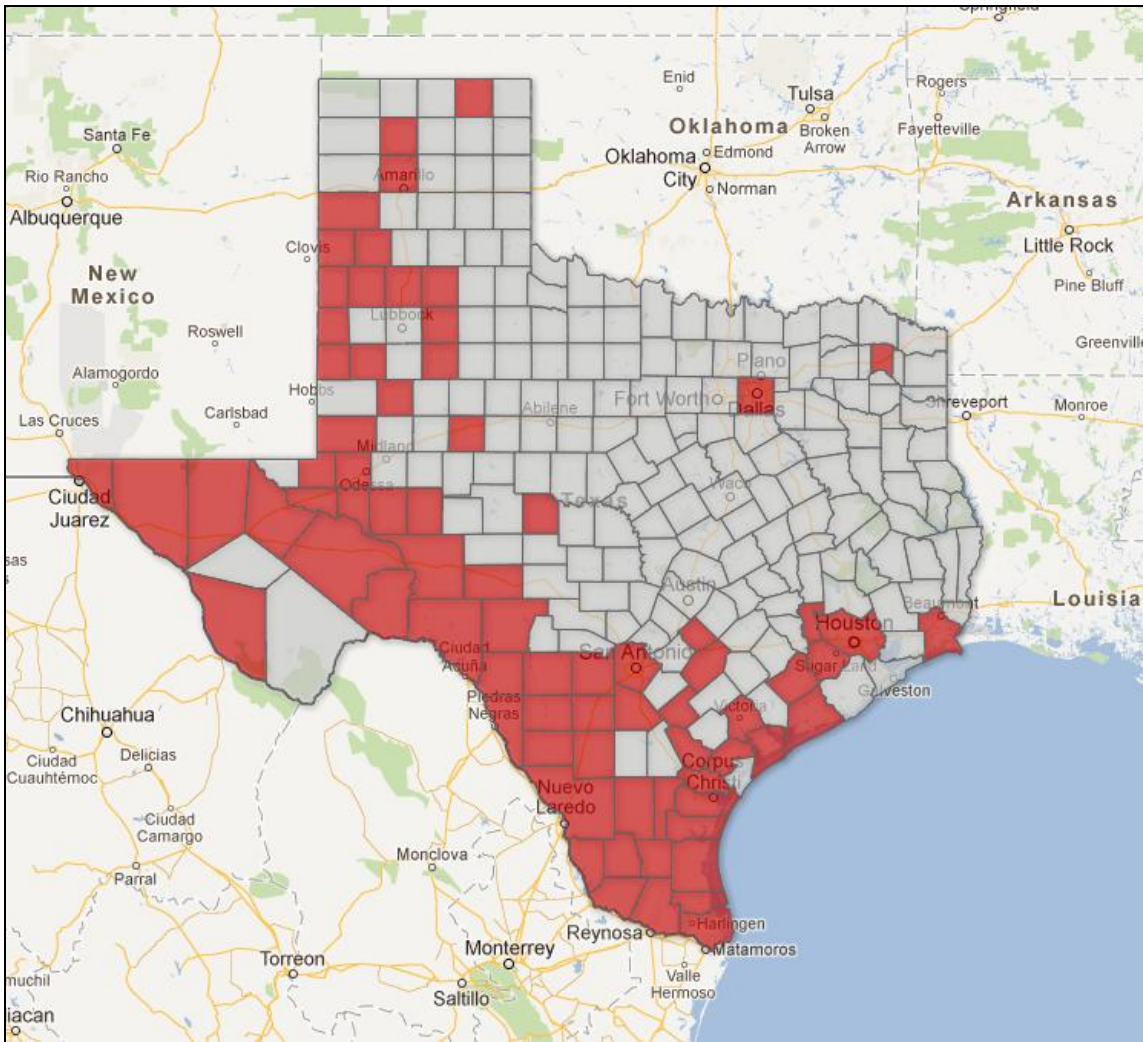


Figure 1.2 Texas Minority Counties. U.S. Census 2010, 2011. Data retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of Texas 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents about minority member recruitment and retention. To learn more about minority participation in Texas 4-H programs, a descriptive survey was sent to adult leader volunteers of 4-H clubs with at least 50% minority members, as well as the corresponding county Extension agents.

Limitations of the Study

The sample for this study was limited to the adult club leaders of Texas 4-H clubs that met specific demographic criteria, along with the corresponding county Extension agents. This study focused on traditional 4-H clubs as defined by the National 4-H Council (2011).

Basic Assumptions

1. Adult club leaders and Extension agents participating in this study answer the questionnaire honestly and to the best of their knowledge to properly reflect their clubs and counties.
2. Adult leaders participating in this study have at least two years experience working with their 4-H club.

Significance of the Problem

Though the 4-H organization has been successful for more than 100 years, its future is not guaranteed. The 4-H organization relies on the participation from youth members and the increasing diversity that brings the members together. Recent data shows that membership enrollment has declined over the past 10 years, and may continue to do so if nothing is done to help improve these issues. It would be detrimental for the agricultural society to repeat history and find minorities left out and uninvolved. Youth tend to follow the local trends, and while 4-H is successful in creating activities and projects aimed at different interests, that may not always be the solution if its members are not experiencing diverse societies around them (Sutphin & Newsom-Stewart, 1995). It is important to study the retention of 4-H youth membership, specifically members with minority backgrounds.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of Texas 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents about minority member recruitment and retention. The following literature will give deeper understanding regarding minority 4-H youth members.

Cooperative Extension System

Warner, Christenson, Dillman, and Salant (1996) reported changes with the publics' perceptions of Extension between 1982 and 1995. Warner et al. (1996) found that although the perceptions from the past 13 years had not drastically changed, young urban residents with low levels of income and education were less likely to be aware of Extension and its services (Warner et al., 1996). During both surveys, however, the authors found that the way most people knew about Extension was by being aware of 4-H. Of the 45% who knew about extension, 69% were aware of 4-H (Warner et al., 1996). Those people who were familiar with 4-H thought that 4-H was the main organization Extension worked with. Though these statistics are positive, the authors still found an 8% decrease in awareness of 4-H from the first survey in 1982. The authors concluded that it is important for Extension to make counties more familiar with the organization to better be recognized for other services they offer besides affiliation with 4-H. (Warner et al., 1996).

4-H & Youth Development

A study conducted by McKee, Talbert, and Barkman (2002) involved 4-H youth development educators and 4-H policy-making board members located in Indiana. The researchers surveyed and interviewed participants to gain a better understanding about

their perceptions of change occurring within their 4-H programs. Although most participants were open and willing to change in order to attract and advertise 4-H more effectively, some indicated a reluctance to change (McKee et al., 2002). The reasons identified for not being open to change included a lack of parental involvement that would make the staff members' jobs even more difficult without proper support and help; 4-H's rural image that obstructs the views of prospective urban members; and professional staff's unwillingness to work with volunteers (McKee et al., 2002). McKee wrote, "They did not see the necessity of sharing with volunteers their ideas, work with new audiences, or collaborative efforts with other youth serving agencies," (McKee et al., 2002, para. 20). The authors concluded that,

Individuals involved in all levels of the program, from administration, staff, and volunteers, to the youth and parents involved, should be challenged to more accurately describe the benefits of the 4-H Program for youth. All of these groups have responsibility for the public image of the program to potential new youth. Work should be done with state and local extension staff to heighten awareness and encourage individuals to promote the fact that the 4-H Program is delivered in multiple ways, to multiple audiences, with multiple results and benefits. There is no one "right" way to deliver or evaluate the program, just as there is not a single benefit to program participants. (McKee et al., 2002, para. 31)

Among the authors' recommendations was a further research with youth and adults to determine different strategies that could help promote the opportunities and advantages

that the 4-H program has to offer, in an effort to help dismiss the common misconception image of a rural, agriculturally-dominant organization (McKee et al., 2002).

Ferrari and Turner (2006) interviewed a panel of 50 youth participants in an after-school 4-H program to explore the perceptions of their experiences in the development organization. Most of the youth that participated were African American. This study concluded that the youth felt a sense of safety and belonging, while also receiving academic support, and had fun (Ferrari & Turner, 2006). The authors stated that youth appreciated feeling as though they had a voice and a choice in participation. Ferrari and Turner (2006) believed that knowing these factors can greatly help strengthen any youth development program by allowing the members to feel important.

Minorities in Agriculture

Anderson, Torres, and Ulmer (2007) surveyed 60 urban students to determine their leadership development needs based on agricultural-related topics. Results showed that most students who are involved in agriculture strongly believed leadership is a very important aspect of agriculture (Anderson et al., 2007). Students emphasized the importance of learning real-world leadership skills that could be used daily. Students stated that being involved in agriculture was a helpful outlet to gain improved leadership skills that they could relate to other real-life settings outside of agricultural-related situations (Anderson et al., 2007).

Talbert and Larke (1995) researched reasons that influence students to enroll or not enroll in an introductory agriscience course in Texas. For this study 1,399 students were selected from 57 agriscience departments in Texas to determine reasons why they chose to enroll in an agriculture-related course. Minority students had more negative

perceptions about agriculture compared to non-minority students (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Overall, minority students were less likely to envision themselves taking part in agricultural careers because they believed there are more barriers to enter into the industry. Bechtold and Hoover (1997) found comparable results, reporting that Hispanic students believed a career in agriculture involved low pay, poor working conditions, and was related exclusively to farming.

Sutphin and Newsom-Stewart (1995) conducted research similar to Talbert and Larke (1995), to identify reasons behind students' decisions to enroll in agricultural education. Results showed that the main reasons students enroll in agricultural-related courses was to prepare for a job and higher education, develop leadership skills, enhance academic performance, and respond to surrounding social pressures (Sutphin & Newsom-Stewart, 1995). Contrary to Talbert and Larke (1995), however, they found no significant difference in perceptions to study agriculture by ethnicity.

Jones, Bowen, and Rumberger's (1998) study, similar to Talbert and Larke (1995), focused on African American student enrollment in agriscience courses. African American students held more negative perceptions towards the industry than students from any other ethnicity (Jones, Bowen & Rumberger, 1998).

Retention and Recruitment within Youth Development Programs

Dorsey, Ingram, and Radhakrishna (2006) studied students who participated in Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) National Society during 2003-2004. The purpose of their study was to determine the members' perceptions about minorities in agriculture and to assess the effectiveness the organization has in helping with their success. Most of the responses came from African

American members. The majority agreed that since joining MANRRS, their leadership skills and self-confidence in agriculture had increased (Dorsey et al., 2006). This study broke down perceptions of success based on ethnicities and found participation within a supporting organization, such as MANRRS, did influence perceptions.

Outley (2008) studied factors that influenced career choice behaviors among youth who were participants in Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) National Society. The top influential factor for choosing agricultural-related career choices were reported to be family members or other people employed within the industry. The same group of participants reported the major barrier to choosing a career in agriculture and natural resources is the lack of information being provided to minority students. “Getting the information to minorities seems to be the problem”, (Outley, 2008 p. 147). The minority participants admitted to feeling “isolated” and “not as equal” to other non-minority students within the agriculture industry. Students in the study believe their involvement in MANRRS will greatly help increase agricultural-related career options for them because of the information and exposure they have received in the organization (Outlet, 2008).

Taylor and Miller (2002) researched necessary components for retention among minority students attending a predominantly White institution. The study focused on differences between participants and non-participants in a minority retention program. Taylor and Miller (2002) found that leadership opportunities were of most influence for minority students’ levels of social integration, worth, and competence. A minority students’ sense of worth, among other components evaluated, can be strongly increased

through campus involvement along with a supportive peer network (Taylor and Miller, 2002).

Finally, a study conducted by Lee, Borden, Serido, and Perkins (2009) researched the effects youth programs had on ethnic minority youth members based on feelings of safety, relationships with the adult staff, and perceptions of learning social skills. The conclusions to this study found that youth who feel accepted, safe, and connected to their social groups demonstrate an increased sense of responsibility and academic achievement. Involvement in the program resulted in positive relationships between the youth and adult staff, which caused the youth to feel more confident with their social skills (Lee et al., 2009).

Retention and Recruitment within 4-H Programs

An article by Cano and Bankston (1992) described a study investigating factors associated with participation and nonparticipation of minority youth in Ohio 4-H programs. The population for the study was minority youth and their parents; 59 youth and 44 parents participated in focus group interviews to assess factors contributing to participation. Cano and Bankston (1992) reported that most of the youth interviewed were African American, followed by Hispanic, Phillipino, and Asian. Overall, both minority youth and parents believed that 4-H offered positive influences for participation, including developing self-confidence, enjoying participation in projects, and receiving awards and prizes to recognize their work. The participating youth and parents also identified negative contributing factors they believe need to be changed within the 4-H organization. Negative factors included barriers to participation, limited knowledge of the 4-H program by parents, lack of minority-friendly advertising, and lack of minority adult

role models. Cano and Bankston (1992) concluded that many changes need to be addressed by the Cooperative Extension Service in order to have a positive outlook on their 4-H programs.

Gill, Bruce, and Ewing (2010), used a content analysis on responses from open-ended questions of 87 youth active in a Pennsylvania 4-H club. Based on McClelland's motivational needs theory (McClelland, 1987), the authors constructed their questions on three motivational factors: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. The majority of youth responded that friends and opportunities to meet new people, more available resources for future jobs and careers, and the activities/events offered through 4-H were among the top responses that would increase participation (Gill et al., 2010). Factors such as lack of sufficient information about an activity, long term benefits of 4-H, and financial costs of participation were among the reasons that might limit involvement in 4-H. (Gill et al., 2010).

Whaley (2011) researched the demographic indicators of persistence among 4-H members in Iowa. Rather than studying retention rates of 4-H members, Whaley (2011) chose to focus on persistence, the willingness to stay, among the youth in the 4-H clubs. Whaley (2011) believed that demographics played a major role in a youth member's persistence to remain in the organization. The results of this study found that residence is a strong indicator of persistence. Youth not raised or living on a farm were less likely to stay involved in 4-H (Whaley, 2011). In addition to residency, grade level, age, and years of involvement also contributed to the persistence of the 4-H members. The study found that the younger the 4-H member was when they became involved and the longer they

were an active member, the more persistent they were to keep joining and participating each year (Whaley, 2011).

Adult Perceptions of Minority Youth Involvement

Alston and Crutchfield (2009) analyzed the perceptions of 4-H Extension agents in North Carolina about the minority youth participation in agriculture-related activities. The results found in this study reflected a negative perception on agricultural programs, specifically 4-H organizations, where the organizations were “not fully meeting the needs of a growing diverse population”, (Alston and Crutchfield, 2009 p. 1). Alston and Crutchfield (2009) concluded that perception is a limiting factor and education is needed to help increase the interests of minority youth. Among the recommendations for improvement, Alston and Crutchfield (2009) suggested increasing the number of adult minority role models in 4-H in order to help recruit minority membership.

Newby and Sallee (2011) reviewed previous studies and literature to summarize possible issues related to retention and recruitment among youth within certain age groups. The results of this meta-analysis explained the importance of considering the perceptions from the current and prospective youth members. To most youth, 4-H is viewed as an organization comprised of white youth from rural environments (Newby and Sallee, 2011). This belief could be the limiting factor resulting in a lack of recruitment for most prospective teenage youth members. Another conclusion that could help explain retention for the youth members could be the lack of family support. Newby and Sallee (2011) suggest encouraging involvement from the entire family in order to engage motivation and willingness to remain in the 4-H club. Regardless what the causes for a lack of retention and recruitment are, Newby and Sallee (2011) continue to reiterate

the importance of listening to the youth themselves in order to gain perspective and knowledge on what exactly interests the members.

Methodology

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program is a voluntary organization for youth, aged 5-19, that builds positive characteristics and promotes a healthy lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents about recruitment and retention of minority youth 4-H members.

This descriptive study utilized a survey as the research instrument to obtain and compare the perceptions of the adult club leaders and county Extension agents in Texas 4-H organizations. The survey was distributed to leaders of 155 4-H clubs in 54 counties throughout the state of Texas based on specific club demographic criteria.

Objectives

1. To describe 4-H members and identify the project areas that most minority 4-H members participate.
2. To determine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of recruitment and retention techniques by 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents.
3. To describe the success of those 4-H clubs that have retained minority membership, as perceived by adult club leaders and county Extension agents.
4. To describe minority youth recruitment strategies utilized by 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents.

5. To determine if adult club leaders' perceptions about minority youth in 4-H differ from those of county Extension agents.

Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive research method with a survey instrument in order to obtain the most accurate results. "A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2008, p. 145). Dillman's Tailored Design Method was used as a guide for this study (Dillman et. al, 2009).

Population and Sample

A purposive sampling method was used for this study. A specific population was required for this study based on the knowledge and experience that was needed to respond effectively, which is why a homogenous purposive sampling method was utilized. The objective of a purposive sampling technique is to acquire a non-probability sample with the intention of making generalizations. Though this study cannot be generalized to the entire National 4-H Council, it can however serve as a generalization for Texas 4-H clubs consisting of both minority and non-minority members. A purposive sampling method requires a specific united population. For the purposes of this study, common knowledge and experience within minority 4-H clubs was required. Determining the perceptions of county Extension agents and 4-H adult club leaders will offer insight to possible improvements for minority retention and recruitment techniques that are needed within Texas 4-H clubs.

The population for this research was Texas 4-H club adult leaders and the corresponding county Extension agents. To be included in this study, adult club leaders

must have at least two years of experience with the Texas 4-H club represent a 4-H club with 50% or greater minority membership, and have a valid email address. Based on the 4-H clubs meeting the study criteria, the corresponding county Extension agents were included as members of the sample to be surveyed.

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization was a cooperative supporter of this study. A permission request was sent to the Extension 4-H and Youth Development Specialist in order to obtain contact information consisting of first and last names, email addresses, and current county of service for the 4-H club leaders. In addition to providing contact information, a notification letter was sent to the prospective participants on behalf of the Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization in order to spread awareness about this upcoming research study.

Only 54 of the 254 counties in Texas have clubs that were included in this research based on the sampling criteria. From the 2,145 4-H clubs in Texas, 155 clubs have more than 50% minority youth members, meaning, at least 50% of the members of these club are Hispanic, African-American, Asian, or other non-White ethnic backgrounds. Based on the selection criteria, 168 adult club leaders and 58 county Extension agents were included in the purposive sample. Contact information and confirmation that the county Extension agents were involved with the 4-H programs was collected by phone interview with each of the 54 county offices. Fifty-eight agents were identified as working with the county 4-H programs. Because of the small sample size, all members were included. Figure 1.3 illustrates the counties with 4-H clubs that met the specific criteria in relationship to the participating counties for this study.

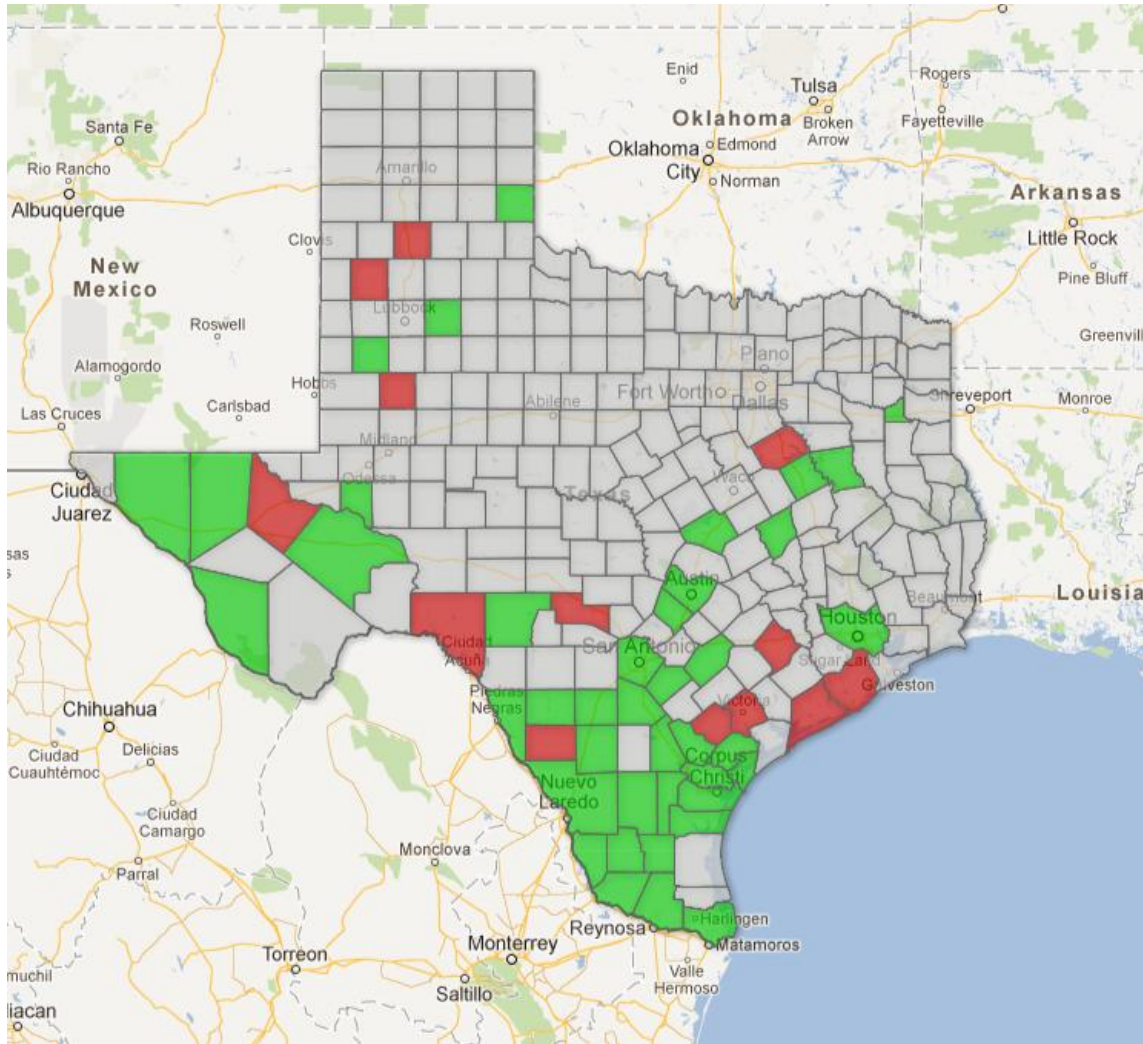


Figure 1.3 Participating Texas County 4-H Clubs. Highlighted counties have clubs with 50% or greater minority participation. Counties in green chose to participate in the study, while counties in red chose not to participate (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2010).

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this research is a descriptive survey modified from existing descriptive surveys used with 4-H based populations (Bankston, J., 1992; Meighan, T. G., 1997; Gottlieb, D., 1974). Reliability of previous instruments were .82 (Bankston, J., 1992); .92 (Meighan, T.G., 1997); and *unknown* (Gottlieb, D., 1974). Post-hoc scale reliability for this study was .91 (usefulness) and .94 (effectiveness) to reflect

both practical and statistical differences in responses reported by the participants.

Validity was determined by previous studies and a review by a panel of experts from Texas A&M University faculty.

A pre-notice letter was sent to all identified adult club leaders by the Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization to identify the research and the organization's support. In June 2012, a cover letter explaining the purpose of this research, as well as the detailed instructions for completing the survey was sent to the prospective participants a week in advance to prepare for the launch of the study. The instrument was sent electronically via Qualtrics survey software on June 21, 2012. The participants were given a six-week time period to complete the survey, during which three reminder emails were sent in order to encourage participation. This timeline was carefully planned around events occurring throughout the 4-H organization, such as the conclusion of Texas 4-H Roundup and the beginning of open registration for the new 2012-2013 calendar year. All questions included in the instrument utilized a Likert-type scale or multiple choice options. Of the 226 total participants contacted for the study, 67% ($n=39$) county Extension agents and 38% ($n=64$) adult club leaders responded. A comparison of early to late respondents found no statistically significant differences (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001).

Analysis of Data

Data obtained from this study was analyzed at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS). Levels of significance were set at $p < 0.05$ *a priori* for all tests, frequencies, means, and standard deviations are reported.

Use of Findings

The results obtained from this study may be used by the Texas 4-H Youth and Development Program, as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, to improve the minority youth membership throughout the state. These results may be helpful in determining the cause for minority retention issues in particular clubs, and create effective recruitment strategies to engage prospective members to the organization.

Limitations of the Study

Use of a purposive sample does not allow for generalization of the study findings to all 4-H club leaders and county agents in Texas. It is also important to note that were 155 individual 4-H clubs with 168 4-H club leaders, it is possible that some club leaders were married couples and only one leader chose to respond to the survey. Additionally, the survey was only provided in English; some club leaders may speak English as a second language and therefore did not respond to the survey because of language barriers.

CHAPTER II

TEXAS COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS

Introduction

Since the establishment of the Cooperative Extension Service in 1914, the success of the organization has been demonstrated in its growth and expansion. There are six areas that Extension works in: Agriculture, 4-H Youth and Development, Leadership Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, Natural Resources, and Community and Economic Development. Due to a decline in the number of Texas Extension offices, there are not Extension agents stationed in every individual county, however all 254 counties are assigned an Extension agent (Cooperative Extension Service, 2011). The Texas AgriLife Extension Service works closely with local counties and/or regions in order to educate and assist those interested or involved with agriculturally related programs (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2012). AgriLife Extension Agents who are involved with Texas 4-H and Youth Development are familiar with club needs and successes within their county and are qualified to provide resourceful information regarding the status of their local 4-H organizations.

Review of Literature

To best understand the role and value of 4-H to its publics, a review of previous studies was conducted. Previous research examines public, member, and leader perceptions.

Warner, Christenson, Dillman, and Salant (1996) reported the publics' perceptions of Extension. The researchers compared public survey results from 1982 and 1995. Warner et al. (1996) found that although the reported perceptions had not

drastically changed in 13 years, young urban residents with low levels of income and education were less likely to be aware of Extension and its services (Warner et al., 1996). In both surveys, however, the authors found that most people knew about Extension through awareness of 4-H. Of the 45% who knew about extension, 69% were aware of 4-H (Warner et al., 1996). Those respondents who were familiar with 4-H thought that 4-H was the main Extension organization. Though these statistics are positive, the authors still found an 8% decline in awareness of 4-H from the 1982 survey to the 1995 survey. The authors concluded that it is important for Extension to make counties more familiar with the organization in order to be recognized for the other services they offer beyond 4-H. (Warner et al., 1996).

A study conducted by McKee, Talbert, and Barkman (2002) involved 4-H youth development educators and 4-H policy-making board members located in Indiana. The researchers surveyed and interviewed participants to gain a better understanding about their perceptions of change occurring within their 4-H programs. Although most participants were open and willing to change in order to attract and advertise 4-H more effectively, some indicated a reluctance to change (McKee et al., 2002). The reasons identified for not being open to change included a lack of parental involvement that would make the staff members' jobs even more difficult without proper support and help; 4-H's rural image that obstructs the views of prospective urban members; and professional staff's unwillingness to work with volunteers (McKee et al., 2002). McKee wrote, "They did not see the necessity of sharing with volunteers their ideas, work with new audiences, or collaborative efforts with other youth serving agencies," (McKee et al., 2002, p. 40-2). The authors concluded that,

Individuals involved in all levels of the program, from administration, staff, and volunteers, to the youth and parents involved, should be challenged to more accurately describe the benefits of the 4-H Program for youth. All of these groups have responsibility for the public image of the program to potential new youth. Work should be done with state and local extension staff to heighten awareness and encourage individuals to promote the fact that the 4-H Program is delivered in multiple ways, to multiple audiences, with multiple results and benefits. There is no one "right" way to deliver or evaluate the program, just as there is not a single benefit to program participants. (McKee et al., 2002, p. 40-2)

Among the authors' recommendations was a further research with youth and adults to determine different strategies that could help promote the opportunities and advantages that the 4-H program has to offer, in an effort to help dismiss the common misconception image of a rural, agriculturally-dominant organization (McKee et al., 2002).

Alston and Crutchfield (2009) analyzed the perceptions of 4-H Extension agents in North Carolina about the minority youth participation in agriculture-related activities. The results found in this study reflected a negative perception on agricultural programs, specifically 4-H organizations, where the organizations were "not fully meeting the needs of a growing diverse population", (Alston and Crutchfield, 2009, p. 1). Alston and Crutchfield (2009) concluded that perception is a limiting factor and education is needed to help increase the interests of minority youth. Among the recommendations for improvement, Alston and Crutchfield (2009) suggested increasing the number of adult minority role models in 4-H in order to help recruit minority membership.

Methodology

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program is a voluntary organization for youth, aged 5-19, that builds positive characteristics and promotes a healthy lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of county Extension agents about recruitment and retention of minority youth 4-H members.

This descriptive study utilized a survey as the research instrument to obtain the perceptions of the county Extension agents in Texas 4-H organizations. The survey was distributed to 58 county Extension agents in 54 counties throughout the state of Texas based on specific club demographic criteria.

Objectives

1. To describe 4-H members and identify the project areas that most minority 4-H members participate.
2. To determine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of recruitment and retention techniques by county Extension agents.
3. To describe the success of those 4-H clubs that have retained minority membership, as perceived by county Extension agents.
4. To describe minority youth recruitment strategies utilized by county Extension agents.

Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive research method with a survey instrument in order to obtain the most accurate results. “A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample

of that population” (Creswell, 2008, p. 145). Dillman’s Tailored Design Method was used as a guide for this study (Dillman et. al, 2009).

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Determining the perceptions of county Extension agents will offer insight to possible improvements for minority retention and recruitment techniques that are needed within Texas 4-H clubs.

The population for this research was Texas county Extension agents. For this study, the Extension agents must represent a county containing 4-H clubs with 50% or greater minority membership.

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization was a cooperative supporter of this study. A permission request was sent to the Extension 4-H and Youth Development Specialist in order to obtain contact information consisting of first and last names, email addresses, and current county of service for the 4-H club leaders. In addition to providing contact information, a notification letter was sent to the prospective

participants on behalf of the Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization in order to spread awareness about this upcoming research study.

Only 54 of the 254 counties in Texas have clubs that were included in this research based on the sampling criteria. From the 2,145 4-H clubs in Texas, 155 clubs have more than 50% minority youth members, meaning, at least 50% of the members in these clubs are Hispanic, African-American, Asian, or other non-White ethnic backgrounds. Based on the selection criteria, 58 county Extension agents were included in the purposive sample. Contact information and confirmation that the county Extension agents were involved with the 4-H programs was collected by phone interview with each of the 54 county offices. Fifty-eight agents were identified as working with the county 4-H programs. Because of the small sample size, all members were included. Figure 2.1 illustrates the counties with 4-H clubs that met the specific criteria in relationship to the participating counties for this study.

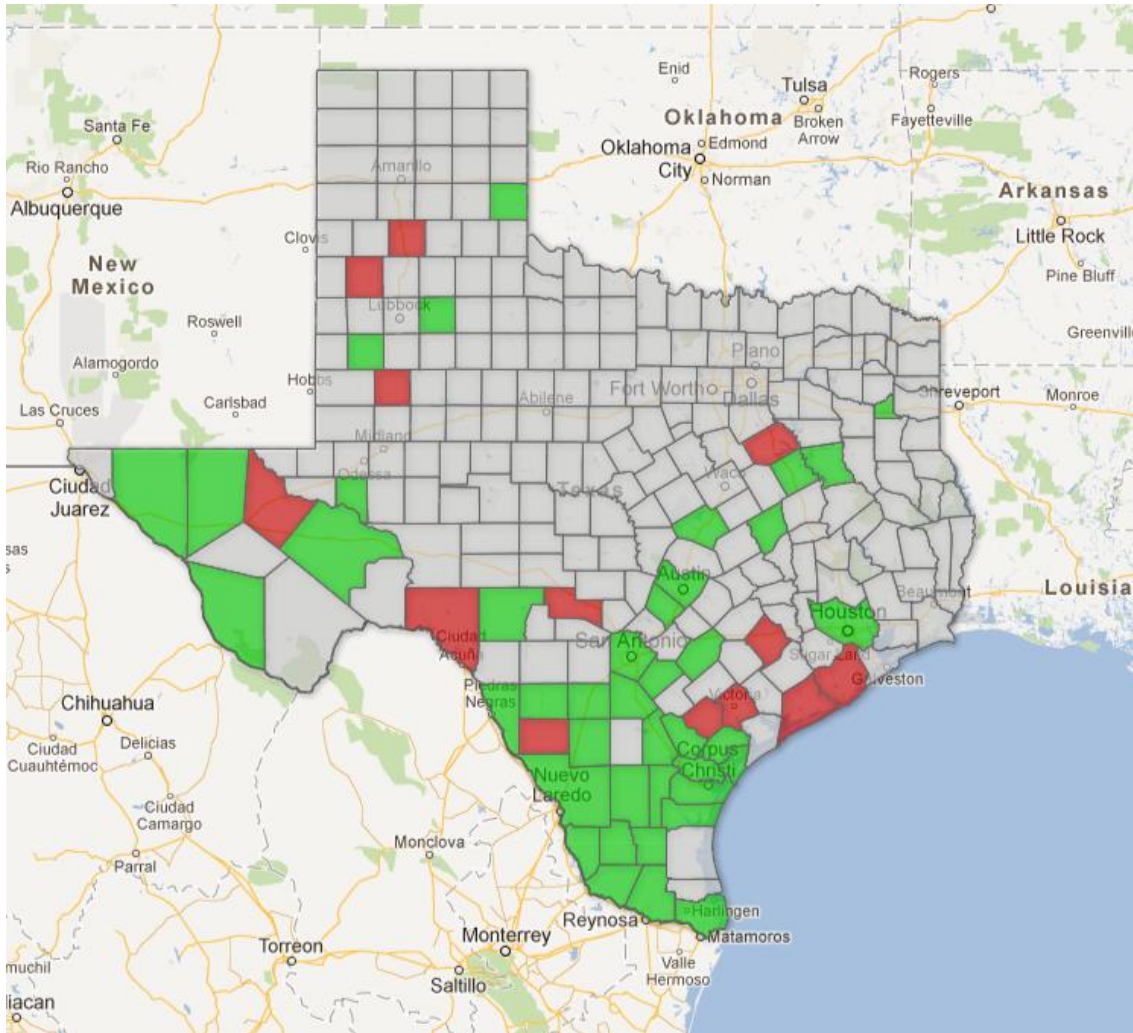


Figure 2.1 Participating Texas County 4-H Clubs: County Extension Agents. Highlighted counties have clubs with 50% or greater minority participation. Counties in green chose to participate in the study, while counties in red chose not to participate (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2010).

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this research is a descriptive survey modified from existing descriptive surveys used with 4-H based populations (Bankston, J., 1992; Meighan, T. G., 1997; Gottlieb, D., 1974). Reliability of previous instruments were .82 (Bankston, J., 1992); .92 (Meighan, T.G., 1997); and *unknown* (Gottlieb, D., 1974). Post-

hoc scale reliability for this study was .91 (usefulness) and .94 (effectiveness) to reflect both practical and statistical differences in responses reported by the participants.

Validity was determined by previous studies and a review by a panel of experts from Texas A&M University faculty.

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Analysis of Data

Data obtained from this study was analyzed at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS). Levels of significance were set at $p < 0.05$ *a priori* for all tests, frequencies, means and standard deviations are reported.

Use of Findings

The results obtained from this study may be used by the Texas 4-H Youth and Development Program, as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, to improve the minority youth membership throughout the state. These results may be helpful in determining the cause for minority retention issues in particular clubs, and create effective recruitment strategies to engage prospective members to the organization.

Results

Of the 58 Extension agents selected for participation in this study, 39 provided survey responses for a response rate of 67%. The county Extension agents who participated in this study were predominately White males between the ages of 40-59 years old. Of the total responding Extension agents, 63% are former 4-H members who have between 6-10 years of experience working with the 4-H clubs in their current county of residence. The complete demographic characteristics of the participating respondents can be found in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Demographic Characteristics of Texas County Extension Agents (N = 30)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Age at time of survey (years)		
20-29	6	20
30-39	6	20
40-49	9	30
50-59	8	27
60+	1	3
Race/Ethnicity		
White	21	70
Hispanic	8	27
African American	1	3
Asian	0	0

Table 2.1 Continued

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Other	0	0
Gender		
Male	17	57
Female	13	43
Years volunteered with current club		
1	6	20
2	5	17
3	0	0
4	3	10
5	2	7
6-10	7	23
11-15	5	17
16-20	2	7
21-25	0	0
26-30	0	0
31+	0	0
Former 4-H member		
Yes	19	63
No	11	37

Objective 2.1: Describe 4-H members and identify the project areas that most minority 4-H members participate, as perceived by Texas county Extension agents

The county Extension agents ranked the ethnicities of the 4-H members that most represent their county. Respondents ranked the ethnicities on a scale of one to five, with one being the most represented and five being the least represented. Of the 24 respondents, 14 agents rated Hispanic to be the top ethnicity, followed by 14 replying White as the second most represented ethnicity in their 4-H clubs. A complete list of the 4-H member ethnicity rankings can be found in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Rank of Ethnicities Represented by 4-H Members in Club (N=24)

Ethnicity	Rank				
	1	2	3	4	5
White	10	14	0	0	0
Hispanic	14	7	3	0	0
African American	0	3	18	1	2
Asian	0	0	1	22	1
Other	0	0	2	1	21

Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to missing data

When asked to identify the 4-H projects that their county clubs most participate in, respondents were able to select more than one project area, 97% (n=31) responded “animal” projects as being the most popular choice, followed by 63% (n=20) responding “personal development and leadership”, and 59% (n=19) selecting “consumer and family sciences”. The complete list of 4-H projects that are chosen by members can be found in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 4-H Project(s) Participation (N = 32)

Project	<i>n</i>	%
Animals	31	97
Personal Development and Leadership	20	63
Consumer and Family Sciences	19	59
Healthy Lifestyles	11	34
Citizenship and Civic Education	9	28
Communications and Expressive Arts	9	28
Plants	7	22
Environment Education and Earth Sciences	6	19
Science, Engineering, and Technology	5	16

Note: Total is greater than 32 as respondents indicated all project areas represented in their county.

Extension agents were asked to rate their county 4-H members’ ability to perform specific tasks compared to other youth based on a scale of one to three, one meaning

“below average”, two meaning “average” and three meaning “above average”. From the 32 respondents, “have fun”, “learn responsibility”, and “meet new friends” (M=2.50, SD=.57) were selected as “above average”. The remaining tasks were rated “average”. The complete list of data can be found in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 4-H Members' Ability to Perform Specific Tasks (N = 32)

Tasks	M	SD
Have fun	2.50	.57
Learn responsibility	2.50	.57
Meet new friends	2.50	.57
Learn new skills	2.44	.50
Get help in deciding on their future education, work, and career	2.34	.65
Take trips	2.25	.72
Meet people from other ethnicities	2.25	.57
Get help with personal problems	2.13	.66
Other	2.40	.55

Note: Based on Likert Scale. Below Average=1 – 1.50, Average=1.51 – 2.50, Above Average=2.51 – 3.0

Objective 2.2: Determine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of recruitment and retention techniques by county Extension agents

The county Extension agents were asked to select a response that best reflects their opinion to identify the most important aspect that keeps members in their 4-H program, based on a scale from one to four, one meaning “very ineffective” to four meaning “very effective”. The Extension agents perceived the following two reasons to be “very effective” in retaining members: “a supportive county agent, staff, or 4-H leader” (M=3.61, SD=.50) and “providing praise, motivation, and encouragement”

(M=3.58, SD=.50). All other statements were reported to be “effective”. The complete data for the responses can be found in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Most Important Reasons That Retain Members in 4-H (N = 31)

Reason	M	SD
A supportive county agent, staff or 4-H leader	3.61	.50
Provide praise, motivation and encouragement	3.58	.50
Involve parents and keep them involved	3.48	.63
Friends and family being a part of 4-H	3.48	.51
Provide equal opportunities for all	3.42	.62
Provide efficient and fun meetings, programs and activities	3.42	.56
Listening to members' inputs and needs	3.39	.56
Being a friend by communicating and understanding	3.35	.49
Keep everyone involved in the 4-H club	3.32	.60
Awards that recognize members for their achievements	3.32	.48
Provide a challenging and competitive environment	3.26	.51
Leadership projects	3.26	.58
Keep meetings at the same time. Be consistent	3.26	.63
Provide members' opportunities to meet new people	3.19	.60
Don't stereotype 4-H members. 4-H involves urban members as well as rural members	3.13	.57

Note: Based on a Likert scale. Very Ineffective=1.00 – 1.50, Ineffective=1.51 – 2.50, Effective=2.51 – 3.50, Very Effective=3.51 – 4.00

Extension agents reported how useful retention strategies have been to involve the minority youth to their 4-H clubs. Two strategies that were found to be “very useful” by the county Extension agents were “recognize achievement” (M=3.55, SD=.57) and “involved the parents of minority youth” (M=3.55, SD=.72). All other responses were identified as “useful”. The complete data for this response can be found in Table 2.6.

*Table 2.6 How Useful Retention Strategies are to Involve Minority Youth
(N = 31)*

Retention Strategies	M	SD
Recognize achievement	3.55	.57
Involved the parents of minority youth	3.55	.72
Held meetings in a convenient location, at times convenient to the majority of the youth	3.48	.57
Recognize minority volunteer leaders for time and service	3.48	.77
Used a variety of activities	3.45	.68
Helped youth earn money from 4-H fund raising	3.42	.92
Made certain that each first-year minority member has the necessary information and supplies to complete his/her project	3.39	.84
Researched ideas for projects that will interest and meet the needs of minority youth	3.39	1.09
Found ways to make meetings interesting for minority youth	3.32	.91
Developed ways to give recognition to minority members who do not exhibit or compete	3.32	1.09

Note: Based on a Likert Scale. Very Useless=1.00 – 1.50, Useless=1.51 – 2.50, Useful=2.51 – 3.50, Very Useful=3.51 – 4.00

Objective 2.3: Describe the success of those 4-H clubs that have retained minority membership, as perceived by Texas county Extension agents

The county Extension agents rated the degree to which they believe they have been successful with involving minority youth to their county 4-H clubs ranging from “very unsuccessful” to “very successful”. All but one respondent considered themselves “successful” with 71% (n=22) indicating they were “somewhat successful” and 26% (n=8) “very successful”. The data for the respondents can be found in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Success in Involving Minority Youth (N = 31)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Somewhat Successful	22	71
Very Successful	8	26
Somewhat Unsuccessful	1	3
Very Unsuccessful	0	0

To explain Extension agents' success in retaining members, the county Extension agents were asked to identify which factors they believe to be the most important reasons why they have been both successful and unsuccessful. Extension agents believe they have been successful because 50% (n=4) responded "the number of minority youth enrolled and remained in my program". While the most important reason for lack of success was "minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques", selected by 67% (n=10). The complete list of the responses can be found in Tables 2.8 and 2.9.

Table 2.8 Most Important Reason for Success in Involving Minority Youth (N = 8)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
The number of minority youth who enroll and remained in my program	4	50
The number of minority youth who attend meetings and participate in activities	2	25
The minority youth members involved say they enjoy 4-H	2	25
I have made every reasonable effort to involve minority youth	0	0

Table 2.9 Most Important Reason for Lack of Success in Involving Minority Youth (N = 15)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques	10	67

Table 2.9 Continued

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Minority youth are not interested in 4-H	4	27
There are very few minorities in my county	1	7

Extension agents believe minority youth members remain in their county 4-H programs because “they feel welcome and are accepted in this 4-H club” (n=9, 31%), followed by 21% (n=6) answering both “their parents/family members have encouraged them to stay involved” and “activities” to be next most popular choices.

In contrast, the factors county Extension agents believe to be the most important reason why minority youth members have *not* remained in their county 4-H programs were “lack of money for projects and events” (n=11, 37%) and “involvement in other activities” (n=10, 33%). Only 10% (n=3) of the Extension agents answered “lack of interest in 4-H”. The remaining responses for the two previous questions can be found in Tables 2.10 and 2.11.

Table 2.10 Most Important Reason Minority Members Remain in 4-H in Your County (N = 29)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
They feel welcome and are accepted in this 4-H club	9	31
Their parents/family members have encouraged them to stay involved	6	21
Activities	6	21
Their friends are involved	3	10
4-H gives them something to do	2	7
Achievement awards	2	7
A leader has encouraged them to stay involved	1	3

Table 2.11 Most Important Reason Minority Members Do Not Remain in 4-H in Your County (N = 30)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Lack of money for projects and events	11	37
Involvement in other activities	10	33
Parents do not support the program	4	13
Lack of interest in 4-H	3	10
This program does not meet their needs	1	3
Other	1	3

Objective 2.4: Describe minority youth recruitment strategies utilized by Texas county

Extension agents

Extension agents reported how frequently the county 4-H clubs advertise to minority populations by utilizing specific forms of media based on a scale from one to four, one meaning “never” and four meaning “often”. The top two advertising techniques reportedly used only “sometimes” were “involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth” (M=2.81, SD=.98) and “placing promotional posters or flyers in minority community locations such as businesses, schools, or churches” (M=2.65, SD=.98). Table 2.12 lists the complete responses selected by the Extension agents.

Table 2.12 Frequency of Minority Advertising (N = 31)

Advertising Techniques	M	SD
Involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth	2.81	.98
Placing promotional posters or flyers in minority community locations such as businesses, schools or churches	2.65	.98
Publicizing 4-H in minority newspapers	1.73	1.05
Radio program/interview	1.73	.94
Publicizing on minority radio stations	1.40	.67
Publicizing through cable TV programs	1.30	.60

Note: Based on a Likert scale. Never=1.00 – 1.50, Rarely=1.51 – 2.50, Sometimes=2.51 – 3.50, Often=3.51 – 4.00

Conclusions

Based on data reported by the Texas county Extension agents, various conclusions were drawn in relation to previous studies of 4-H member recruitment and retention.

Texas county Extension agents were surveyed on a range of questions concerning minority youth involvement in their local county 4-H clubs. The main issues in which this study concentrated on pertained to minority recruitment techniques and retention rates among various county 4-H clubs with 50% or greater minority membership. The Texas county Extension agents who chose to participate in this study offered a great contribution of information about minority involvement in their county 4-H clubs.

The overall perceptions the Extension agents had about the 4-H clubs in their counties were positive. The majority of agents agreed that offering motivation, praise, and encouragement along with a supportive staff or adult leaders can result in a somewhat successful 4-H club. The agents recognize the members who enroll and remain in the program to be evidence of their success with involving minority youth to their 4-H programs.

McKee et al., (2002) reported the reluctance of change from staff working within the 4-H organization in Indiana. This study did not seek out to research the county Extension agents' willingness for change, however, it is interesting to consider this option based on the results found. Although there is an overall positive outlook for the county 4-H clubs, Extension agents reported problem areas including a lack of funding for projects and events along with youth not responding to the usual recruitment techniques. If these problem areas are recognized by the county Extension agents, how willing would they be to take action towards addressing these issues?

In regards to recruitment techniques, similar to Alston and Crutchfield (2009), the county Extension agents also agree to involve minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth. Alston and Crutchfield (2009) concluded that according to the perceptions of county Extension agents in North Carolina, the 4-H organizations were not meeting the needs of the growing diverse population of youth. Their study concluded that increasing the number of minority role models could help improve minority membership in order to meet those needs (Alston & Crutchfield, 2009).

A different conclusion that can be made regarding recruitment techniques as perceived by county Extension agents comes from the lack of advertisement to the minority youth population. When asked about frequency of advertisement, the most common techniques were only reported to be utilized at most, “sometimes”. The remaining techniques, as reported by the agents, were utilized “rarely” or “never”. Not a single recruitment technique was reported to be used “often”. Recognizing the lack of minority youth involvement should encourage more frequency of advertisements to this population.

In relation to advertising to minority youth members, county Extension agents reported a negative effect on recruitment, stating that minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques. This statement could offer another reflection to McKee et al., (2002), in questioning how willing the Extension agents are to implement changes within their county 4-H clubs related to new, and more effective, recruitment techniques.

However ineffective the Extension agents perceive recruitment and retention techniques to be, the agents still report having been “somewhat successful” in involving minority youth to their 4-H clubs. The Extension agents reported an overall positive

outlook on their county 4-H clubs' involvement with minority youth, claiming that any unsuccessful turnouts are based on outside effects, such as a lack of money for projects and events or youth being involved in other activities. These perceptions, though positive, could have an overall negative effect on the 4-H organization due to misinterpretation of actual membership data.

Recommendations

It is important for Texas county Extension agents to stay closely involved with the clubs in order to maintain awareness of the events that the members are experiencing. Involvement and communication should be key relationships between county Extension agents and the 4-H clubs that they represent. In order to strengthen the relationship between the Extension agents and county clubs, the agents need to determine the interests of the youth members involved. Recognizing the different project areas that minority youth are interested in and providing more accessible information to prospective members could serve as productive changes to the 4-H organization.

Recognizing the perceptions of the county Extension agents may help to draw conclusions about the individual 4-H clubs. If the Extension agents work closely with the county 4-H clubs, then they will have a better understanding of what is really going on throughout the county. If the Extension agents do *not*, however, have a close relationship to their county clubs, then there may be a definite misinterpretation of the success in the county 4-H organization.

The perceptions of Texas county Extension agents, though focused on minority recruitment and retention, can offer a great input to the remaining 4-H states throughout the nation. County Extension agents, wherever employed, have a common goal for the 4-

H organization, which is to promote important life skills in youth that help build character and leadership qualities (Cooperative Extension Systems Offices, 2011).

CHAPTER III

TEXAS COUNTY 4-H CLUB ADULT LEADERS

Introduction

On record, the first Texas 4-H club was founded in 1908 by Tom Marks in Jack County (Texas 4-H and Youth Development, 2012). Since then, Texas 4-H clubs have continued to grow and expand their involvement in communities throughout the state. Texas 4-H club adult leaders are selected on a volunteer basis with an ambition to help educate and improve the leadership skills of youth interested in agricultural-related issues. Adult leaders are required to manage and work exclusively with the 4-H club in their community, assisting with projects, events, activities, and education that the club participates in. For the purpose of this research, specific Texas 4-H club adult leaders were recommended to participate because of their extensive involvement with the youth members registered in the 4-H organization and their ability to provide helpful insight about their individual clubs.

Review of Literature

To better understand the role and value of 4-H to its publics, a review of previous studies was conducted. Previous research examines public, member, and leader perceptions.

By researching the perceptions of 4-H club adult leaders, we can have a better understanding of the leaders' involvement within the 4-H organization, since the mission of 4-H is designed to help youth strive in various fields related to agriculture and improve their overall leadership skills in any field of interest.

Cano and Bankston (1992) investigated factors associated with participation and nonparticipation of minority youth in Ohio 4-H programs. Cano and Bankston (1992) reported that most of the youth participating in the focus groups were African American, followed by Hispanic, Phillipino, and Asian. Overall, both minority youth and parents believed that 4-H offered positive influences for participation, including developing self-confidence, enjoying participation in projects, and receiving awards and prizes to recognize their work. The participating youth and parents also identified negative contributing factors they believe need to be changed within the 4-H organization. Negative factors included barriers to participation, limited knowledge of the 4-H program by parents, lack of minority-friendly advertising, and lack of minority adult role models. Cano and Bankston (1992) concluded that many changes need to be addressed by the Cooperative Extension Service in order to have a positive outlook on their 4-H programs by the general public.

Gill, Bruce, and Ewing (2010), used a content analysis on responses from open-ended questions by youth active in a Pennsylvania 4-H club. Based on McClelland's motivational needs theory (McClelland, 1987), the authors constructed their questions on three motivational factors: need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. The majority of youth responded that friends and opportunities to meet new people, more available resources for future jobs and careers, and the activities/events offered through 4-H would increase participation (Gill et al., 2010). Factors such as lack of sufficient information about an activity, long term benefits of 4-H, and financial costs of participation were among the reasons that might limit involvement in 4-H. (Gill et al., 2010).

Ferrari and Turner (2006) interviewed a panel of 50 youth participants in an after-school 4-H program to explore the perceptions of their experiences in the development organization. Most of the youth that participated were African American. This study concluded that the youth felt a sense of safety and belonging, while also receiving academic support, and had fun (Ferrari & Turner, 2006). The authors stated that youth appreciated feeling as though they had a voice and a choice in participation. Ferrari and Turner (2006) believed that knowing these factors can greatly help strengthen any youth development program by allowing the members to feel important.

Whaley (2011) researched the demographic indicators of persistence among 4-H members in Iowa. Rather than studying retention rates of 4-H members, Whaley (2011) chose to focus on persistence, the willingness to stay, among the youth in the 4-H clubs. Whaley (2011) concluded that demographics play a major role in a youth member's persistence to remain in the organization. The results of this study found that residence is a strong indicator of persistence. Youth not raised or living on a farm were less likely to stay involved in 4-H (Whaley, 2011). In addition to residency, grade level, age, and years of involvement also contributed to the persistence of the 4-H members. The study found that involvement in 4-H at a younger age and longer active membership resulted in more persistence (Whaley, 2011).

Methodology

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program is a voluntary organization for youth, aged 5-19, that builds positive characteristics and promotes a healthy lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of 4-H adult club leaders about recruitment and retention of minority youth 4-H members.

This descriptive study utilized a survey as the research instrument to obtain and compare the perceptions of the adult club leaders in Texas 4-H organizations. The survey was distributed to leaders of 155 4-H clubs in 54 counties throughout the state of Texas based on specific club demographic criteria.

Objectives

1. To describe 4-H members and identify the project areas that most minority 4-H members participate.
2. To determine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of recruitment and retention techniques by 4-H adult club leaders.
3. To describe the success of those 4-H clubs that have retained minority membership, as perceived by adult club leaders.
4. To describe minority youth recruitment strategies utilized by 4-H adult club leaders.

Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive research method with a survey instrument in order to obtain the most accurate results. “A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2008, p. 145). Dillman’s Tailored Design Method was used as a guide for this study (Dillman et. al, 2009).

Population and Sample

A purposive sampling method was used for this study. A specific population was required for this study based on the knowledge and experience that was needed to respond effectively, which is why a homogenous purposive sampling method was

utilized. The objective of a purposive sampling technique is to acquire a non-probability sample that with the intention of making generalizations. Though this study cannot be generalized to the entire National 4-H Council, it can however serve as a generalization for Texas 4-H clubs consisting of both minority and non-minority members. A purposive sampling method requires a specific united population. For the purposes of this study, common knowledge and experience within minority 4-H clubs was required.

Determining the perceptions of 4-H adult club leaders will offer insight to possible improvements for minority retention and recruitment techniques that are needed within Texas 4-H clubs.

The population for this research was Texas 4-H club adult leaders. To be included in this study, adult club leaders must have at least two years of experience with the Texas 4-H club, and represent a club with 50% or greater minority membership.

The Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization was a cooperative supporter of this study. A permission request was sent to the Extension 4-H and Youth Development Specialist in order to obtain contact information consisting of first and last names, email addresses, and current county of service for the 4-H club leaders. In addition to providing contact information, a notification letter was sent to the prospective participants on behalf of the Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization in order to spread awareness about this upcoming research study.

Only 54 of the 254 counties in Texas have clubs that were included in this research based on the sampling criteria. From the 2,145 4-H clubs in Texas, 155 clubs have more than 50% minority youth members, meaning, at least 50% of the members in these club are Hispanic, African-American, Asian, or other non-White ethnic

backgrounds. Based on the selection criteria, 168 adult club leaders were included in the purposive sample. Figure 3.1 illustrates the counties with 4-H clubs that met the specific criteria in relationship to the participating counties for this study.

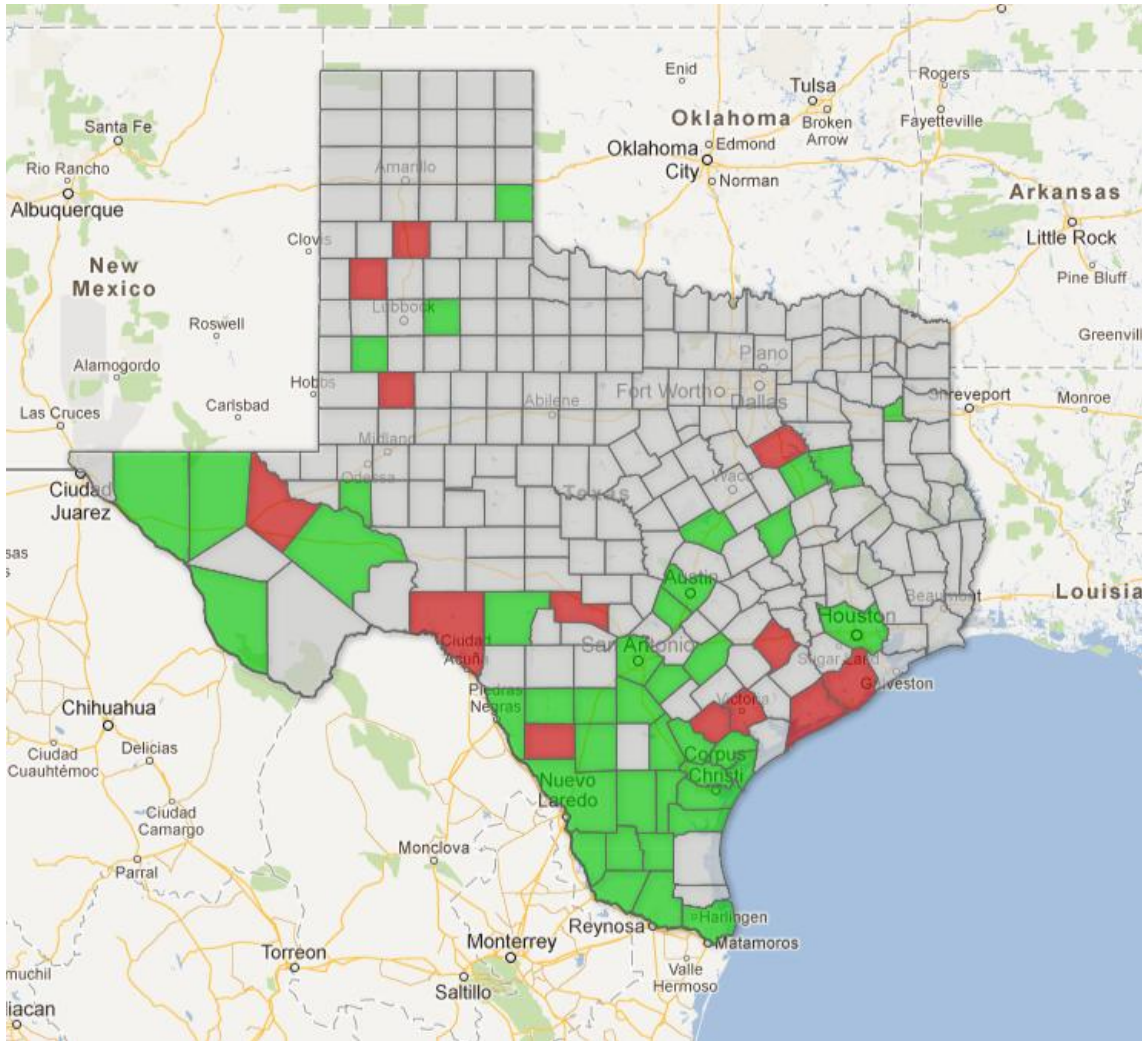


Figure 3.1 Participating Texas County 4-H Clubs: Adult Club Leaders. Highlighted counties have clubs with 50% or greater minority participation. Counties in green chose to participate in the study, while counties in red chose not to participate (Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 2010).

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this research is a descriptive survey modified from existing descriptive surveys used with 4-H based populations (Bankston, J., 1992; Meighan, T. G., 1997; Gottlieb, D., 1974). Reliability of previous instruments were .82 (Bankston, J., 1992); .92 (Meighan, T.G., 1997); and *unknown* (Gottlieb, D., 1974). Post-hoc scale reliability for this study was .91 (usefulness) and .94 (effectiveness) to reflect both practical and statistical differences in responses reported by the participants. Validity was determined by previous studies and a review by a panel of experts from Texas A&M University faculty.

A pre-notice letter was sent to all identified adult club leaders by the Texas 4-H and Youth Development organization identify the research and the organization's support. In June 2012, a cover letter explaining the purpose of this research, as well as the detailed instructions for completing the survey was sent to the prospective participants a week in advance to prepare for the launch of the study. The instrument was sent electronically via Qualtrics survey software on June 21, 2012. The participants were given a six-week time period to complete the survey, during which three reminder emails were sent in order to encourage participation. This timeline was carefully planned around events occurring throughout the 4-H organization, such as the conclusion of Texas 4-H Roundup and the beginning of open registration for the new 2012-2013 calendar year. All questions included in the instrument utilized a Likert-type scale or multiple choice options. Of the 226 total participants contacted for the study, 38% ($n=64$) adult club leaders responded. A comparison of early to late respondents found no statistically significant differences (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001).

Analysis of Data

Data obtained from this study was analyzed at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS). Levels of significance were set at $p < 0.05$ *a priori* for all tests, frequencies, means and standard deviations are reported.

Use of Findings

The results obtained from this study may be used by the Texas 4-H Youth and Development Program, as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, to improve the minority youth membership throughout the state. These results may be helpful in determining the cause for minority retention issues in particular clubs, and create effective recruitment strategies to engage prospective members to the organization.

Limitations of the Study

Use of a purposive sample does not allow for generalization of the study findings to all 4-H club leaders in Texas. It is also important to note that were 155 individual 4-H clubs with 168 4-H club leaders, it is possible that some club leaders were married couples and only one leader chose to respond to the survey. Additionally, the survey was only provided in English; some club leaders may speak English as a second language and therefore did not respond to the survey because of language barriers.

Results

Of the 168 adult club leaders selected for participation in this study, 64 provided survey responses for a response rate of 38%. The Texas 4-H club adult leaders who chose to participate in this study were predominately Hispanic females between the ages of 40-49 years old. Of the total number of adult club leaders, 63% were not 4-H members,

however, 27% have 6-10 years of experience working with their current 4-H club. The complete list of demographics for the 4-H adult club leaders can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Adult Leaders (N = 48)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Age at time of survey (years)		
20-29	1	2
30-39	6	13
40-49	25	52
50-59	12	25
60+	4	8
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic	29	60
White	16	33
African American	3	6
Asian	0	0
Other	0	0
Gender		
Female	31	65
Male	17	35
Years volunteered with current club		
1	1	2
2	6	13
3	6	13
4	3	6
5	2	4
6-10	13	27
11-15	5	10
16-20	7	15
21-25	2	4
26-30	1	2
31+	2	4
Former 4-H member		
No	30	63
Yes	18	38

Objective 3.1: Describe 4-H members and identify the project areas that most minority 4-H members participate as perceived by adult club leaders

The adult club leaders ranked the ethnicities of the 4-H members in their club on a scale from one to five, with one being the most represented ethnicity and five being the least represented. From the 55 respondents, 41 adult leaders ranked Hispanic to be the most represented ethnicity in their 4-H club, followed by 42 ranking White as the second most represented ethnicity. The complete list of ethnicities among the county 4-H members as perceived by the adult club leaders can be found in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Rank of Ethnicities Represented by 4-H Members in Club (N = 55)

Ethnicity	Rank				
	1	2	3	4	5
Hispanic	41	9	5	0	0
White	10	42	3	0	0
African American	4	2	38	9	1
Other	0	1	1	2	49
Asian	0	1	7	42	3

Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to missing data

When asked to identify the 4-H projects that their county clubs most participate in, respondents were able to select more than one project area, 91% (n=51) selected “animals” as being the most popular project choice, followed by 46% (n=26) choosing “personal development and leadership”, 34% (n=19) selecting “consumer and family sciences”. The complete list of project choices can be found in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Adult Club Leaders Perceptions of 4-H Project(s) Participation (N = 56)

Project	<i>n</i>	%
Animals	51	91

Table 3.3 Continued

Project	<i>n</i>	%
Personal Development and Leadership	26	46
Consumer and Family Sciences	19	34
Citizenship and Civic Education	15	27
Healthy Lifestyles	13	23
Communications and Expressive Arts	9	16
Plants	8	14
Science, Engineering, and Technology	6	11
Environment Education and Earth Sciences	5	9

Note: Total is greater than 56 as respondents indicated all project areas represented in their county.

Adult club leaders were asked to rate their club members' abilities to perform specific tasks compared to other youth based on a scale from one to three, one meaning "below average", two meaning "average", and three meaning "above average". From the 56 responses, the adult club leaders answered "have fun" (M=2.57, SD=.60) to be "above average". The remaining responses were rated as "average". The complete list of data can be found in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 4-H Members' Ability to Perform Specific Tasks (N = 56)

Ability to	M	SD
Have fun	2.52	.60
Learn responsibility	2.43	.66
Meet new friends	2.36	.64
Learn new skills	2.30	.66
Meet people from other ethnicities	2.27	.65
Get help in deciding on their future education, work, and career	2.23	.69
Take trips	2.07	.76
Get help with personal problems	2.02	.65
Other	2.57	.79

Note: Based on Likert Scale. Below Average=1 – 1.50, Average=1.51 – 2.50, Above Average=2.51 – 3.0

Objective 3.2: Determine the perceived effectiveness and usefulness of recruitment and retention techniques by 4-H adult club leaders.

The 4-H club adult leaders were asked to select a response that best reflects their opinion to identify the most important aspect that keeps 4-H members in their club, based on a scale from one to four, one meaning “very ineffective” and four meaning “very effective”. The adult club leaders perceived the following reasons to be “very effective” in retaining members: “provide praise, motivation and encouragement” (M=3.59, SD=.61), “provide equal opportunities for all” (M=3.58, SD=.67), “friends and family being part of 4-H” (M=3.57, SD=.57), and “a supportive county agent, staff or 4-H leader” (M=3.53, SD=.76). All other statements were reported to be “effective”. The remaining data for this question can be found in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Most Important Reasons That Retain Members in 4-H (N = 51)

Reason	M	SD
Provide praise, motivation and encouragement	3.59	.61
Provide equal opportunities for all	3.58	.67
Friends and family being a part of 4-H	3.57	.57
A supportive county agent, staff or 4-H leader	3.53	.76
Keep meetings at the same time. Be consistent	3.49	.67
Provide efficient and fun meetings, programs, and activities	3.47	.70
Being a friend by communicating and understanding	3.47	.70
Leadership projects	3.45	.70
Keep everyone involved in the 4-H club	3.44	.79
Awards that recognize members for their achievements	3.41	.83
Involve parents and keep them involved	3.41	.80
Listening to members' inputs and needs	3.39	.70
Provide members opportunities to meet new people	3.33	.74

Table 3.5 Continued

Reason	M	SD
Don't stereotype 4-H members. 4-H involves urban members as well as rural members	3.31	.76
Provide a challenging and competitive environment	3.27	.70

Note: Based on a 4-point Likert scale. Very Ineffective=1.00 – 1.50, Ineffective=1.51 – 2.50, Effective=2.51 – 3.50, Very Effective= 3.51 – 4.00

Adult leaders reported how useful retention strategies have been to involve the minority youth to their 4-H clubs. All responses were identified as “very useful” with the most selected response, “recognize minority volunteer leaders for time and service” (M=3.90, SD=.79). The complete list of data can be found in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 How Useful Retention Strategies are to Involve Minority Youth (N = 51)

Retention Strategies	M	SD
Recognize minority volunteer leaders for time and service	3.90	.79
Helped youth earn money from 4-H fund raising	3.84	.83
Developed ways to give recognition to minority members who do not exhibit or compete	3.84	.99
Researched ideas for projects that will interest and meet the needs of minority youth	3.80	1.07
Made certain that each first-year minority member has the necessary information and supplies to complete his/her project	3.72	.70
Held meetings in a convenient location, at times convenient to the majority of the youth	3.69	.58
Recognize achievement	3.68	.68
Used a variety of activities	3.59	.80
Involved the parents of minority youth	3.53	.73
Found ways to make meetings interesting for minority youth	3.52	.93

Note: Based on a 4-point Likert Scale. Very Useless=1.00 – 1.50, Useless=1.51 – 2.50, Useful=2.51 – 3.50, Very Useful=3.51 – 4.00

Objective 3.3: Describe the success of those 4-H clubs that have retained minority membership, as perceived by adult club leaders

The adult club leaders rated the degree to which they believe they have been successful with involving minority youth to their 4-H clubs ranging from “very successful” to “very unsuccessful”. All but three respondents considered themselves “successful” with an even split of 47% (n=24) indicating they were both “somewhat successful” and “very successful”. This data for the respondents can be found in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Success in Involving Minority Youth (N = 51)

Response	n	%
Very Successful	24	47
Somewhat Successful	24	47
Somewhat Unsuccessful	3	6
Very Unsuccessful	0	0

To explain the adult leaders’ success in retaining members, the leaders were asked to identify which factors they believe to be the most important reasons why they have been both successful and unsuccessful. One adult leader believed they had been successful because *I have made every reasonable effort to involve minority youth*. While another believed their success was based on *the number of minority youth who attend meetings and activities*. While the most important reason for lack of success was “minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques”, selected by 50% (n=9). The complete list of responses can be found in Tables 3.8.

Table 3.8 Most Important Reason for Lack of Success in Involving Minority Youth (N = 18)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques	9	50
Minority youth are not interested in 4-H	5	28
There are very few minorities in my county	4	22

Adult club leaders believe minority youth members remain in their 4-H clubs because “they feel welcome and are accepted in this 4-H club”, (n=14, 29%), followed by “their parents/family members have encouraged them to stay involved” (n=13, 27%) as the next most popular answer choice.

In contrast, the factors the adult leaders believe to be the most important reason why some minority youth have *not* remained in their 4-H club were, “involvement in other activities” (n=18, 38%), followed by 27% (n=13) selecting “parents do not support the program”. Only 19% (n=9) respondents chose “lack of money for projects and events”. The remaining responses for the two previous questions can be found in Tables 3.9 and 3.10.

Table 3.9 Most Important Reason Minority Members Remain in 4-H in Your County (N = 48)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
They feel welcome and are accepted in this 4-H club	14	29
Their parents/family members have encouraged them to stay involved	13	27
Activities	8	17
4-H gives them something to do	4	8
Their friends are involved	4	8
A leader has encouraged them to stay involved	3	6
Achievement awards	2	4

Table 3.10 Most Important Reason Minority Members Do Not Remain in 4-H in Your County (N = 48)

Response	<i>n</i>	%
Involvement in other activities	18	38
Parents do not support the program	13	27
Lack of money for projects and events	9	19
Lack of interest in 4-H	5	10
This program does not meet their needs	0	0
Other	3	6

Objective 3.4: Describe minority youth recruitment strategies utilized by 4-H adult club leaders

To report recruitment information regarding minority youth in Texas 4-H clubs, the adult leaders reported how frequently their county 4-H club advertises to minority population by utilizing specific forms of media. Results were based on a scale from one to four, one meaning “never” and four meaning “often”. The top three advertising techniques reportedly used only “rarely” were “involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth” (M=2.44, SD=1.18), “placing promotional posters or flyers in minority community locations such as businesses, schools or churches” (M=2.15, SD=1.20), and “publicizing 4-H in minority newspapers” (M=1.67, SD=1.00). The complete list of advertisement techniques can be found in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11 Frequency of Minority Advertising (N = 48)

Advertising Techniques	M	SD
Involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth	2.44	1.18
Placing promotional posters or flyers in minority community locations such as businesses, schools or churches	2.15	1.20
Publicizing 4-H in minority newspapers	1.67	1.00

Table 3.11 Continued

Advertising Techniques	M	SD
Radio program/interview	1.23	.52
Publicizing on minority radio stations	1.17	.48
Publicizing through cable TV programs	1.15	.41

Note: Based on a Likert Scale. Never=1.00 – 1.50, Rarely=1.51 – 2.50, Sometimes=2.51 – 3.50, Often=3.51 – 4.00

Conclusions

After analyzing the results gathered from the perceptions of the Texas 4-H adult club leaders, various conclusions were drawn in relation to previous studies of 4-H member recruitment and retention.

The 4-H adult club leaders have an overall positive perception about their clubs and the members who are involved. The majority of the adult leaders reported that offering praise, encouragement, and motivation, along with a supportive staff and leaders can result in a very to somewhat successful 4-H club. In addition to providing support, the adult leaders agree that involving the family and friends of the members and providing equal opportunities for everyone also contributes to success.

In relation to successful 4-H clubs, Gill et al., (2010) reported that opportunities to meet people and participate in activities increased participation in Pennsylvania 4-H clubs. Similarly, meeting new friends was among the top responses that the 4-H clubs provide to its members, as perceived by the adult leaders. In contrast, Gill et al., (2010) reported that financial costs were factors that decrease participation in Pennsylvania 4-H clubs. Relating to finances, the adult club leaders report helping youth earn money from 4-H fund raising to be a top response for a very useful retention strategy.

Other than financial issues having a negative impact on 4-H members' retention, Cano and Bankston (1992) identified that limited knowledge by parents of youth members cause a lack of participation for minority youth. Interestingly, parental involvement has an equally positive and negative effect on retention, according to adult club leaders. Parents or family members encouraging youth to stay involved in the organization was a top response for why minority members remain in the leader's 4-H clubs, followed by a top response reporting a lack of parental support as to why minority members do not remain in the 4-H club.

In addition to a lack of parental involvement, Cano and Bankston (1992) also reported a lack of minority role models and minority friendly advertising to be among the top reasons to cause barriers in minority youth participation. The top recruitment techniques utilized only rarely by adult club leaders were involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth and placing promotional posters or flyers in minority communities. Though the recruitment techniques may seem to be beneficial according to the study by Cano and Bankston (1992), the adult leaders reported that minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques, which may explain why these techniques are rarely utilized.

Ferrari and Turner (2006) concluded that youth members participating in a 4-H program appreciate feeling as though they have a voice and a choice regarding participation in the organization. Adult club leaders agree on this issue, reporting to recognize minority youth members who do not exhibit or compete while also recognizing the minority volunteer leaders for their time and service as a useful retention strategy to involve minority youth.

According to this research, adult club leaders are making an effort to recognize minority youth members in their club. The adult leaders strive to provide equal opportunities for their members, whether that involves helping to raise money by fund raising, or encouraging the involvement of the youths' parents and family members. The 4-H adult club leaders must also recognize their efforts because they rated their success with involving minority youth to be both somewhat to very successful.

Recommendations

This study serves as an important reference to minority youth 4-H members across the state. The perceptions shared by the adult club leaders can be recognized as a new beginning for the 4-H organization. Identifying the problem areas is the first step in conducting a positive transformation. When the diversity of our state's population continues to grow, the 4-H program will need to adapt and develop alongside those changes.

Texas 4-H adult leaders are the primary population to question regarding youth membership, recruitment techniques, and retention rates among clubs. The adult leaders interact with the youth members of the club on a personal level and are the most aware of the type of problems that need to be addressed in order to improve the organization. With their help, 4-H can begin to recognize the negative issues in order to help shape the future of 4-H to support both current and prospective members in the organization.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The population of Texas county Extension agents and the adult club leaders for this study consisted of those adult leaders who currently represent clubs, and the corresponding counties, that contain more than 50% minority youth enrollment. Of the 254 counties in Texas, only 54 counties qualified for this research. A total of 155 Texas 4-H clubs were selected to participate, resulting in 168 adult club leaders and 58 county Extension agents. Each participant who chose to respond was given the opportunity to indicate their personal demographics, consisting of age, gender, race/ethnicity, current county they work for, years involved in 4-H, and if they are former 4-H members.

Of those who responded, 67% of invited county Extension agents and 38% of invited 4-H club adult leaders participated. The demographics for the county Extension agents who participated in this study were predominately White males between the ages of 40-59 years old. The demographics for the 4-H adult club leaders were predominately Hispanic females between the ages of 40-49 years old. When asked if the participants were former 4-H members, 63% of the county Extension agents responded “yes”, while 63% of the adult club leaders responded “no”. The average number of years that both the county Extension agents and the 4-H club adult leaders reported to have experience working with their current county 4-H programs were between 6-10 years. The complete list of data describing the demographics of the two participating panels can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Extension Agents and Adult Leaders

Characteristic	Responses			
	Extension Agents (N = 30)		Adult Leaders (N = 48)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Age at time of survey (years)				
20-29	6	20	1	2
30-39	6	20	6	13
40-49	9	30	25	52
50-59	8	27	12	25
60+	1	3	4	8
Race/Ethnicity				
White	21	70	16	33
Hispanic	8	27	29	60
African American	1	3	3	6
Asian	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
Gender				
Male	17	57	17	35
Female	13	43	31	65
Years volunteered with current club				
1	6	20	1	2
2	5	17	6	13
3	0	0	6	13
4	3	10	3	6
5	2	7	2	4
6-10	7	23	13	27
11-15	5	17	5	10
16-20	2	7	7	15
21-25	0	0	2	4
26-30	0	0	1	2
31+	0	0	2	4
Former 4-H member				
Yes	19	63	18	38
No	11	37	30	63

Objective 5: Determine if adult club leaders' perceptions about minority youth in 4-H differ from those of county Extension agents

According to the data collected by the county Extension agents and the adult club leaders, statistical differences were reported regarding retention effectiveness and usefulness. When asked about the most important reasons believed to retain 4-H members, the participating panels ranked the strategies on a scale from one to four, ranging from “very ineffective” to “very effective”, respectfully. The three categories that showed a statistical difference were “being a friend by communicating and understanding”, “awards that recognize members for their achievements”, and “don't stereotype 4-H members. 4-H involves urban members as well as rural members”. The scale reliability for the effectiveness regarding retention strategies was .94. The complete list of data regarding retention effectiveness, along with the statistical differences, can be found in Table 4.2

Table 4.2 Most Effective Recruitment Strategies

Statement	Adult Leaders (N = 51)		Extension Agents (N = 31)		Overall (N = 79)		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Provide praise, motivation and encouragement	3.59	0.61	3.58	0.50	3.58	0.57	0.37
A supportive county agent, staff or 4-H leader	3.53	0.76	3.61	0.50	3.57	0.67	0.10
Friends and family being part of 4-H	3.57	0.57	3.48	0.51	3.54	0.55	0.54
Provide equal opportunities for all	3.58	0.67	3.42	0.62	3.51	0.66	0.92
Being a friend by communicating and understanding	3.47	0.70	3.35	0.49	3.44	0.64	0.03*

Table 4.2 Continued

Statement	Adult Leaders (N = 51)		Extension Agents (N = 31)		Overall (N = 79)		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Provide efficient and fun meetings, programs and activities	3.47	0.70	3.42	0.56	3.44	0.66	0.26
Involve parents and keep them involved	3.41	0.80	3.48	0.63	3.43	0.75	0.23
Keep meetings at the same time. Be consistent	3.49	0.67	3.26	0.63	3.43	0.65	0.30
Listening to members' inputs and needs	3.39	0.70	3.39	0.56	3.42	0.63	0.09
Keep everyone involved in the 4-H club	3.44	0.79	3.32	0.60	3.41	0.73	0.07
Awards that recognize members for their achievements	3.41	0.83	3.32	0.48	3.38	0.72	0.01*
Leadership projects	3.45	0.70	3.26	0.58	3.38	0.67	0.11
Provide members opportunities to meet new people	3.33	0.74	3.19	0.60	3.28	0.70	0.07
Provide a challenging and competitive environment	3.27	0.70	3.26	0.51	3.27	0.63	0.09
Don't stereotype 4-H members. 4-H involves urban members as well as rural members	3.31	0.76	3.13	0.57	3.25	0.71	0.03*

Note: Based on a 4-point Likert scale. Very Ineffective=1.00 – 1.50, Ineffective=1.51 – 2.50, Effective=2.51 – 3.50, Very Effective= 3.51 – 4.00

* $p < .05$

A statistical difference was found when the panel responses about the usefulness of specific retention strategies were compared, “found ways to make meetings interesting for minority youth”. The complete list of data regarding usefulness can be found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Most Useful Retention Strategies

Statement	Adult Leaders (N = 51)		Extension Agents (N = 31)		Overall (N = 79)		Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Researched ideas for projects that will interest and meet the needs of minority youth	3.24	0.82	3.00	0.82	3.11	0.89	0.18
Used a variety of activities	3.43	0.69	3.34	0.55	3.47	0.65	0.20
Found ways to make meetings interesting for minority youth	3.32	0.80	3.07	0.68	3.28	0.74	0.05*
Made certain that each first-year minority member has the necessary information and supplies to complete his/her project	3.58	0.58	3.21	0.69	3.36	0.72	0.80
Developed ways to give recognition to minority members who do not exhibit or compete	3.31	0.72	2.80	0.71	3.03	0.65	0.36
Helped youth earn money from 4-H fund raising	3.49	0.60	3.12	0.65	3.25	0.65	0.12
Recognize achievement	3.63	0.64	3.50	0.51	3.50	0.56	0.82
Held meetings in a convenient location, at times convenient to the majority of the youth	3.63	0.53	3.43	0.50	3.50	0.56	0.78
Involved the parents of minority youth	3.5	0.71	3.45	0.63	3.47	0.65	0.70
Recognize minority volunteer leaders for time and service	3.59	0.59	3.38	0.68	3.50	0.56	0.69

Note: Based on a 4-point Likert Scale. Very Useless=1.00 – 1.50, Useless=1.51 – 2.50, Useful=2.51 – 3.50, Very Useful=3.51 – 4.00

* $p < .05$

Though these two issues demonstrate *statistical* differences, it is important to recognize that there is no *practical* difference found between the perceptions of county Extension agents and adult club leaders because each retention strategy was reported to be “very effective”. The results from this study found there to be no variation of any practical differences between the two participating panels. Both share very common views and seem to agree on common goals for improving retention and minority

recruitment within their 4-H clubs and counties. It is interesting to discover, however, that although each of the retention strategies was reported to be “very effective”, what are the causes for retention problems with minority youth? There must be other retention factors that have not been discussed because this research reflects very positive outcomes, when the actual membership data for minority youth does not support this.

Summary

Overall, both Texas county Extension agents and 4-H adult club leaders agreed on most issues presented. For example, both panels reported to have a Hispanic-majority membership, followed by White and African American members. The Extension agents and adult club members agreed that the top three project areas chosen by their members were “animals”, “personal development” and “consumer and family sciences”.

Aside from the club characteristics, the panels reflected their opinions about the members’ perceptions. They agree that their members have high ability to “have fun”, “learn responsibility”, and “meet new friends”. The important reasons believed to keep their members in the program were agreed to be a supportive county agent, staff, or 4-H leader and providing praise, motivation, and encouragement to their members.

The two panels of participants also agreed when rating their degree of success involving minority youth, both selecting “somewhat successful” to “very successful”. The most important reason why minority members remain in their 4-H clubs is because “they feel welcome and are accepted”, as perceived by the county Extension agents and adult club leaders.

Opinions began to differ when the participants were asked how useful certain retention strategies are to involve minority youth. While the county Extension agents

reported recognizing achievement and involving the parents of minority youth members to be very useful retention strategies, the adult club leaders reported recognizing minority volunteers for their time and service, along with helping youth to earn money from 4-H fund raising to be very useful retention strategies. In fact, recognizing achievement and involving the parents of minority youth members was reported as two of the least selected options according to the adult club leaders.

Another difference of opinion occurred when the participants were asked the most important reason why minority members do *not* remain in their 4-H clubs. Both panels agreed that the youths' involvements in other activities was a contributing factor, however, county Extension agents believe a lack of money for projects and events to be an issue, while adult club leaders reported a lack of parental support for the program to be the cause of their retention issues.

Recruitment techniques seemed to be of most concern for both panels of participants. Though both county Extension agents and adult club leaders report involving minority 4-H leaders to recruit minority youth, and placing promotional posters or flyers in minority communities, it is the frequency of their advertisements that cause a concern. Neither panel reported utilizing any recruitment techniques "often". The majority of the recruitment techniques were reported to be used "rarely". When questioned about the reason for their lack of success in involving minority youth, both panels agreed that minority youth do not respond to the usual recruitment techniques. This lack of response may be the cause for the low frequency of minority advertising techniques.

The opportunity for open-ended responses regarding recruitment and retention was provided at the end of the survey. A general theme identified from the review of these comments was that there needs to be greater involvement from the parents of the youth members, along with more funding for the 4-H programs. The most important issue reported was a lack of volunteers. Both panels of participants reflected their needs for adult volunteers, specifically minority volunteers (based on this study) which could help recruit prospective minority youth members. One example from a county Extension agent responded, “Although we have a good volunteer base, more volunteers are always needed to keep up with the growth in the 4-H club.” Additionally, two adult club leaders also reported, “More volunteers to help keep the kids involved”, and, “Involvement from minority parents” when asked to provide other factors that could make their 4-H clubs more successful in recruiting and retaining minority youth.

It is evident from this study that both county Extension agents and adult club leaders have positive perceptions about their 4-H programs. The problem issues being retention and recruitment were analyzed, and both panels offered helpful views about these problems on a personal level pertaining to the 4-H clubs. Working hard for both the current members and prospective members seems to be an important goal of both the county Extension agents and 4-H adult club leaders, which was reflected by the common responses given throughout this study.

Minority youth should not miss out on the experiences to actively participate in 4-H because of the lack of support that can be offered to them. The county Extension agents and adult club leaders must work together to develop new recruitment techniques along with productive retention strategies for minority youth members.

Though this research cannot be generalized throughout the U.S. because of the specific focus on minority retention and recruitment, it can still serve as a helpful reference to problem areas that may or may not be occurring in other 4-H programs. It is always helpful to learn about various techniques and consider different procedures that other 4-H organizations may utilize. Learning from one another is a great way to grow and adapt to inevitable changes. Sharing research and discussing results is one way to contribute to the recruitment and retention issues that the Texas 4-H organization is facing.

Recommendations for Further Research

Fortunately, a study such as this gives greater opportunity for further research. In order to gain better understanding of the issues that exist with minority enrollment in Texas 4-H clubs, duplicate studies may be conducted, focusing on different populations. For example, this same study may be sent to the non-minority Texas counties and clubs in order to interpret their perceptions on recruitment and retention of youth members. This study should also research the perceptions of the youth themselves, both of minority and non-minority, to gain a better understanding of their interests and needs to participate as a successful 4-H member.

The following are recommendations for the Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Service and 4-H adult club leaders in order to progress towards a more diverse 4-H organization.

- Identify successful recruitment strategies
 - Create more advertisements for the 4-H program that pertain to both minority and non-minority youth populations

- Organize public workshops to demonstrate projects and events in an attempt to recruit prospective members who are unfamiliar with 4-H
- Advertise to recruit more adult minority volunteers
 - Develop training strategies to help educate adult volunteers on connecting and creating friendships with youth members
- Organize regular meetings between county Extension agents and adult club leaders in order to relay current information and upcoming events
 - Recognize both accomplishments and problem areas of the 4-H clubs in order to identify the best directions for success
- Communicate with clubs who have been successful in retaining members to gain strategy techniques

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APPENDIX A

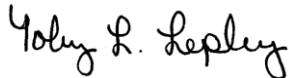
Initial Cover Letter from Texas 4-H Youth & Development Granting Permission to
Conduct This Study

TO: Texas A&M University – Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Permission to Use Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program Data in
Research Project

Permission is granted to Nicole Gonzales, Graduate Student in ALEC at Texas A&M University to use contact and demographic data of select club managers (adult volunteers) and county Extension Agents (adult employees of the Texas A&M System) involved with the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program in order to conduct her research focusing on minority participation in 4-H. All research in this study will involve adults only and no minors.

Thank you.



Toby L. Lepley, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Extension 4-H
and Youth Development Specialist
cc: Nicole Gonzales
Dr. Tracy Rutherford

APPENDIX B

Initial Cover from Texas 4-H Youth & Development to Prospective Participants of this Study

TO: Selected Texas 4-H Club Managers and County Extension Agents

SUBJECT: Request of your participation in a Master's Student Study

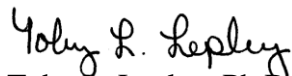
From time to time the Texas 4-H and Youth Development Program has the opportunity to work jointly with university graduate students in conducting research that evaluate and benefit the Texas 4-H Program and/or the youth involved in the program. In the next couple of days as a club manager or a county Extension Agent, you will have that opportunity to assist us in one of the research projects.

Nicole Gonzales, a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communications at Texas A&M University will be conducting an on-line survey of certain club managers and county Extension agent's who have 4-H clubs with a high minority membership. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agent's participating in Texas 4-H programs to understand if that has an effect on minority enrollment. The goal of this research will be to determine the reasons behind changes in participation. To learn more about minority youth perceptions in Texas 4-H programs, a descriptive survey will be sent to adult leader volunteers of 4-H clubs with at least 50 percent minority members. The adult leaders who interact with minority members on a regular basis will offer a helpful primary perception for the youth reactions to fellow 4-H members. The three ethnicities that will be focused on are White/Caucasian, Black/African American, and Hispanic, with Black/African American and Hispanic ethnicities noted as the minority groups.

The information gained through this research will provide a valuable resource to 4-H in knowing how better to recruit and retain our minority participants. Please take fifteen minutes of your time and complete the survey when you receive the information from Nicole. Your participation in the survey will be anonymous so we are asking for your honesty in completing the survey.

If you have any questions about the survey please feel free to contact me at the information below.

Thank you.



Toby L. Lepley, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Extension 4-H
and Youth Development Specialist

cc: Nicole Gonzales
Dr. Tracy Rutherford

APPENDIX C

Initial Cover Letter to Participants of the Study

TO: Texas 4-H Adult Leaders and County Extension Agents

SUBJECT: Participation in Texas A&M University Graduate Research Study

Howdy,

My name is Nicole Gonzales; I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University studying in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communications. I have decided to conduct research within the Texas 4-H organization as the focus for my graduate thesis study. The goal of my study will be to research minority youth members within Texas 4-H clubs to determine any existing issues regarding recruitment and/or retention among the organization.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are either a current 4-H adult leader or county Extension agent within a club that is made up of at least 50 percent minority youth members. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of 4-H adult club leaders and county Extension agents participating in Texas 4-H programs to understand if that has an effect on minority enrollment.

A descriptive survey will be sent to you online via email in order to gain more knowledge about this study. This email will contain a link to the survey along with a personal password that may only be used for your individual use in order to protect your confidentiality and personal identification.

I would greatly appreciate your time and cooperation by participating in this brief survey. I also kindly ask that you please respond by July 1, 2012, if at all possible. The information obtained from this study will provide many resources to the 4-H organization to help gain knowledge about recruitment and/or retention within the minority youth population.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns. Thank you for your cooperation.

Nicole Gonzales
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