



OVERVIEW OF THE PARENTS ANONYMOUS SELF-HELP FOR CHILD ABUSING PARENTS PROJECT EVALUATION STUDY FOR 1974-1976

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INTRODUCTION

Behavior Associates, Tucson, Arizona conducted an in-depth evaluation of the Parents Anonymous Self-Help for Child Abusing Parents Project which was funded by the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development. The evaluation was conducted during the period from May 1, 1974 through April 30, 1976.

The major goals of the Parents Anonymous Project were to expand nationally the self-help treatment approach for child abusing persons, and to provide information, consultation and technical assistance to agencies and communities attempting to understand and remedy the problems of child abuse. The strategies for accomplishing these goals included multi-media materials design, development and dissemination; provision of direct staff consultation and technical assistance to communities; and sponsoring and presenting training workshops, programs, conferences, and so forth.

The major purposes of the evaluation were:

1. To document the accomplishment of the program goals and objectives especially the formation and activities of Parents Anonymous Chapters.
2. To collect descriptive information about Parents Anonymous Chapter Chairpersons, Sponsors, and Members.
3. To analyze the processes involved in Parents Anonymous Chapter functioning and to collect information which would permit more precise definition of the treatment strategies being utilized.
4. To measure the impact of the Parents Anonymous program upon the participants.

This evaluation study could not have been completed without the cooperative effort and able assistance of the Parents Anonymous National Office staff--Leonard Lieber, National Administrator and Co-Founder; Jolly K., Founder and Director of Programs; and Margot Fritz, Director of Training; the P.A. Regional Coordinators who served in the ten United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare National regions; and many P.A. Chapter Chairpersons, Sponsors and Members throughout the United States and Canada. The study was based on data collected from documentation records completed by Parents Anonymous National Office staff and Regional Coordinators; from phone interviews with new Chapter Chairpersons and Sponsors, and from written questionnaire responses and in-depth personal interviews with Chapter Sponsors, Chairpersons and Members.

A summary of the principal findings, conclusions and recommendations of the two year evaluation study are presented in this program evaluation overview. A complete evaluation report has been submitted to the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect and to the Parents Anonymous National Office.

PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

Major objectives of the Parents Anonymous program included materials development and dissemination, delivery of technical assistance to communities and formation of new Parents Anonymous Chapters. Program achievements were outstanding in all three areas and are briefly summarized in the following sections.

1. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT, DISSEMINATION AND EVALUATION

One major objective of the Parents Anonymous project was to develop and produce written products which would help to disseminate the Parents Anonymous concepts and treatment approaches on a national level. Accomplishments have been impressive in this area. Seven written products had been developed, printed, and disseminated nationally by the end of the current evaluation period. Table A summarizes the data regarding dissemination of these products. The great increase in dissemination during the second year of the project is readily visible.

WRITTEN MATERIALS DISSEMINATION SUMMARY - 1974 - 1976		
TITLE OF MATERIAL	NUMBER OF COPIES DISSEMINATED	
	1974-1975	1975-1976
Frontiers: P.A. Newsletter (4 issues in 1975-1976; 3 issues in 1974-1975)	48,483	70,064
Public Information Pamphlet	39,425	194,586
Parents Pamphlet	0	95,993
P.A. Member Booklet	2,321	23,283
Chapter Development Manual	910	2,277
Chapter Chairperson and Sponsor Manual	0	1,839
Parents Anonymous Chapter Directory	0	183
TOTALS	91,139	338,225

TABLE A

In addition to those materials which were disseminated nationally, a Regional Coordinator Training Manual has been disseminated to all of the P.A. Regional Coordinators. A Parents Anonymous Children's Group Manual is in the rough draft stages and the Volunteer Manual which was planned to have been completed by the end of the current evaluation period has not yet been written. An evaluation of all written materials was completed during the first year of the P.A. program. The people who were involved in evaluating the materials included a professional panel of experts in the field of child abuse, P.A. Chapter Sponsors and Chairpersons, and a random sample of readers of Frontiers, the P.A. Newsletter. All the written materials were generally very well received and, were considered useful and effective by the target populations for whom they were written as well as being judged useful and valid from a professional standpoint. Most of the materials evaluation was conducted during the first year of the program and the results were presented in the first year evaluation report.

2. DELIVERY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITIES

Another major objective of the Parents Anonymous program was to deliver technical assistance on a nationwide basis to communities interested in learning about child abuse and Parents Anonymous or desiring to establish Parents Anonymous community treatment programs. Technical assistance visits were made by the P.A. National Office staff and the P.A. Regional Coordinators located in each of the ten U.S. DHEW national regions.

During the first year of the program, 101 technical assistance visits were documented while during the second year this figure rose to 439 visits. During many of the technical assistance visits, large public meetings were held in association with wide media coverage in order to provide consultation and education on the widest possible basis. The officially documented attendance at these meetings was over 8,000 during the first year of the project and close to 30,000 during the second year.

The technical assistance visits tended to be made to communities without established P.A. Chapters. For example, out of the total of 439 visits made during the second program year, 301 were to communities that did not have an established P.A. Chapter. This finding is significant in that one of the major purposes of the technical assistance visits, in addition to public education, was to provide an impetus to the development of new P.A. Chapters.

The high level of success of both the materials dissemination component and the technical assistance services are perhaps best illustrated by the accomplishments described in the next section, i.e. the establishment of large numbers of new P.A. Chapters throughout the nation.

3. NEW CHAPTER FORMATION

The third major objective of the Parents Anonymous project was to establish new Chapters throughout the nation. The documentation of new P.A. Chapters was often difficult since new Chapters were springing up rapidly in many different areas of the country during a relatively short time period. Official documentation of the establishment of a new Chapter was accomplished by means of a phone interview with the Chapter Sponsor or Chairperson, usually conducted by a P.A. Regional Coordinator. These phone interviews were recorded in detail on the evaluation instrument entitled, A Guide for Chapter Phone Interviews. A total of 273 new P.A. Chapters were documented during the first two years of the program by interviewing either the Chairperson or the Sponsor. Of this total, 171 of the new Chapters were interviewed during Year 2 of the project. In addition to those Chapters officially documented by the end of the time covered by this evaluation report, another 181 Chapters have been unofficially reported. There are also approximately 65 still existing Chapters which were started prior to May, 1974, the beginning of federal funding for Parents Anonymous. Therefore, it is estimated that, as of the time this report was completed, there are 519 P.A. Chapters functioning throughout the United States and Canada.

Other information about the new Chapters can be summarized as follows:

- . . . A majority of the new Chapters were located in communities ranging from under 50,000 to 250,000 in population size.
- . . . The most frequently reported factor instrumental to Chapter formation during Year 2 of the project was *"Interest of local professional groups"*. This factor was in only fourth place during Year 1 of the project. This change possibly reflects the effect of P.A.'s expanded efforts at publicity and community outreach to social agencies and professional groups and suggests an increasing acceptance of P.A. by professionals.
- . . . Other factors which were among those most frequently reported as helpful to Chapter formation were: (1) *"Visit to the community by a P.A. representative"* and (2) *"Local newspaper, T.V. or radio publicity"*. These findings suggest that the technical assistance delivery model used by P.A. has been effective in new Chapter formation.
- . . . The types of problems facing new Chapters remained the same during both years of the program. However, only 10% of the Chapters interviewed during Year 1 reported having *"No problem"* in forming their Chapters while 22% reported having *"No problem"* during Year 2. Increased technical assistance by the Regional Coordinators during Year 2, and broader dissemination of P.A. written materials are probably at least partially responsible for this encouraging trend.



- . . . The problems which seem to occur most frequently in Chapter formation are *"Lack of referrals"* and *"Lack of community awareness of child abuse problems"*.
- . . . Referral sources remained fairly similar over the two years of the program, except that referrals from community agencies increased to first place over third place and were reported by 49% of the new Chapters interviewed in Year 2, versus 27% of Year 1 Chapters. This is a significant finding and again suggests that public and community support for P.A. is growing rapidly.

ANALYSES OF PROGRAM AND SERVICE STRATEGIES

In order to gain greater insight into how the Parents Anonymous program works, at both a community and Chapter level, the evaluators developed procedures for obtaining fairly detailed information from Chapter Sponsors and Chairpersons and from Regional Coordinators. These procedures included written questionnaires, daily activity recording forms, in-depth personal interviews, and phone interviews. All of these procedures are described in depth in the body of the report and in this section of the overview we will merely summarize the data so obtained.

CHAPTER FUNCTIONING AND CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

- . . . At the time of the surveys, the average P.A. Chapter had been in existence for 16 months, with a small percentage (7%) having been in existence longer than 3 years.
- . . . The mean number of Members per Chapter is 7.6, although new Chapters report a mean of only 4.7 Members.
- . . . Using the mean membership figure of 7.6 and the most current estimate of number of Chapters presently functioning -- 519 -- the present estimate of P.A. membership is 3,944.
- . . . The P.A. Chapter meetings occur usually once a week and include a Chapter Chairperson, a Chapter Sponsor (usually a professional) and an average of 4 to 10 Members, the majority of whom are mothers.
- . . . The meetings are described as being group-discussion oriented, with the Chapter Chairperson acting as a group leader and the Sponsor as a resource person and an important source of support for the Chairperson.
- . . . Anonymity is maintained for those who desire it. However, a large percentage of P.A. Members who were interviewed indicate that they are very open about their membership.
- . . . The meetings are described as being informal, supportive and positive -- a place where the Members can feel free to express feelings and to experience the caring and concern of the group. Learning to feel better about oneself as a person and to stop abusive behavior are primary goals. The meetings are also educational in that alternative ways for dealing with child and family problems are discussed and encouraged.



- . . . Overall, 75% of the Chapter leaders are women, with 95% of the Chairpersons and 65% of the Sponsors being women.
- . . . Forty-one percent of Chapter Sponsors report their profession as social worker, with psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors making up another approximately 25%.
- . . . Eighty percent of the Chapter Sponsors have had previous experience in leading groups with 71% having had more than one year of such experience.
- . . . Seventy-two percent of the Chairpersons and 56% of the Sponsors reported that they did not use any one specific type of therapy or group techniques. Several listed general approaches such as "eclectic", "empathic listening skills" and so forth. Among those specifying a particular approach, Transactional Analysis (T.A.) was most popular with Reality Therapy second.
- . . . The mean drop out rate for P.A. as estimated by Chapter leaders is 23%.
- . . . The primary motivations of Chairpersons and Sponsors as indicated through interviews were: need to help others or perform worthwhile work, professional growth, avoiding the bureaucracy associated with other forms of treatment, and a way of working through some of one's own problems.
- . . . The self-help treatment concept was highly praised by Chapter Sponsors and Chairpersons. Representative comments were:

"I don't think traditional treatment modalities or state operations are meeting the needs of parents. . . maybe P.A. can."

"Few forms of therapeutic endeavor show such graphic, measurable results. The dramatic change in the parents is very gratifying."

"I felt that P.A. offered a far more effective approach to families with child abuse and neglect problems than the use of traditional social work techniques."
- . . . Chapter leaders were asked whether they refer their Members to other community agencies and 93% said they did so. Seventy-seven percent of the polled Chapter leaders stated that they make referrals for counseling or therapy. Other referrals were to health, welfare, child care and vocational agencies. This high level of referrals suggests that self-help treatment

programs such as P.A. can be important channels for directing individuals into needed additional forms of psychotherapy and other helping services.

- . . . Ninety-five percent of the Chapter leaders who were questioned indicated that their Chapters also receive referrals from other community agencies. The lowest level of referrals comes from private physicians and hospitals and the highest from mental health or counseling agencies.
- . . . In spite of the fact that most Chapters do receive some referrals from community agencies, the majority report that one of their most important needs is more referrals from agencies. Other very frequently reported Chapter needs were publicity, crisis care, transportation, training for Chairpersons, babysitting and money. Less frequently reported but still very important were children's treatment groups and volunteer help.

REGIONAL COORDINATOR ROLE AND ACTIVITIES

The Regional Coordinator role was designed for the purposes of decentralizing the functions of the Parents Anonymous National Office, and of increasing as well as personalizing the delivery of technical assistance to local communities. Regional Coordinators were selected for each of the 10 U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare national regions.

- . . . The Regional Coordinators were trained by the Parents Anonymous National Office staff and consultants through workshops, on-the-job training, role-modeling, written materials, phone consultation and so forth.
- . . . In general their level of education was completion of high school and their ages ranged from 22 to 57. Very few had education or training specifically related to the role they were to occupy. Their qualifications were principally their experiences in P.A.
- . . . The duties of the Regional Coordinators included: (1) Educating the general public and professionals in their areas about child abuse and about the P.A. self-help treatment concept (2) Helping to build membership in already established P.A. Chapters (3) Helping to establish new P.A. Chapters in their regions (4) Training and consulting to Chapter Chairpersons and Sponsors (5) Helping to establish Regional Advisory Councils for Parents Anonymous and (6) Helping to develop local community, statewide, and regional financial support for P.A. The Regional Coordinators considered the last two mentioned job objectives as the most difficult to accomplish.



. . . In the opinion of the evaluators the Regional Coordinators generally performed at a very high level as shown by their accomplishments which are documented throughout the entire evaluation report. The difficulties of the role were tremendous in that the job was a multi-faceted one, demanding initiative and independent, decision making at a high level.

OVERALL PROGRAM IMPACT

The overall impact of the Parents Anonymous program in terms of the number of people reached can be estimated by looking at the various types of program contacts and the number of people or agencies involved. Table B below illustrates this impact.

PROGRAM IMPACT	
TYPE OF CONTACT	NUMBER
	Year 2 - 1975-1976
Persons attending meetings during technical assistance visits	29,754
Number of people at public meetings conducted in home communities of Regional Coordinators	12,032
Individuals contacted during technical assistance visits	2,013
Agencies contacted during technical assistance visits	750
Persons on Frontiers Newsletter mailing list	17,516
Distribution of Public Information Parent Pamphlet	194,586
Distribution of Parents Anonymous Parent Pamphlet	95,993
Estimated total number of P.A. Members (average of 7.6 per Chapter for 519 Chapters)	3,944
National Office written replies to inquiries received	12,500
Number of phone calls responded to on National Office WATTS line	5,000
Number of persons attending National Conference on Child Abuse	260
TOTAL	374,348

TABLE B



PROGRAM VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH CHAPTER FORMATION

An examination of some of the program variables which may be related to the rate of Chapter formation is provided in the following table:

VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH CHAPTER FORMATION			
YEAR 2			
NUMBER OF NEW CHAPTERS	REGION	NUMBER OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VISITS	DISTRIBUTION OF WRITTEN MATERIALS
49	5	63	73,310
30	9	149	116,508
20	10	46	17,485
16	4	26	48,913
12	1	14	14,590
12	2	8	28,815
9	7	72	22,865
8	3	8	33,069
7	8	8	15,223
7	6	43	16,760
1	Canada	2	460

TABLE C

An examination of Table C will show that, in general, there is a positive correlation between P.A. program effort in a community and the establishment of new Chapters. There are some notable discrepancies. Forty-three technical assistance visits were made in Region 6 and yet only seven new Chapters were started during Year 2. However, there were problems in that this region was without a Regional Coordinator for a period of time, so that follow-up support for the visits was lacking. In addition the population in this region is relatively spread out rather than concentrated in urban centers, making communication something of a problem. In Region 7 there were 72 technical assistance visits and yet only nine new Chapters were formed during Year 2. This region includes the states of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska and is rather sparsely populated, again with few large urban centers.



Generally, the evidence is clear that the P.A. approach is working effectively. The technical assistance which has been provided to communities across the nation in the form of visits to communities by National Office staff, sponsoring of public meetings, wide use of media, Regional Coordinator services, and materials dissemination has been extremely effective as evidenced by the establishment of large numbers of functioning P.A. Chapters throughout the nation.

EFFECTS ON PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

In addition to the documentation of program objectives and the analysis of program strategies, the evaluation study included an extensive assessment of the overall effects of membership in Parents Anonymous and the satisfaction of Members, Chairpersons and Sponsors with the P.A. program. These variables were assessed by means of (1) In-depth personal interviews with a sample of 39 P.A. Members and 20 Chairpersons and Sponsors from several geographically diverse communities, (2) A written questionnaire for Chapter Sponsors and Chairpersons which was completed by 188 individuals from 164 different P.A. Chapters and (3) A written questionnaire for P.A. Members entitled Parents Anonymous: Your Personal Profile which was completed by 613 Members from 125 different P.A. Chapters throughout the United States and Canada. The Personal Profile Questionnaire was designed to obtain the following information about P.A. Members:

- . . . Demographic and descriptive characteristics
- . . . Knowledge about child development and parenting
- . . . Attitudes about oneself, about children and about parenting
- . . . Parenting behavior, especially child abuse patterns
- . . . Use of community resources and their frequency of social contacts
- . . . Opinions about the Parents Anonymous program and about child abuse issues

A time series evaluation design was utilized to assess the effects of the P.A. program upon its Members. Through the time series design it was possible to determine if significant program effects occurred as a function of length of time in the program. Details regarding the evaluation design and statistical procedures used are provided in the body of the evaluation report in the section entitled Evaluation Methodology. An abbreviated summary of the findings of the impact study is presented here.

THE P.A. PROFILE

Ages of P.A. Members responding to the questionnaire ranged from 18 to 60 and the mean age was 29.3 years. A large majority of P.A. Members are females, but 17% of the sample responding to the questionnaire were males. Educational levels were relatively high with the average for the group being completion of high school. Twenty-six percent of the sample reported education beyond the high school level and 4% reported education beyond college graduation.

The majority (65%) of the questionnaire respondents were married and living with their spouses. People from a broad range of vocations and income levels are Members of P.A. Forty-seven percent reported incomes under \$10,000; 38% reported a \$10,000 to \$20,000 income, and 6% reported over \$20,000. Interesting also was the fact that 13% hold professional level jobs.

Ethnic minority group representation is apparently fairly low (10%) compared to 69% white or Anglo Members. Since 20% of the respondents failed to answer the question about ethnic background, we can only speculate as to whether the 20% of non-respondents was or was not of minority ethnic group background.

Average length of membership was 7.9 months for those responding to the questionnaire and 16.7 months for the Members who were interviewed.

Other significant findings about P.A. Members were:

- . . . Seven percent of the respondents were attending P.A. because of being ordered to do so by the court.
- . . . Twenty-one percent reported that they have had a child or children removed from their homes by court order.
- . . . Among those Members who were interviewed, 58% reported that at least one of their children had some type of handicap or special problem and the problem mentioned most frequently was hyperactivity. This finding supports the hypothesis of Kempe and Helfer (1972) that characteristics of the child (whether "real" or as perceived by the parent) have an important influence upon the occurrence of abusive behavior by the parent.
- . . . Seventy-five percent of the respondents reported that they had experienced abuse during their own childhoods. Verbal and emotional abuse were reported more frequently than was physical abuse, and 17% of the group reported sexual abuse. When asked about which abuse problems during their childhoods was most serious, emotional neglect and emotional abuse were mentioned most frequently.
- . . . Abuse problem of P.A. Members toward their own children tended to be highest in the area of verbal abuse (77% reported this form of abuse). Only 54% reported physical abuse toward their children, and only 23% reported physical abuse as their most serious abuse problem.
- . . . Forty-three percent reported verbal abuse as their most serious abuse problem toward their children, with 26% reporting either emotional abuse or emotional neglect as the most serious problem.

- . . . In general, abuse patterns were fairly similar for the different income levels. The only statistically significant differences were: (1) A higher percentage of both high and low income groups reported emotional abuse and emotional neglect toward their children than did middle income persons and (2) More high income persons reported verbal abuse toward their children than did middle or low income persons.
- . . . Ninety-two percent of the interviewees reported that one child was the focus of their abuse, often the child who was most like themselves or who had special problems.

CHANGES IN THE ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR PATTERNS OF P.A. MEMBERS

Obviously a primary goal of any intervention program for individuals with abuse problems is to change their abusive behavior. Members were, therefore, questioned about their current and past frequency of physical and verbal abuse toward their children, and the findings can be summarized as follows:

- . . . A statistically significant decrease in frequency of physical abuse immediately after joining P.A. was found for the entire group of questionnaire respondents. For example, 19% of the group reported that they physically abused their children "Almost Every Day" before joining P.A. whereas only 1% reported this frequency of abuse after joining. The mean frequency of physical abuse for persons who had been in the program only one month dropped to "Almost Never" or "Once a Month or Less".
- . . . The same immediate decrease was found in regard to the frequency of verbal abuse. However, the frequency of verbal abuse was generally higher than for physical abuse, both before and after joining P.A. Also, the frequency of verbal abuse continued to decline with length of time in the program.

In summary, these findings indicate that P.A. Members report a decrease in both their verbal and physical abuse toward their children immediately after joining P.A.



CHANGES IN SELF-ESTEEM OF P.A. MEMBERS

A major goal of the Parents Anonymous treatment program is to help its participants increase their self-esteem. In order to measure program effectiveness in this area, P.A. Members were asked to indicate the frequency with which they experience various feelings, both positive and negative about themselves. A total score was thus obtained for each Member with a higher score representing more positive feelings about self. A regression analysis was then performed to determine if scores on the self-esteem measure were higher as a function of length of time in the program.

- . . . The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem scores and months in the program. This finding demonstrates that P.A. Members report increasingly positive feelings about themselves as they remain in P.A. for longer periods of time.
- . . . Additional analysis indicated that there were no differential program effects for persons of different socioeconomic backgrounds or between males and females. In other words, increases in self-esteem occurred for both male and female program participants and for those of all income levels.

CHANGES IN P.A. MEMBERS' SOCIAL INTERACTION PATTERNS

Social isolation and reluctance to seek help have been among the psychological characteristics often reported for child abusing parents. Therefore, another of the major goals of the Parents Anonymous treatment program has been to help reduce the social isolation patterns of its Members. Six items on the evaluation questionnaire were designed to assess this variable. Responses on the six items were added together in order to obtain an overall score for social contacts.

Again regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between time in the program and frequency of social contacts. A statistically significant trend toward increased social contacts with length of time in the program was found. This finding demonstrates that participation in P.A. tends to reduce the social isolation patterns of its' Members.

CHANGES IN P.A. MEMBERS' FEELINGS ABOUT CHILDREN AND PARENTHOOD

Negative attitudes toward and dissatisfaction with their children have frequently been mentioned in the literature concerning child abusing parents. In order to measure this variable 15 items were included on the evaluation questionnaire to assess the extent of Members' positive feelings about their children and about parenthood.

No significant relationships were found between scores on this measure and length of time in the program. For example, mean scores for those who had been in the program for one month did not differ from those who had been in the program 19 months or longer (47.4 vs. 47.5). Thus, no program effect was found relative to feelings about children and parenthood. However, the mean score for even new P.A. Members responding to this questionnaire was 47 out of a total possible of 60. This score is a relatively high one in that it represents a majority of the answers to the questions being on the positive side. Thus, P.A. Members generally may not have the negative attitudes relative to children and parenthood usually attributed to child abusing parents.

CHANGES IN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILD BEHAVIOR AND DEVELOPMENT

Child abusing parents have been frequently reported as having unrealistically high expectations for their children relative to the children's actual development levels. An eleven item scale on the evaluation questionnaire was used to assess the P.A. Members' knowledge of child development, based upon the hypothesis that lack of such knowledge may contribute to unrealistic demands and expectations which parents may have for their children.

In order to assess change in this dimension as a function of membership in P.A., mean scores among the various time categories of membership were compared using regression (trend) analysis. A statistically significant trend was found in the direction of more positive scores over time thus demonstrating a significant program effect. These findings indicate that the Parents Anonymous program tends to increase the participants' knowledge of child development, and helps them to acquire more realistic and appropriate expectations regarding their children's behavior.

P.A. MEMBERS EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

In general, the Members expressed high levels of satisfaction with their participation in Parents Anonymous and this "client satisfaction" tended to increase significantly with length of time in the program as shown by regression analysis. For example:

- . . . Of those Members who had been in the program one month, 42% reported "*A great deal of benefit*" while 87% of those who had been in the program longer than 18 months reported "*A great deal of benefit*".

In regard to perceived improvement in their child abuse problem, P.A. Members also reported a great deal of satisfaction.

- . . . Of those P.A. Members who had been in the program one month, 23% reported "*A great deal of improvement*" in their ability to handle their child abuse problem, while of those who had been in the program 18 months or longer, 76% reported "*A great deal of improvement*".

P.A. Members were also asked about other specific benefits which they felt they had obtained as a result of being in P.A. Chi-Square analysis and regression analysis were performed to determine if perceived benefits were greater as a function of length of time in the P.A. program. Out of nine possible benefits, the statistical analyses showed a definite trend for eight of these benefits to be reported more frequently by people who had been in the program longer periods of time, thus demonstrating another program effect. For example:

- . . . "*More positive feelings about myself*" was reported by 59% of the people who had been in the program one month or less compared to 90% of those who had been in the program longer than 18 months.
- . . . "*Better ability to handle stress*" was reported by 47% of those in the program one month or less compared to 82% of those in the program longer than 18 months.
- . . . "*Better understanding of children's needs*" was reported by 55% of those in the program one month or less and 75% of those in the program longer than 18 months.

Other specific benefits showing similar statistically significant trends over time were "*More positive feelings about my children*," "*Better ability to get along with other people*", "*Increase in use of community resources*", "*Decrease in frequency of abuse*", and "*Decrease in severity of abuse*".

P.A. MEMBERS' VIEWS OF THE CHAPTER MEETINGS

In-depth interviews of P.A. Chapter Members revealed that the two most important ways in which the Chapter meetings helped them came from the realization that other people had the same problems and from the expressions of care, concern and acceptance by the group.

Other frequently mentioned characteristics of the Chapter meetings were the positive group atmosphere, the freedom to express oneself, the educational aspects, the support and guidance of the Sponsor and last but not least important -- the basis of self-help -- that in helping others one helps oneself.

Representative comments were:

"I know I can go someplace where I will not be condemned -- where people will understand and sympathize".

"They accepted me for just what I was -- good or bad. They did not tear me down for doing things wrong but tried to build up the good I did".

CHAPTER LEADERS EVALUATE THE PROGRAM

Chapter Chairpersons and Chapter Sponsors were also asked to evaluate the effects of the P.A. program on the Members. They judged that a large majority of people who join P.A. are benefited by the program. Sixty-three percent of the Chairpersons who were polled and 55% of the Sponsors stated that "Almost all" benefit, while another 22% of Chairpersons and 24% of Sponsors judged that at least three-fourths of the Members benefit. Specific changes in P.A. Members as they participate in the program are noticed by the Chapter leaders, and are listed here in the order of frequency with which they were mentioned:

- . . . Speak more positively about themselves
- . . . Become more willing to talk about their child abuse problems
- . . . Speak more positively about their children
- . . . Socialize more with other Members
- . . . Improve their appearance

Strengths of P.A. in the opinion of Chapter leaders, are the nonjudgemental atmosphere of the group; the understanding, support, trust and encouragement given to the Members by one another; the opportunity to get help anonymously; the assistance given to Members in wading through agency and court systems, and in obtaining help from other community resources; and the fact that one can help others with similar problems.

Weaknesses were perceived by the Chapter leaders as being both those applicable to most intervention programs and those peculiar to P.A. Among the former were the need of the Members for additional help, the difficulty of helping Members who don't attend regularly, Members expecting too much too soon, and as one Sponsor put it, *"All the usual problems of therapy, the difficulty of changing"*. Problems more specific to P.A. include the following: Many Chapters report difficulties in helping the Member who is a sexual abuser, particularly so when other Members have histories of having been the victims of sexual abuse. Also, more parent training in child rearing techniques and more direct help for the children are needed for persons with abuse problems. Difficulties in obtaining strong committed leaders were also reported.



CHILD ABUSE ISSUES AS VIEWED BY P.A. MEMBERS AND LEADERS

MANDATORY REPORTING LAWS AND CENTRAL REGISTRIES

Among the P.A. Member interviewees, only 20% were definitely in favor of a Central Registry for child abusers; 49% were opposed and 31% were ambivalent or had no opinion. Concerns were mainly regarding the stigma and the possible punitive use of such a system.

A much larger percentage of P.A. Member interviewees were in favor of mandatory reporting laws than they were for Central Registries (49% vs. 20%). Mandatory reporting was also generally favored by the Chapter Chairperson and Sponsor interviewees. Both Chapter leaders and Members however, felt that mandatory reporting was far from being the whole solution. Each case, they argued, must be assessed individually; care must be given to safeguard children and, in addition, help must be given to the parent. Once a parent is a P.A. Member, the issue of reporting arises infrequently. Only 10% of P.A. leaders questioned have found it necessary to report Members to child protective service agencies.

P.A. MEMBERS TALK ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

On the written evaluation questionnaire, the following question was asked: "If you could say one thing to the whole world about child abuse right now, what would you say?" Some representative comments were:

"I hate child abuse - but as an abuser, I hate the way society looks upon us. We are human and want and need help. P.A. helps stop the cycle of abuse".

"Oh God, forgive us and help us".

"ATTENTION ALL PEOPLE WITH CHILD ABUSE PROBLEMS: You are not psychotic or nuts. You learned to act the way you are acting and you have a lot of angry feelings you need to let somebody hear. You need to pound your fists on a P.A. table. Come to P.A. and become somebody to yourself".

"If you know of an abusive mother, love her, just love her. Give her help with her heavy load and break her lonely isolation. People need people; love alone heals".

"Don't take our children away and punish us. HELP US!"

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A high level of effectiveness of the Parents Anonymous Self-Help for Child Abusing Parents program has been demonstrated by the documented changes in behavior, attitudes and knowledge of its' program participants and by the expressions of "client satisfaction". A program with such demonstrated effects and which deals with a current social problem of such magnitude and concern as child abuse deserves to be continued and, hopefully, the results of this evaluation will help to ensure this continuation.
2. The program strategies used by the Parents Anonymous project have been effective in accomplishing the major goal -- that of developing new P.A. Chapters and maintaining existing Chapters. However, several suggestions for possible changes or improvements have emerged as a result of the evaluation:
 - . . . Development of materials and techniques for helping P.A. Chapters deal with sexual abuse problems more effectively.
 - . . . Possible incorporation of parent training in positive child rearing techniques into the overall program format of P.A.
 - . . . Provision of direct services for children of P.A. parents in conjunction and coordination with the Chapter services to the parents. The finding that many children of abusive parents may have behavioral problems such as hyperactivity, which may tend to elicit abuse, is very significant and corroborates the need for children's treatment services. Hyperactive children and children with other types of learning disabilities and emotional handicaps may thus be "at risk" for possible parental abuse.
 - . . . More emphasis in publicity and education about child abuse upon the non-physical types of abuse such as verbal and emotional, and the fact that treatment programs such as P.A. are as concerned with these non-physical forms of abuse as they are with the "battering" type of abuse. Verbal and emotional abuse are probably much more pervasive problems in our society than is harsh physical abuse.
 - . . . More training and support services for the Regional Coordinators who have such a tremendously responsible and difficult role to fill.

- . . . The relatively low rate of referrals from physicians and hospitals suggests that these groups need more information about the Parents Anonymous program and its positive effects upon abusing parents. Referral at a time of crisis, such as hospitalization or office treatment of a child, would perhaps be more readily accepted by the parent than at other times and would be especially valuable in offering the parent immediate support and therapy.
- . . . Chapter leaders may need more guidance in several areas -- especially in dealing with sexual abusers and with parents who continue abusive behavior. Both training and written materials have been suggested as ways of providing this guidance.
- . . . Motivating more professionals to volunteer as Chapter Sponsors might be accomplished by providing professional groups with material from this evaluation report, particularly the satisfactions reported by P.A. Chapter Sponsors.
- . . . More mental health agencies should be added to the Frontiers mailing list.
- . . . Mental health professionals in general should be educated about child abuse, especially the non-physical types, and should receive some training in the identification of potential child abusers. Perhaps this type of training and consultation could be accomplished by groups such as Parents Anonymous and other existing child abuse treatment programs.
- . . . State legislatures should be provided with information about effective treatment programs for child abuse problems.

END