

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/112556>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

Assessing the impact of a paid children, youth or family worker on
Anglican congregations in England

Leslie J. Francis*

University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

David Howell

Christian Youth Work Consortium, Swindon, UK

Phoebe Hill

King's College, London, UK

Ursula McKenna

University of Warwick, UK

Author note:

*Corresponding author:

Leslie J. Francis

Warwick Religions & Education Research Unit

Centre for Education Studies

The University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)24 7652 2539

Fax: +44 (0)24 7657 2638

Email: leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

Abstract

Drawing on the survey conducted by Christian Research and commissioned by the Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope, this study examined the impact of a paid children, youth or family worker on the weekly attendance of 5- to 18-year-olds within 786 Church of England churches with adult attendance ranging from 20 to 250. Nearly a third of these churches had a paid children, youth or family worker (N = 259). The data demonstrated that on average the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker added seven young people between the ages of 5 and 18 years to the total weekly Sunday attendance, after controlling for the weekly adult attendance figures.

Keywords: youth workers, children's workers, family workers, church attendance, Church of England

Introduction

Professionalised youth ministry gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the reported decline in the numbers of young people attending church (see Brierley 1991, 1999, 2005). The early 1990s saw the launch of *Youthwork* magazine, a specialist publication for church-based youth workers, along with tailor-made courses at training colleges dedicated to the youth ministry profession (and later children's work profession) and an increase in employed youth and children's work posts in churches. *Youth A Part*, the result of a gathering held by the Anglican Church in 1996, made the following statement:

The vision is for a Church which takes young people seriously. It is a Church where young people fully and actively participate at every level. It is a Church which is built on good relationships, where young people particularly are concerned, not only with each other but with those inside and outside the Church. It is a Church where there is a good theological understanding of why and how it goes about its work with young people. It is a Church which recognises that work of this quality needs resources and has the faith and courage to commit significant resources to the young people in the Church. (Church of England, 1996, p. 161)

Writing a decade later, Brierley (2005) assessed the extent to which the commitment of the Churches more widely to work among children and young people was being effected and effective. He made two observations. The first observation was that there was an encouraging increase in the number of children's workers (as well as youth workers) employed by churches, particularly in the early 2000s, with roughly a third of churches having one or the other. The second observation was that, although by 2005 nearly half of churches (49%) had no one attending between the ages of 11 and 14, and over half (59%) had no one attending between the ages of 15 and 19 (Brierley, 2005, p. 118), this represented a

smaller than expected decline in numbers of young people attending church. In a subsequent publication, *Have youth workers worked?*, Brierley (2011) concluded that:

The number of youth who left the church in the 1990s was far fewer than would have been expected from the 1980s data, suggesting that youth workers, who largely began working in churches in the 1990s, were making a real impact in their churches and enabling more young people to stay on in church life than might have been the case...

Youth workers work! (Brierley, 2011, p. 2)

Keeping track of the numbers of children, youth or family workers engaged in churches is not easy. It was estimated by Collins-Mayo *et al.* (2010, p. 23) that there were roughly 8000 employed church youth workers in the UK in 2010. A later report from the Archbishops' Council in 2014 (see Collins-Mayo, 2016, p. 34) stated that there were 2,000 youth workers employed by Anglican Churches, while in 2016 there were reported to be 2,670 employed children's and/or youth workers in Anglican Churches (Howell, 2016). What is clearer, however, is that recent years have seen a 25% drop in new recruits to youth work/ministry training programmes (Howell, 2018, p. 25). The decline has resulted in the closure or reorganisation of several key institutions (International Christian College, Glasgow; Oasis College, London; Oxford Centre for Youth Ministry), and three large youth ministry conferences coming to an end (The Youth Work Summit, The Youthwork Conference, and the Soulnet retreat). These elements may tell a different story about the future of professional youth ministry. *Premier Children's Work* (which launched in 2012) merged with *Premier Youthwork* with the January 2017 edition (now called *Premier Youth and Children's Work*), perhaps reflecting the increasingly merged roles required by churches (i.e. youth, children's and families workers).

Nonetheless, at an institutional level, there seems to be a continued recognition of the need to resource the Church's work with children and young people. In *From Anecdote to*

Evidence, the report commissioned by the Church of England (2014), there was found to be a correlation between growing churches and those with active groups for children and young people; churches with a high ratio of children and young people to adults were more likely to grow. The report also highlighted the significance of employing someone to work with children and young people: 'Those who employ a youth worker are only half as likely to be declining as those who employ another type of paid worker' (p. 23). In another paper from the Growth Research Programme, Voas and Watt (2014) acknowledge the importance of parents' religiosity on their children's faith, but also highlight a generational 'half-life' of institutional religion, with church-attending parents having only a 50/50 chance of passing on faith to their children. The authors urge churches to prioritise youth and children's work: 'Retaining children/youth is critical; it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders' (p. 2).

In response to the finding highlighted by the report *From Anecdote to Evidence* (Church of England, 2014) that over half of churches had fewer than five young people in them, the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group made the following recommendation to Synod:

That the Synod encourage parishes and dioceses to invest in more paid children and youth work posts. The 'Anecdote to Evidence' report shows that churches that employ children and youth posts increase the engagement with children and young people throughout the week and as a result many have come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. These posts should not be seen as stepping stones to other forms of ministry but recognised as a specialist ministry. (Church of England, 2016a, p. 12)

The need for youth ministry to be respected as a specialised profession is highlighted elsewhere, as employed workers do not always feel valued by their congregations and in their profession and struggle from a lack of professional development, finances, good line

management structures and spiritual and emotional support (Griffiths, 2013, p. 20). Similarly, the report *Rooted in the Church* (Church of England, 2016b, p. 3) states that: ‘Youth workers are the ideal ‘bridge people’, and yet their work is often not sufficiently resourced or supported’. One of the report’s ‘key conclusions’ was that ‘churches need to do more to support their youth workers and leaders’. The importance of youth workers for youth engagement with Christianity is highlighted elsewhere through the finding that 67% of young Anglicans identified youth workers as the people who helped them to think about their religious beliefs (Collins-Mayo, 2016, pp. 33-34).

There are, however, question marks around whether or not the ‘professionalisation’ of youth work, and increasingly children’s work, has been a positive development for the Church. Some would argue that as youth ministry became increasingly ‘outsourced’ to professional workers, the nature of work shifted from being primarily volunteer-driven to a specialised ministry for the expert few (see Allan, 2015). Others argue that an ageing demographic within the churches has meant a decline in volunteers to work with the children and young people (Howell, 2018, p. 26; Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope, 2016, p. 35). The findings of the survey reported in *Losing Heart* (Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope, 2016) indicated that 45% of churches identified a ‘leader’ or ‘worker’ as the greatest need for their youth and/or children’s work, with a third of those mentioning the need for an ‘employed’ worker specifically.

At the same time, there has been increasing emphasis in more recent years on the role of the wider church (Dean, 2010), and on the importance of family (Mark, 2016) in addition to or, in some cases, prioritised over and above, the role of youth and/or children’s work in children and youth faith formation. These shifts in emphasis once again bring into focus the question: is an employed worker really the answer? Does an employed worker make a tangible difference to the youth and children’s work in a church?

Research question

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to draw on the unique data collected by Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope (2016) to test whether an employed children, youth or family worker makes a statistically significant impact on the total attendance of children and young people. The research question has been carefully shaped to be both meaningful and realistic within the potential and limitations of the data available from this project. In view of the nature of the available data the research question focuses: on workers employed within the threefold category of children, youth and family; on the total weekly church attendance of young people between the ages of 5 and 18 years; and on the subgroup of congregations within the total survey that were defined as Anglican and within England. The decision to focus exclusively on Anglican congregations was for two reasons: this was by far the single largest group within the survey; and focusing on one group enabled clear comparisons to be made between congregations supporting a paid children, youth or family worker and congregations not doing so.

Method

Procedure

The Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope commissioned Christian Research to survey 2054 churches across England, Scotland and Wales in Autumn 2015. The details of the survey are provided in the report *Losing Heart: How churches have lost confidence in their work with children and young people* (Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope, 2016). The present paper undertook secondary analysis of these data to explore the specific research question concerning the effects of employing children, youth and family workers.

Instrument

The analysis drew on the following variables collected in the survey: the total adult weekly church attendance, the total weekly church attendance of young people between the ages of 5 and 18 years, and whether or not the church had a paid children, youth or family worker (irrespective of the number of hours worked).

Analysis

In order to focus the analysis, the present paper first selected the subset of churches that described themselves as Church of England and were located within England. Second, in order to model a normal distribution of church size within this group the long tail of 8% of churches reporting adult attendances between 251 and 1000 were excluded (8% of the total number of churches) and so were the churches reporting adult attendance below 19 (9% of the total number of churches). This subset of data included 786 churches with congregation size ranging from 20 to 250. Drawing on these churches the regression model took the total attendance of young people between 5 and 18 years of age as the dependent variable, and total adult attendance and the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker as the two independent variables entered in that fixed order. This model tests the extent to which the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker added additional predictive power, after controlling for variation in the adult church attendance, to the total attendance of young people between 5 and 18 years of age.

Results

- insert tables 1 and 2 about here -

Table 1 present the weekly attendance statistics both for adults and for young people between the ages of 5 and 18 years for the 786 Church of England churches in England included in the survey. One third of these churches has a paid children, youth or family worker (N = 259). Table 2 presents the correlations between adult attendance, young people attendance and the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker. These data show that

with growth in adult attendance there is greater likelihood of the church employing a children, youth or family worker, and that the number of young people attending is also highly correlated with the number of adults attending.

- insert table 3 about here -

Table 3 presents the regression model designed to test the extent to which the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker added to the number of 5- to 18-year-old weekly attenders, after controlling for variation in the number of adult attenders. In this model the presence of a paid children, youth or family worker was entered as a dummy variable (1= present, 0 = not present) as the second step (testing the increase in variance accounted for after taking adult attendance into account). The statistics demonstrate that there were significantly more young people attending church where there was a paid children, youth or family worker. The unstandardized regression coefficient (not shown in the table) indicates that on average the 259 churches that had a paid children, youth or family worker had seven more young people attending weekly compared with churches of comparable adult attendance that did not have a paid children, youth or family worker.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to draw on the unique data collected by Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope (2016) to test whether an employed children, youth or family worker makes a statistically significant impact on the total attendance of children and young people. The data suggest a positive answer to this question. On these data, the churches that paid a children, youth or family worker had seven more young people attending compared with churches of comparable adult attendance that did not have a paid children, youth or family worker. Strictly the generalisability of this finding is restricted by the nature of the sample on which the analyses were conducted: Church of England churches with adult attendance ranging from 20 to 250 individuals.

Inevitably there are other limitations associated with secondary analyses conducted on data not originally collected for this specific purpose. Future research building on the present study would wish to introduce into the regression model further relevant control variables, including factors like the church tradition to which the local Anglican congregation belongs (see Randall, 2005), the age and profile of the senior minister, and the social, ethnic and economic contexts within which the congregation is located. There would also be advantages in differentiating between children, youth and family workers and in concentrating on a larger number of churches with less variation in congregational size. Further research in this quantitative tradition, in terms of the replication and extension of the present project, would add to research-based practice in these specialised fields of ministry.

In spite of such limitations with the present study, it offers the best empirical evidence currently available to document the effectiveness of employing a paid children, youth, or family worker within Anglican congregations. The implications of this evidence deserve further investigation. On one account, adding contact with seven young people may not seem a great return on such investment. On another account, however, the impact may be wider than on these seven young people themselves and may also influence the commitment and participation of their wider families, or be a reflection of the existing involvement of their families. Alongside further quantitative research, there is also need for qualitative research, paying attention to the wider perceptions of young people, of their families, and of local congregations concerning the benefit brought by local churches employing children, youth and family workers.

References

- Allan, J. (2015). What we lost in the youth ministry revolution. In *Youth and Children's Work Magazine* edited by Phoebe Thompson.
<https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Youth-Work/Read/Youthwork-blog/What-we-lost-in-the-youth-ministry-revolution>:
- Brierley, P. (1991). *Christian England: Results of the 1989 English Church Census*. Bromley: MARC Europe.
- Brierley, P. (1999). *Religious trends 2000/2001, No.2*. London: HarperCollins Religious/Christian Research.
- Brierley, P. (2005). *Pulling out of the nose dive*. London: Christian Research.
- Brierley, P. (2011). Have youth workers worked? In P. Brierley (Ed.), *UK church statistics 2005-2015* (pp. 1-3). Tonbridge: Brierley Consultancy.
- Church of England (1996). *Youth apart: Young people and the Church*. Church of England, Board of Education.
- Church of England (2014). *From anecdote to evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013*. London: Church Commissioners for England.
- Church of England (2016a). *Report from the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group*. London: General Synod of the Church of England.
- Church of England (2016b). *Rooted in the Church: Summary report*. London: Church of England Education Office.
- Collins-Mayo, S. (2016). The meaning and inheritance of Anglican identity amongst young people. In A. Day (Ed.), *Contemporary issues in the worldwide Anglican communion: Powers and pieties* (pp. 21-37). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Collins-Mayo, S., Mayo, B., Nash, S., & Cocksworth, C. (2010). *The faith of Generation Y*. London: Church House Publishing.

- Dean, K. C. (2010). *Almost Christian: What the faith of our teenagers is telling the American church*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Griffiths, S. (2013). *Models for youth ministry: Learning from the life of Christ*. London: SPCK.
- Howell, D. (2016). *Report of the consultation: Christian youth work and ministry across the UK*. Swindon: Christian Youth Work Consortium.
<http://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=182924>.
- Howell, D. (2018). Youth work training. *Premier Youth and Children's Work*, February 2018, p. 28.
- Mark, O. (2016). *Passing on faith*. London: Theos.
- Randall, K. (2005). *Evangelicals etcetera: Conflict and conviction in the Church of England's parties*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Voas, D., & Watt, L. (2014). *Numerical change in church attendance: National, local and individual factors*. Report commissioned by the Church of England. Retrieved from http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org./uk/progress_findings_reports
- Youthscape Centre for Research and One Hope (2016). *Losing heart: How churches have lost confidence in the work with children and young people*. Luton: Youthscape.

Table 1

Weekly Attendance Statistics

	Mean	Median	SD	Range	
				Min	Max
Adults	85.4	70.0	54.0	20	250
5- to 18-years	21.4	15.0	20.3	0	145

N Churches = 786

Table 2

Correlation matrix

	Adult attendance	Paid Worker
Child attendance	.70***	.43***
Paid worker	.40***	

Table 3

Regression model on attendance of 5- to 18-year-olds

	r^2	Increase			B	SE	Beta	t	$p <$
		r^2	F	$p <$					
Constant					-1.395	.942			
Adult attendance	.49	.49	762.9	.001	.237	.010	.63	23.3	.001
Paid worker	.52	.03	43.3	.001	7.689	1.169	.18	6.6	.001

Note on author contributions:

Leslie designed the structure of the argument and of the data analysis. David and Phoebe originated the survey and data collection, and sourced the literature review. Ursula organised the data for analysis, undertook the analysis and coordinated the paper.