

Texas College Students Perceptions of Family Services

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Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to examine Texas college students’ perceptions about family services. Opinions that students develop regarding family services may influence their willingness to report or refer to appropriate services as professionals. Though there is little research over student perceptions, there is literature on parent perception of services their child receives. Murray-Labriola et al. (2015) found that after a child received family-centered services, parents viewed that particular service in a positive light. However, Staniforth, Deane, & Beddoe (2016) found that the media is the largest influence on the perceptions of social services by the public, and that media presentation of social services are strongly negative. This same study also found a positive correlation between education level and positive opinions of social services.

This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by examining the perceptions Texas college students have about different types of social services, as well as the experiences that they feel most affect those perceptions.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of various family services held by Texas college students?

RQ2: What are the experiences that Texas college students feel most affect those perceptions?

Procedures

Using word of mouth, social media, and email solicitation, 108 Texas college students who plan to enter “helping” fields such as education, healthcare, and social work were recruited. Of those 108 recruited, 76 participants completed the online, anonymous survey in its entirety.

The survey collected demographic information including personal and educational experiences to understand factors that may contribute to student’s familiarity with, likelihood to refer to, and perceptions of a selection of family services that are available across the state of Texas.

Participants

Table 1: Demographic Variables (n=108)

Variables	Valid Percent
Gender	
Male	9.4
Female	90.6
Religious Affiliation	
Christianity	66.0
Atheism	17.9
Other	16.0
Political Affiliation	
Democratic	44.3
Republican	22.6
Other	33.0
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	60.4
Hispanic	17.0
African American	3.8
Other	18.9

Note: More than half (56.2%) of participants came from one university

Major Findings

Chart 1: "How Familiar Are You With This Service?" (1= Not at all familiar, 6= Very familiar)

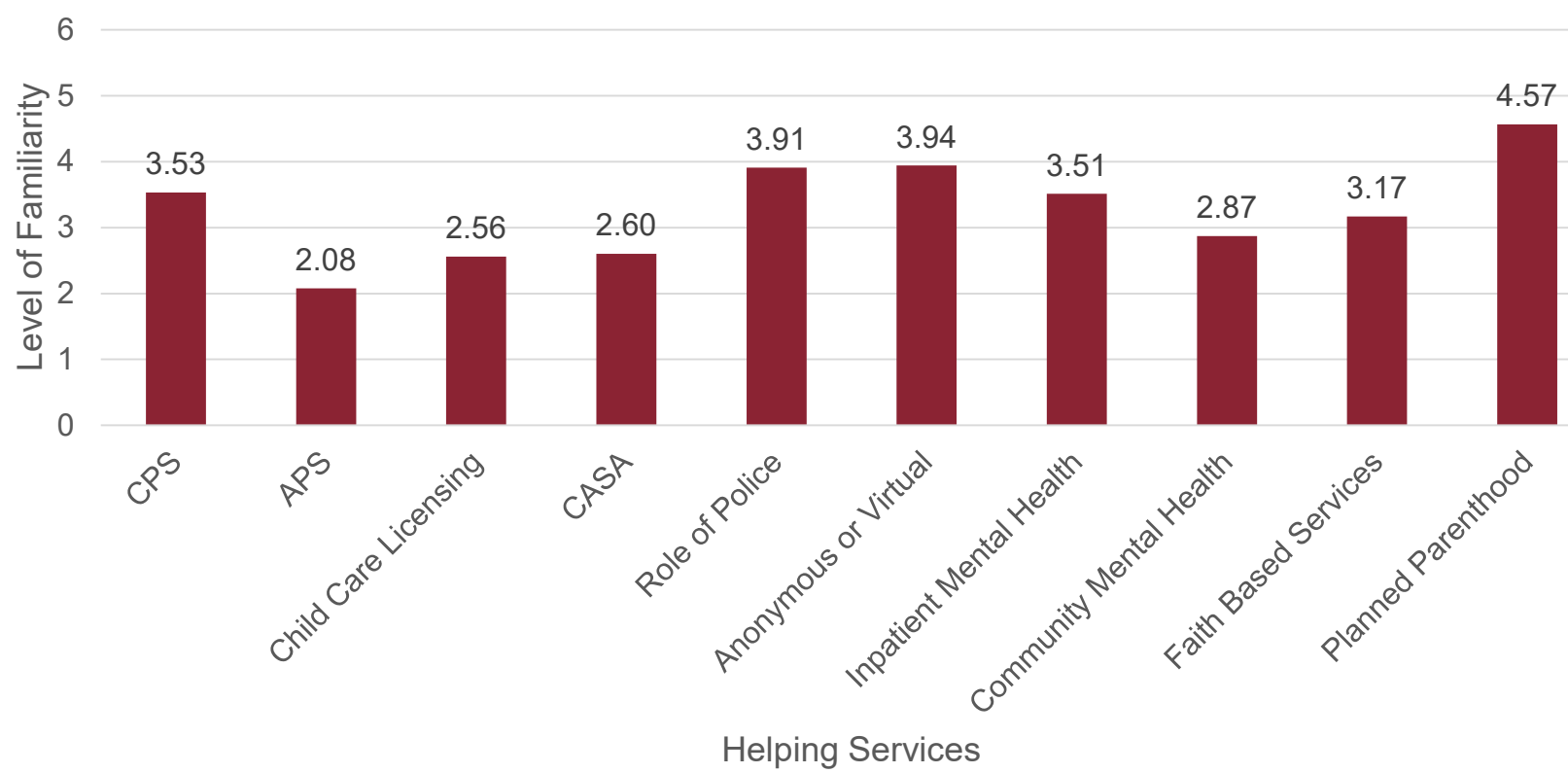


Chart 2: "How Do You Feel About The Mission of This Service?" (1= Very negative, 6= Very positive)

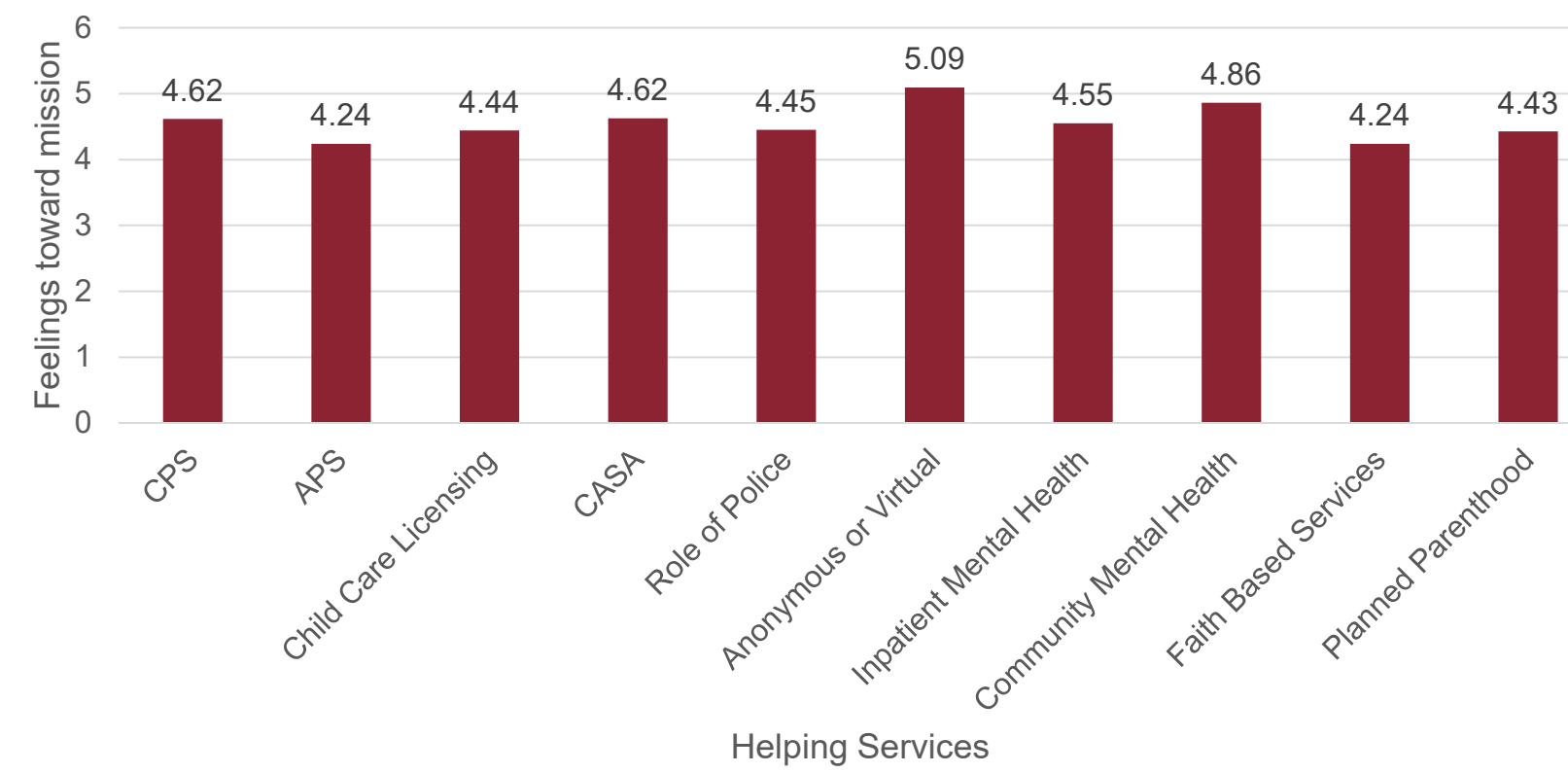


Chart 3: "How Effective Do You Feel This Service Is?" (1= Detrimentially ineffective, 6= Extremely effective)

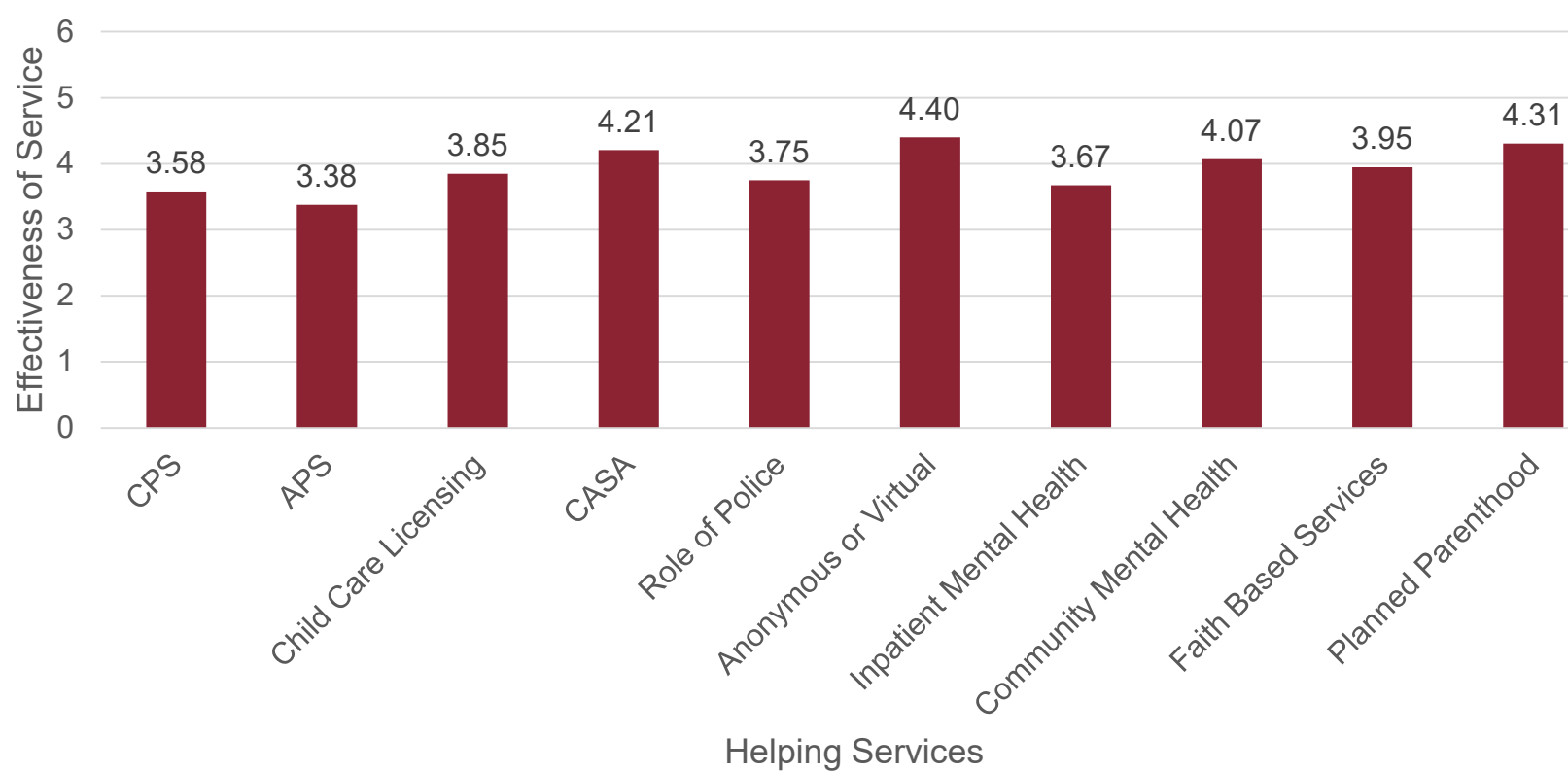
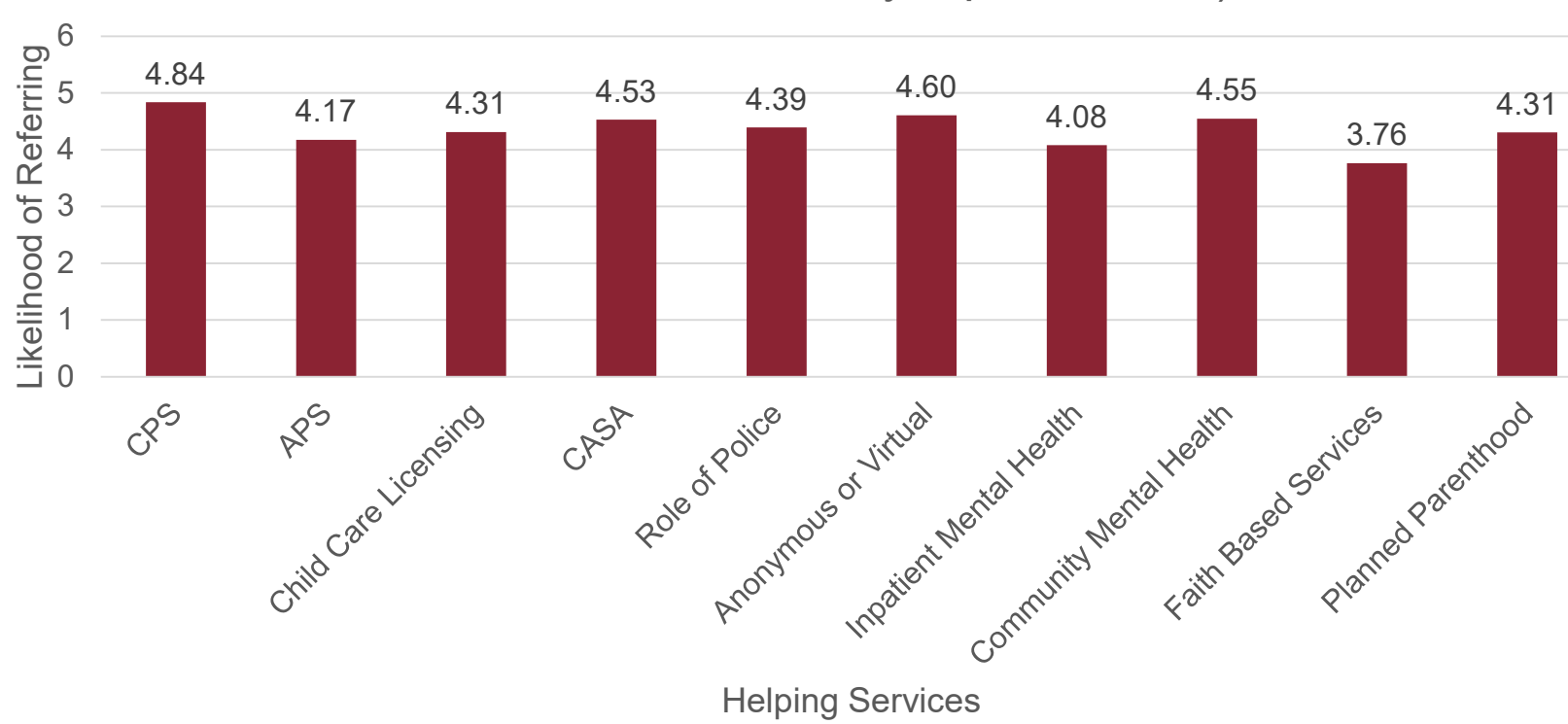
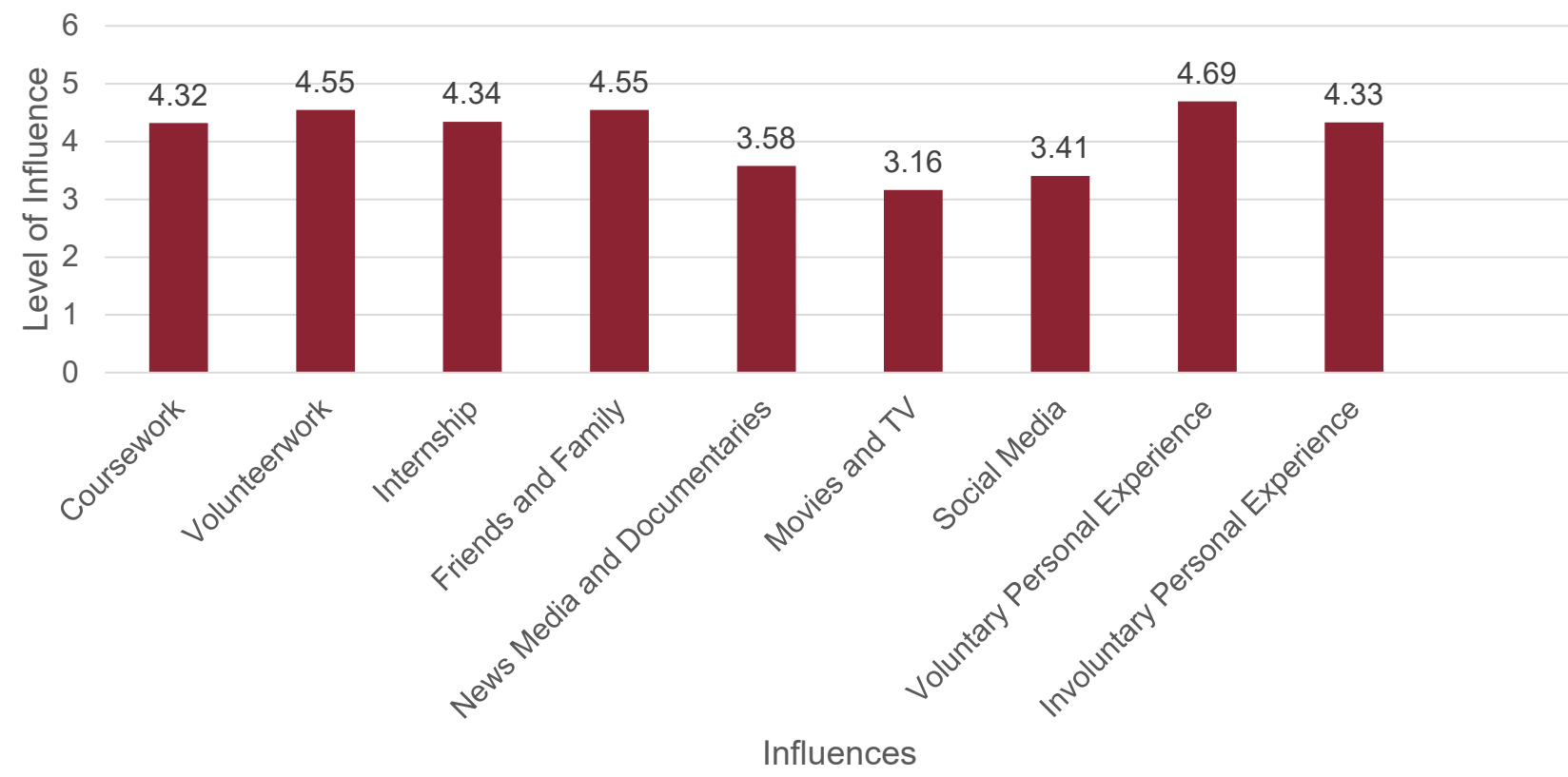


Chart 4: "How Likely Would You Be to Report or Refer to This Service if Needed (1= Definitely would not report or refer, 6= Would definitely report or refer)



Major Findings (cont.)

Chart 5: Self-Reported Major Influences on Perceptions of Services (1= Not influential at all, 6= Very influential)



Discussion

One discovery in our study was that students do not rate themselves to be very familiar with many important resources they may need to refer to as professionals. This lack of familiarity is despite participants rating educational experiences such as coursework and internships as strong influences on their opinions of the services. This suggests that further education could empower students to better understand and work cooperatively with these agencies as professionals. Furthermore, this lack of familiarity somewhat limits our study as student perceptions are based on a limited understanding of the services available.

While participants in this sample reported media as a common influence on perceptions, all of the other experiences were reported as influential with more frequency. In an effort to better understand student perceptions of services that are potentially polarizing based on one’s political or religious affiliation, a MANOVA was computed with political affiliation and religious affiliation as the independent variables, and three rated items on student perceptions of familiarity with, effectiveness of, and likelihood to refer to Planned Parenthood and faith-based services as the dependent variables. Statistically significant multivariate results were found for both political affiliation $F(12, 78) = 3.22, p = .001$; Wilk’s $\Lambda = .447, \eta^2 = .331$, and religious affiliation $F(12, 78) = 2.94, p = .002$; Wilk’s $\Lambda = .475, \eta^2 = .311$. An examination of between-subjects effects revealed a statistically significant difference in participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of Planned Parenthood’s services $F = 5.37, df = (2, 51), p = .008$, and likelihood to refer to Planned Parenthood $F = 9.51, df = (2, 51), p < .001$, based on political affiliation, but not for religious affiliation. Less surprisingly, a statistically significant difference was also found for these items in regard to faith-based services based on religious affiliation (effectiveness, $F = 11.65, df = (2, 51), p < .001$; likelihood to refer $F = 12.67, df = (2, 51), p < .001$.

Examinations of mean differences revealed that participants identifying with a Democratic party affiliation were more likely to rate Planned Parenthood as more familiar, effective, and were more likely to refer than participants identifying with other political parties. Mean differences also revealed that participants who identified as Christian were more likely to be familiar with, refer to, and rate as effective faith-based services than participants identifying as atheist or belonging to other religious affiliations.

When a test for group differences in regard to police services was computed, no significant group differences were found based on political or religious affiliation, nor ethnicity. No significant group differences were found in regard to the experiences that affected student perceptions either, although this finding, and those discussed previously, should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size, voluntary nature of participation, and the relatively homogenous nature of the sample.

Implications

It was not surprising to find that religious affiliation affected perceptions of and willingness to refer to faith-based services in this sample. What was surprising was the lack of significance in religious affiliation being associated with attitudes towards Planned Parenthood in this sample, while political affiliation was. This suggests that political affiliation may have influenced our participants willingness to refer to this particular service more so than religious beliefs. The literature suggests that young people are less engaged in religious practices (Dalessandro, 2015), while voter turnout among young people ages 18-29 in the state of Texas reached record highs in the 2018 midterm elections (Midterms, 2018). Future research should continue to study whether this phenomenon holds true with larger and more diverse populations, due to the potential implications for the likelihood a helping professional’s political leanings will influence the way he/she perceives a certain service and the likelihood that he/she will refer clients/patients to that service.

While this study was exploratory in nature, it does provide some interesting findings. Despite the small and homogenous sample, the results provide some avenues for future research and implications for practice. Future research should continue to investigate the perceptions emerging professionals have toward each of the services included in this study, and how these perceptions are formed within a larger and more representative sample.

References

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