CARING ABOUT CARE-GIVERS:

A STUDY OF CHILD CARE WORKERS IN CAPE TOWN

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OPSOMMING

Die kindersorgwerker, hoewel die primêre versorger, word tot 'n groot mate deur die meeste ondersoeke na kindersorg misken. Hierdie studie fokus op twaalf kindersorgwerkers in ses kinderhuise. Hulle motivering, take, die wyse waarop hulle die werk hanteer asook die probleme wat hulle ervaar is ondersoek.

Die bevindinge het dié van vorige navorsing bevestig, naamlik dat die kindersorgwerker aan baie stremminge onderworpe is — byvoorbeeld lang werksure, 'n lae kindersorgwerker tot kind verhouding, sowel as die uiteenlopende aard van die take waarvoor die werker verantwoordelik is. Die toewyding van die werkers, sowel as hulle vindingrykheid in die handering van hierdie spanninge het na vore gekom.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the available reseach on child care has focussed on the child, rather than on the person who is providing the care. However, an understanding of the stresses facing the staff person and the ways in which he or she copes with them, is critical for ensuring that that person delivers high-quality care and teaching to the child (Maslach and Pines 1977, 105).

The child care worker (CCW) as the person primarily responsible for the daily care and emotional nurturance of the child, may be seen as the most important and influential person in an institution (Maier, 1972; Whittaker, 1972, as quoted by Wilters, 1981). The CCWs are usually responsible for several children, many of whom may be emotionally deprived, have sustained contact with the children over a substantial time period and may be involved in a diversity of care-giving tasks (Mattingly 1977; Freudenberger 1977). All these factors have been linked to burn-out — a syndrome of emotional exhaustion — that may occur among those who spend a large proportion of their time working with other people (Pines and Maslach, 1980).

As psychiatric nurses, specialising in the field of child care, it seemed appropriate to focus on the CCW as a primary care giver. The aims of this study are thus to identify the CCWs, their reasons for entering and remaining in the field, the problems they may experience, and the actual activities they are involved in. In addition, both the stressfullness and manner of coping with these tasks are examined.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Nine children's homes were selected at random from the twenty-three such homes in the Peninsula.

The principals of three homes were reluctant to take part in the investigation, thus the six remaining homes were included. Each of the three researchers, all of whom are qualified psychiatric nurses, selected two children's homes. Prior to the investigation they visited these homes, explained the purpose of the study, and assured confidentiality. Each researcher was assigned two CCWs in each home (that is twelve in all) and times for visits were then arranged. Each researcher spent one full day (± 6 am to ± 8 pm) with each of the CCWs.

The number of children per home ranged from forty to eighty, and five homes involved long term placement. Four accommodated White children, while two cared for Coloured children.

Procedure

The investigation consisted of two parts:

- an open-ended questionnaire which elicited the following information: demographic characteristics of the CCWs, their reasons for entering and remaining in the field, as well as difficulties they may have experienced;
- an observation of the CCWs as they performed their daily activities.

For the purposes of analysis the observations were grouped into seven meaningful task areas, namely morning activities, meals with children, other duties with children, warm times with children, domestic duties, administration and private time.

RESULTS

The Child Care Workers

Identifying data

A description of the CCWs appears in table 1.

Half the CCWs were in the 20 to 29 year age group, with only three over the age of 40. Two thirds were women, and only four were married. Half had lower secondary school education and the other half had attended university.

Training and experience

Details of the CCWs training and experience in children's homes appears in table 2.

Only four of the CCWs had had previous experience in working in children's homes, and seven received in-service training in their respective

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Table 1 Identifying Data

AGE	20-29	30-39	40-49	50 +
	6	3	0	3
SEX	Male	Female		
	4	8		
MARITAL STATUS	Married	Single	Divorced	Widowed
	4	6	0	2
EDUCATION	Std. 6-8	Std. 9-10	University	
	6	0	6	

Table 2 Training and Experience

Previous experience	Yes	No			
	4	8			
Child care training	Technikon	In-service			None
	2	7			3
Years in present home	<1	1-2	2-5	5-10	10 +
	2	4	4	1	1

homes. By far the majority had been working in the present children's homes for between one to five years (one person had been in the home for about twenty years).

Five of the CCws indicated their intention to leave: two to further their education, one to another home, and two had decided to leave the field of child care altogether. All of these five had been in the home between one to five years, and four were university graduates.

Working conditions

Eight of the CCWs lived in their respective homes and most worked sixteen hour shifts (6 am to 10 pm) with varying degrees of time off duty (two to six hours). Only two had fewer than ten children in their care, with the mean number of children per CCW being 9,8. The age range of the children of four CCWs was 11/12 years (with ages ranging from 5 to 16 or 6 to 18). The age range of the other eight workers' children was 6/8 years (with actual ages ranging from 7 to 15 and 11 to 17).

Reasons for entering child care work

Each CCW was asked to name the one most important reason for entering the field of child care (see table 3) and, additionally any number of factors contributing to their continued stay in this field (see table 4).

The majority of workers entered the field due to their expressed love of children. This ties in with the major factor keeping them in this field of work *(like working with children)*. In addition, nine stayed on as they found the work rewarding. The finding that seven reported staff support as a major contributing factor to their continued stay is important.

Difficulties related to child care work

Problems related to child care work were examined in terms of three major areas: personal, work, factors related to children. Each worker was asked to state the five most serious difficulties in child care work. The results appear in table 5.

The most important difficulties related to personal issues were as follows: nine felt the hours were too long, seven that they had no privacy, and six spoke of the lack of social life. Guilt expressed by three CCWs at their inadequancy in dealing with the children may be related to the low CCW to child ratio.

Three CCWs expressed difficulty in terms of role confusion, that is being surrogate mother at the same time as being therapist. Although specific indications of the work being too strenuous were given, for example, the long hours, only two regarded this as a major difficulty.

Table 3 Reasons for entering child care

MAJOR REASON	N
Love for and interest in children	7
Offered a job	3
To gain experience in child care	1
Called by God	1

Table 4 Factors contributing to continued stay

MAJOR FACTORS	N
Like working with children	9
Work is rewarding	9
Staff is supportive	7
Like living in	4
Like working independently	2
Self growth	1
Experience for therapeutic work	1

Table 5 Difficulties in Child Care Work

A. PERSONAL	N
Hours too long	9
No Privacy	7
No social life/isolated	6
Guilt about children	3
Can only talk about the home	2
No recreation / time for self	2
Feels scapegoated	1
B. WORK	
Frustrated by role confusion	3
Work too strenuous	2
Too much responsibility	2
Poor salary	2
Not enough recognition	1
Routine frustrating	1
C. CHILDREN	
Too many children per worker	3
Children aggressive and destructive	3
Children show no concern/ responsibility	2
Children too institutionalised	1
Children too demanding	1
Children progress slowly	1

Table 6 Morning Activities

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Wake up children	11	11	2,9	1,7
Getting dressed/ toilette	10	18	2,9	1,6
Make beds/tidy room	10	13	2,6	1,6
See children off to school	9	26	2,7	1,1

Table 7 Meals with children

Activity	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Breakfast	11	20	2,1	1,3
Tea	8	36	1,5	1,75
Lunch	7	31	2	1,6
Supper	12	27	2,5	1,7

Three CCWs complained of the children's aggressive and destructive behaviour, and two stated that they were affected by the children's lack of concern and inability to take responsibility.

Observations of child care workers

The activities of the CCWs were divided into seven major task areas for example, domestic duties, mealtimes with children and warm times. Each of these areas examined the number of CCWs involved in the activity, as well as the number of hours spent on this task. In addition two three-point rating scales were devised: one to assess how demanding the activity was for the worker, and the second to assess how each worker handled the stress of the particular task. The demands of the activity were rated as follows: most demanding (3), moderately demanding (2), and least demanding (1). Similarly, the handling of stress was rated as: poorly handled (3), moderately handled (2), and well handled (1).

Each rating was carefully defined. For example, the most demanding situations involved those where the worker had to give attention to many children at once, or had to attend to many tasks simultaneously. Similarly, a task was assessed as poorly handled when the CCW appeared unable to cope with the situation, such as when she became angry or withdrawn. All scores were discussed and standardised by the three researchers at subsequent meetings.

Mean scores based on the number of CCWs involved were calculated. For the demands of the situation these scores were calculated as follows: seven CCWs had lunch with the children, and their individual scores on the demand of this activity were 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1. Therefore the mean score was:

$$\frac{(2 \times 3) + (3 \times 2) + (2 \times 1)}{7} = 2$$

Mean scores for the handling of stress were similarly calculated.

Morning activities

The CCWs' morning activities are presented in table 6.

Almost all the CCWs were involved in all the morning activities, with the average time spent ranging from eleven to twenty-six minutes. All these activities had a very high demanding score, ranging from 2,6 to 2,9. However, handling of stress scores fell between 1,1 to 1,7 that is, tending towards moderate handling.

Meals with children

The results appear in table 7.

Almost every CCW was involved in breakfast and supper, with the average time ranging from twenty to twenty-seven minutes, and these were the most demanding meals, tending towards very demanding scores (2,1 and 2,5 respectively). Nevertheless, the handling of stress appeared to be fair (1,3 and 1,7). Few CCWs were involved in teatime and lunch, and the former appeared to be the least demanding mealtime.

Other duties with children

Other duties with children included everyday activities such as bath and bedtimes, homework supervision, and back from school (table 8).

The largest amount of time was spent on supervising homework (about one-hour), and the least on putting the children to bed (about 1/4 hour). Bathtime, in which almost all the CCWs were involved, was the most demanding. All the activities noted here veered towards being very demanding. Handling of stress ranged from 1,4 (homework) to 2,3 (back form school).

Warmtimes with children

Special warmtimes were defined as warm/close time spent with the children, in a less structured atmosphere, with no specific duties or tasks involved.

These included time spent in cuddling the children, playing, sport activities, reading stories, chatting, and so on. They were divided into morning, afternoon or evening warmtimes, as shown in table 9.

Table 8 Other duties with children

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Bathtime	10	34	2,8	1,7
Bedtime	10	14	2,6	1,6
Homework supervision	7	64	2,7	1,4
Back from school	3	18	2,3	2,3

Table 9 Warmtime with children

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
In morning	3	37	2,3	2
In afternoon	12	72	2,1	1,75
In evening	11	61	2,2	1,5

All CCWs were involved in the afternoon and evening warmtimes, with each such warmtime ranging around one hour. Nevertheless, these times were found to be more than moderately demanding (2,1 and 2,2) and were less than moderately coped with (1,75 and 1,5). Only three CCWs were involved in the morning warm times, with an average time of around half an hour. It was the most demanding of all the warm times and was only moderately well handled.

Domestic duties

Domestic duties included duties of the CCWs that did not, in the main, involve the children directly, and were not administrative (table 10).

Almost all CCWs were involved in doing laundry, although only a few (two to four) were involved in the other domestic duties. Except for laundry, the time spent was high with, for example, three hours spent on cooking, and one and three quarter hours on driving. Scores on the demand of the situation ranged from 1 to 2,5, and stress was moderately well handled, ranging from 1 to 2.

Administration

Almost all the CCWs were involved in various administrative duties such as filling in forms, requisitioning stores and stationary and completing merit sheets (table 11).

Administration took a considerable proportion of time, with the least being just under an hour (counselling parents), and the most, one and three quarter hours (meeting). All the administrative work was found to be moderately demanding, but the stress was well handled (ranging around scores of 1).

Private Time

Private time included any time spent without children, although it did include times spent with other CCWs and time completely off duty (table 12).

Most CCWs spent mealtimes with other workers without the presence of children, with just over an hour being spent on this. The CCWs did not appear to find it demanding, and stress was well handled. Although the off duty hours vary considerably, each CCW had an average of three hours off duty per day. This was not found to be demanding, and stress rating was correspondingly low. As a result of the present investigations, four CCWs spent time with the researchers speaking about their work. The demanding score for this was over 2 and is probably related to understandable anxieties about being observed.

Table 10 Domestic Duties

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Laundry	10	45	1,8	1,1
Driving children to and from activities	4	105	2,5	1,5
Cooking	2	180	1	1
Heavy cleaning	2	80	2,5	1,5
Preparing rooms for new admissions	2	98	2,5	2

Table 11 Administration

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Paperwork	10	60	2,1	1,5
Supervision	4	66	2	1
Meetings	3	102	2	1
Counselling of parents	2	52	2	1

Table 12 Private Time

ACTIVITY	Number of CCWs involved	Mean number of minutes	Mean demanding score	Mean handling of stress score
Mealtimes with other CCWs	11	70	1,3	1
Off-duty hours *	10	180	1	1
Special talk with observer	4	80	2,2	1,5

* These varied considerably — depending on the particular home and the day of the week.

DISCUSSION

The child care workers

As this study only examined twelve CCWs in six children's homes, some caution must be exercised in generalising from these findings.

Three quarters of the CCWs were under forty, two thirds were women, and only a quarter were married. These expected findings resemble those of Roberts (1981, as quoted by Gannon, 1983).

Their educational level was a mixture: half having completed lower secondary school, and the other half university, although none had less than a standard six education. The high proportion of university graduates or students was unexpected, although in a study of CCWs in New York, Freudenberger (1977) reported similar findings.

The finding that only four had, had previous experience in a children's home, ties in with those of Roberts (1981, quoted by Gannon, 1983), who, in a study of 53 White children's homes, found previous experience not to be a requirement for appointment. Only two CCWs had, had formal child care training, with seven receiving in-service training. These findings concur with those of Niewoudt (in progress) and Wilter (1981).

Eight of the workers had been in the present home for between one to five years and five of these expressed their intention to leave soon. This highlights well-known trends in the field of child care (Roberts, 1981). In fact, Freudenberger (1977) stresses that from the mental health viewpoint, two years is about the maximum amount of time that should be spent in this type of work. Our finding that four of the five who expressed their intention to leave were university graduates warrants further investigation.

Most of the CCWs worked extremely long hours (shifts of about sixteen hours), lived in the home, and had approximately ten children with a large age range in their care.

A serious implication both for the CCWs and the children includes the stress of working long hours (Maslach and Pines, 1977; Freudenberger, 1977). *The ongoing practices of double shifts and frequent overnights are emotionally suicidal* (Freudenberger, 1977:97).

The fact that most lived in the home and were unmarried could heighten the feelings of social isolation and lack of privacy expressed by the majority of the CCWs. These too are well-known phenomena associated with work in this field. Freudenberger (1977) points out the difficulty for the CCW in leaving *his job at the office,* thus resulting in a severe drain on his energy and intruding into all aspects of his personal life. Similarly, Mattingly (1977) cautions that the merging of the CCWs' total life with the agency may potentiate burn-out and may indicate that the worker is relying on the home to meet personal needs.

The low CCW to child ratio, together with the large age range, could further contribute to the stresses of working in this field, as well as to feelings of burn-out (Maslach and Pines, 1977). Additionally, since the children in these homes come from disturbed backgrounds, they usually have emotional difficulties. Freudenberger (1977) emphasises that in cases where the children are distrustful, emotionally deprived, unable to relate, and hungry, the demands on the CCWs are heightened. . . . *as day-in-and-day-out they psychically* feed *the needy young person, they day-in-and-day-out deplete themselves* (Freudenberger, 1977:92).

On the positive side, most CCWs reported that their main reason for both entering and remaining in this field was their love for children, as well as the reward they found in their work. For example, more than one CCW related incidents of children who initially were very withdrawn or frightened and, with time and the encouragement of the CCW, were able to relate and respond more spontaneously. Both Mattingly (1977) and Freudenberger (1977) comment on the dedication of the CCWs to their jobs — usually the primary reason for entering this field.

A striking finding was the high number of CCWs who reported that the manner in which staff supported them contributed to their remaining in the field. Both Maslach and Pines (1977) and Mattingly (1977) emphasise that staff reliance on fellow workers not only helps in evaluating their own work, but is seen by them as a major source of support. This has important policy implications, as the maintenance of staff morale appears crucial in maintaining a good, comfortable working atmosphere. In fact, Freudenberger (1977) recommends a mutual peer support system as an essential prerequisite in preventing staff burn-out.

Although in this investigation role conflict was only mentioned by a few CCWs, this aspect has received much attention by both Mattingly (1977) and Freudenberger (1977): *He (the CCW) is called upon to be a good role model, parent, a guardian, a brother or a sister — both a* **real** *person and entirely* **selfless** Freudenberger (1977:93).

Observation of Time

The greatest length of time was spent on administrative and domestic duties, and meal times were surprisingly short. Breakfast and supper were the most demanding. The former is probably attributable to the early morning rush and the latter to fatigue at the end of the long day. The extreme demands made on the CCWs at this time were observed and their fatigue was reflected in their difficulties in handling this stressful situation.

It was encouraging to note that warm times involved more than two hours per day. However, in view of the large number of children per CCW, this could be inadequate in terms of the quality of time spent per child. The high demanding score for these warm times probably reflects this problem, and for this reason again, stress was only coped with moderately.

The early morning activities, for example waking up the children and dressing them, were the most demanding of all the CCWs' duties and this probably relates to the low CCW to children ratio, as well as to the limited time available in the mornings. The least well handled situation was the time the children came back from school. Again, the low CCW to children ratio, the short span of time allotted to this activity, as well as the children's demands, probably contributed to the poor coping by the CCW.

Overall, the observations illustrated the high contact time of the CCWs with the children, as well as the varied duties in which they were involved. The finding that the most stressful activities were those where there was **direct** contact with the children, are confirmed by Maslach and Pines (1977).

Due to the uncommon observational nature of this aspect of the investigation, detailed comparisons with other research is limited. However, Wilter (1981) confirms our findings overall *. . . the child care worker is responsible for the everyday life experiences — she ensures the children are fed, she bathes them and puts them to bed, she awakes them in the mornings, and ensures that they get to school on time, she greets them on their return from school, she settles their fights and disputes, she disciplines those who need disciplining, tends the sick — in short, she is responsible for every aspect of the child's day-to-day existence. It is thus obvious that she is the person most able to influence both the behaviour and emotional state of the children in her care* (Wilter, 1981:32).

CONCLUSION

The overall findings of this investigation concur with previous research in this field in highlighting the inherent stressfulness of child care work: the long hours, lack of privacy with resultant isolation, exposure over long periods of time to emotionally hungry children, the low CCW to child ratio, as well as the diversity of the tasks they are involved in — all of which are factors known to contribute to staff exhaustion and possible burn-out.

Despite the obvious dedication of the CCWs to the children, as well as their resourcefulness in coping with the work stresses, certain recommendations are made: shorter working hours, a higher CCW to child ratio, with a smaller age range, as well as strong staff support. These are important, both for the mental health of the CCW as well as the subsequent influence on the children in their care.

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weens die skynbare onregverdigheid van salarisse wat nie onderskeid maak tussen kollegas wat nie dieselfde kwaliteit en kwantiteit werk lewer nie (Venter, 1983: 36).

Schlebush en sy medewerkers bevind dat ontevredenheid met salarisse die hoofoorsaak van ontevredenheid onder die geregistreerde verpleeglui te Addingtonhospitaal is (Schlebusch *et al.*, 1982: 14).

Ongeveer twee derdes van die respondente in die skryfster se ondersoekgroep was ontevrede met die salaris wat hulle verdien. Die gevoel is dat die salaris nie voldoende vergoeding bied vir die ongereelde werkure nie, vir die werklas wat behartig moet word, vir die groot verantwoordelikheid wat gedra word en vir die opleiding wat deurloop moet word. Die respondente meen ook dat hul salarisse nie met dié van ander beroepe kompeteer nie.

Voorts maak die salarisse ook nie genoeg onderskeid tussen die verskillende grade van verantwoordelikheid wat van geregistreerde verpleegkundiges in verskillende posisies vereis word nie, (byvoorbeeld 'n suster in bevel van 'n afdeling teenoor 'n ander senior suster wat nie 'n bevelsposisie beklee nie), asook nie ten opsigte van die verskil in die kompleksiteit van die werk wat verrig word nie.

Bevorderingsgeleenthede

In ooreenstemming met Venter se bevindinge, is bevind dat daar 'n groot mate van ontevredenheid onder geregistreerde verpleegkundiges van alle bevolkingsgroepe, asook alle taalgroepe heers oor die klaarblyklike gebrek aan voldoende bevorderingsgeleenthede, en veral bevorderingsgeleenthede in die kliniese situasie.

In hul ondersoek, het Schlebusch en andere bevind dat onvoldoende bevorderingsvooruitsigte (56%), die tweede plek (naas ontoereikende salarisse (76%)) ingeneem het op die lys van swak motiverings om in die professie aan te bly (Schlebusch *et al.*, 1982: 16).

SLOTOPMERKINGS

'n Paar ander *interessante* resultate van hierdie ondersoek was die volgende:

- Die graad van spanning waaraan verpleegpersoneel teenswoordig in hospitale onderhewig is, kan as besonder hoog bestempel word.
- Wysigings in verpleegprosedures word té dikwels aangebring en dit skep dikwels verwarring.
- Verpleegkundiges in die provinsiale hospitale in Transvaal blyk meer taak- en proseduregerig, en minder pasiënt-georiënteerd, in hul pasiëntsorg-benadering te wees.
- 'n Streng burokratiese bestuurswyse word in die meeste hospitale gevolg.
- Die geregistreerde verpleegkundige se magdom van administratiewe pligte laat te min tyd vir kliniese onderrig toe.

Dit het uit hierdie ondersoek geblyk dat daar 'n veelvoud van faktore is wat ontevredenheid onder die geregistreerde verpleegkundiges in provinsiale hospitale in Transvaal veroorsaak, waarvan ongereelde ure en die salarisstruktuur (veral ontoereikende salarisdifferensiasie), gebrekkige begrip en ondersteuning van verpleegdiensbestuurders, ontoereikende bevorderingsgeleenthede en te min deelname aan besluitneming, die belangrikste was.

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