

**CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKERS WITH  
REGARD TO DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR  
IN RESIDENTIAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE CENTRE**

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## KEY CONCEPTS:

- **Challenging Behaviour:** This term describes behaviour that interferes with an individual or carers daily life, this would include aggression, self-injury, property destruction, oppositional behaviour, stereotyped behaviour, withdrawn and inappropriate behaviour (Therapeutic Guidelines Limited, 2005).
- **Discipline:** According to Webb, Gore, Amend and De Vries (2007), discipline involves modelling and teaching children appropriate behaviours. It concerns punishment, correction and learning in order for children to develop self-control (Barnes, 2011)

## KEY CONCEPTS:

- Child and Youth Care Centre: The *Suid-Afrikaanse Weeshuis* was established in 1814 and the St Georges Home in 1864. Both these facilities for children were based in Cape Town (Beukes & Gannon, 1994).
- Child and Youth Care Worker: CYC work is described as facilitating the healthy development and promoting the social competence of children and youth, by being part of and using their daily life experiences. Fundamental to this process is the development of a therapeutic relationship, and in particular, the relationship with individual children and youth who are being focused on.

## Research problem

- From the background information it is clear that CYCWs are faced with various challenges with regard to discipline of the children in their care. Apart from that, it seems as if they often lack skills and knowledge in this regard. Children have the right to be free from cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment according to the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 2006). In terms of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act (Act 33 of 1997), corporal punishment has been banned in schools, penal institutions and alternative care settings.

## Research problem

- CYCWs argue that they have not been equipped with skills (other than punishment) in order to manage the behaviour of children and youth in their care. The Department of Social Development in the Western Cape has initiated a project to train all CYCWs employed by residential CYCCs in the Western Cape, in behaviour management. The study explored the challenges faced by CYCWs when disciplining children who display challenging behaviour in CYCCs.

## Research methodology

- The aim of **qualitative** research is to understand the participant's experience of an event, experience or phenomena (Hays & Wood, 2011)
- **Explorative research:** The research study is explorative, as not much has been written about the challenges faced by CYCWs with regard to the discipline of children with challenging behavior in CYCCs
- **Descriptive research** CYCWs in CYCCs find themselves in a relationship with the children in their care, and thus work within a social setting. The study is descriptive, in that it presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship, and focuses on the "how" and "why" questions (De Vos *et al.*, 2002:109).

## Research methodology

- **Contextual research** seeks to avoid separation of parts from a larger context to which the elements may be related, Child and youth care work is practised in the life space (natural setting) of children.
- CYCWs in CYCCs find themselves in a relationship with the children in their care, thus working within a social setting. Furthermore CYCWs are working in the life space (natural setting) of children, thus they will be able to relate to their challenges within the immediate, concrete, natural context in which they occur (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:272; Holloway & Wheeler, 1998:192).

## Population and sampling

- A purposive sampling technique was used for this research study since CYCWs were selected because they had the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the study (De Vos *et al.*, 2002). One CYCC from each metropole in the Cape Peninsula, (namely metropole North, metropole South, metropole East and metropole West) was approached to participate in the study.
- Written permission was obtained from the managers of CYCCs in order to have access to the CYCWs employed at the different centres. Once permission had been obtained from management, participants who met the sampling criteria were approached to participate in the focus groups.



## The sampling criteria

- CYCWs with a minimum of two years' experience of practising CYCW at a CYCC;
- CYCWs who have engaged in basic CYCW training, namely basic qualification in child care, basic qualification in secure care and/or in-house training.
- Volunteers, management, support staff and children were excluded from the study since the study aimed to explore and describe the challenges faced by CYCWs with regard to discipline of children with challenging behaviour in CYCCs

## Data collection

- Focus groups are group interviews; they are a means of better understanding how people feel or think about an issue (De Vos *et al.*, 2002) .
- Focus group interviews are often used when interviewees have similar experiences and are likely to cooperate with each other, and also when their interaction is likely to yield rich information about the phenomenon that is being researched (Krueger, Morgan, Steward & Shamdsani, as cited in Creswell (2007:133)

The interview guide consisted of the following questions:

1. How have you been involved in discipline of children in the CYCC?
2. Think back over all the years that you've disciplined children and explain why you think the desired result was achieved.
3. What went well with discipline?
4. What needs improvement with regard to discipline?
5. Suppose that you were in charge and could make a change that would make the programme better. What would you do?
6. What can each one of us do to make the programme better?

## Data collection

- The CYCWs who expressed interest in participating in the research project were then asked to sign a consent form that was countersigned and witnessed
- A pilot study was implemented by conducting an interview with the first identified focus group, using the proposed interview guide
- On commencement of the interview, participants were made aware of the reasons for conducting the study as well as confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage of the interview. Two prospective participants exercised the right to withdraw from the interview.

## Data analysis

- Permission was obtained from the participants to record the interviews on a digital voice recorder. The data was transcribed verbatim for data analysis.
- The researcher analysed the data during and after data collection.
- In addition, coding was the responsibility of an independent coder and these results were verified by the research supervisor.

## Limitations of the study

- Research on CYCCs in South Africa is difficult to obtain since, from the researchers' point of view, very little research has been conducted in this area. This could lead to generalisations in the research.
- The researcher experienced challenges with regard to maintaining neutrality in conducting the research especially during the data collection process. This was directly because of the researcher's involvement in the field of CYC work as a moderator for the qualification in childcare work and as an employee of the National Association of Child Care Workers.

## Demographics

- Thirty-five of the participants who took part in this study were female, while only three were male.
- Three of the participants were in their late 20s, while the majority of the participants, namely 19, were in their 30s. Seven participants were in their 40s. The second largest proportion of the participants, namely nine, were in their 60s.
- Six of the participants had attained a Basic Qualification in Child Care (BQCC) attendance certificate
- Thirty-two of the participants who took part in the study were learners on the FET Qualification Child and Youth Care Work

## Length of time working in CYC

- 17 of the participants who took part in the study, had between five and ten years of experience in the CYC sector.
- 8 participants had worked at CYCCs for between 10 and 15 years
- 3 participants, had more than 15 years' experience.
- 3 participants had been working in this sector for between 20 and 25 years.
- A single participant had 26 years' experience.
- Only six participants had less than five years of experience as CYCW's.



## Results

- ***CYCWs are life space/first-line disciplinarians***
- The findings of the research study indicated that since CYC work is based on the principle of “life space care”, CYCWs are in direct contact with children and youth under their care and experience their behaviour.
- ***CYCWs are in need of support from colleagues in conducting disciplinary matters/teamwork***
- The CYCWs who took part in this study concluded that they need each other’s support in order to conduct discipline.

## Results

- ***CYCWs' challenges with the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) regarding the discipline of children in CYCCs***
- The participants who took part in this study indicated a need for functioning as a team. Teamwork is an integral and vital component of working in CYCCs
- ***Need for support and open communication by social worker and/or management***
- The participants in this study identified the need for management of CYCCs to communicate and coordinate the actions of MDTs
- *“If you work together with your partner as a team ... then I don't want someone from the office to come and tell me what I must do.”*

## Results

- *“When the communication is good and people talk to one another and there is consensus amongst those who are supposed to do the disciplinary, the intervention, I see it works.”*
- The CYCWs who took part in this study indicated that gaining access to policy and procedure to exercise effective discipline remains a challenge
- ***CYCWs experience conflicting messages from social workers and managers about appropriate methods of discipline***

## Results

- ***CYCWs experience disempowerment by the management of CYCCs***
- Many CYCWs in South Africa are supervised/managed by other professionals, such as social workers, who often do not have an understanding of the complex, therapeutic tasks of CYC work.
- Levine in Gannon (1998:185) Residential social work is a specialised field in child welfare services and such workers may feel professionally isolated in an environment where they are the only person who has undergone professional training this often results in social workers questioning decisions made by CYCWs, often based on their own lack of understanding of CYC work and their lack of trust in CYCWs.

## Results

- Many CYCWs in South Africa are supervised/managed by other professionals, such as social workers, who often do not have an understanding of the complex, therapeutic tasks of CYC work. Supervisors may have the perception that therapeutic work is the domain of social workers and psychologists and therefore CYCWs are either unable, or professional boundaries prevent them, from doing therapeutic work (Michael, 2005).

## Results

- ***CYCW's experience a lack of supervision and support in CYCCs***
- It became evident from the findings of this study that CYCWs experience a lack of supervision in CYCCs.
- ***CYCWs are challenged by physical and verbal violence and aggressive behaviour by children***
- ***CYCWs are challenged by children's truancy, swearing and stealing***
- ***CYCWs are challenged by the sexual development needs of children***
- ***CYCWs are not trained to manage children with special needs***

## Results

- ***Staff work overload and staff turnover as disciplinary challenges***
- CYCWs often allow the boundaries between their work and private life to become blurred, which may lead to feeling overwhelmed, resentful, stressed and tired. Unskilled and new CYCWs or other social service professionals could perceive youth behaviours as dangerous and unusual (Foster & Brookes, 2009)
- ***Social workers make inappropriate placements***
- The workers who took part in this study, pointed to the fact that the procedures do not always take place when children are admitted to the CYCC.

## Results

- ***CYCW experience a lack in service delivery from social workers***
- Young people in alternative care have expressed concerns about the lack of family reunification work done by social workers. The government and Non Profit Organisations services providers have voiced concerns that for various reasons designated social workers lack the time to provide family reunification services (Jamieson, 2014).



## Recommendations with regard to further and future research

- Explore the empowerment of CYCWs in the life space by appropriate supervision in CYCCs;
- Explore what constitutes good CYC work practice by the MDT members in CYCCs;
- Explore transforming CYCCs into best practice models through CYC work practice by the MDT;
- Explore effective MDT work in CYCCs;
- Determine what constitutes effective supervision of CYCWs in CYCCs by supervisors

# Conclusion

Allsopp (2009) in South African CYC work, part of the struggle for the recognition of CYC as a profession, is the fact that good CYC work looks easy to the untrained eye. However, as with art, one's understanding of what is being observed will only be as good as one's perception and knowledge will allow.