

PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA



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Introduction

- From working primarily in residential settings to working in communities in order to address the diverse needs of children and youth.
- Some of the CYCWs have been carefully selected, trained and supported.

Problem statement

- “CYCWs are impacted by the social, political and cultural context of their employment spaces, and this has raised myriad professional issues for the discipline” Gharabaghi (2008:150), leading to a great deal of occupational stress.
- Experts are increasingly concerned about the state of the CYCWs, emphasising alarm regarding issues pertaining to personal preparation, recruitment and retention (Curry et al., 2011:3).
- CYCWs may quit the field earlier than expected.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- The goal: to explore the challenges and coping strategies of CYCWs in the South African context.
- The objectives: to identify the **psycho-social, socio-economic, professional** challenges experienced by CYCWs.
- To explore the **coping strategies** adopted by the CYCWs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Ecological systems theory framework.
- Qualitative methodology.
- 93 participants, 11 focus group interviews, 6 provinces, 7 organisations based in rural, semi-urban and urban areas.
- Government, NGO and private sector.
- Self-designed interview schedule.

Discussion of findings

- **Dealing with clients' behaviours/risk**
 - *“Imagine, on a normal day you come to work at 8:00 o'clock by 8:30 you had three fights breakout on campus.”*
 - *“I'm having a problem with the rights of children. I am thinking that they've given them so much rights that they cannot even try to be responsible for what they do.”*

Discussion of findings...cont...

- **Lack of tangible and immediate results**
 - *...because we want to see them one day become successful.”*
 - *...but when there is no progress, that’s where all the frustration starts.”*
 - *“When the child falls pregnant, you feel like, as a mother, you have failed the child and the child has failed you.”*

Discussion of findings...cont...

- **Poor relations with clients, team members, other professionals and community members.**
 - *“I have been spat on. My mother has been called whatever but I am expected to establish relationships with these boys.”*
 - *“We like bad mouthing each other.”*
 - *“It is mostly the social workers who will say you got the limit you can’t go beyond whatever.”*
 - *“They expect us to come with something and when we just listen and go, they have disappointment in their eyes.”*

Discussion of findings...cont...

- **Lack of recognition, lack of clarity on the role and title of the CYCW, inconsistent job requirements**
 - *“You went to the university or you went to the college, it doesn’t matter, everyone wants to oppress you. It’s like you are nothing.”*
 - *“When it comes to the department, it doesn’t recognise us as professionals. They just label us as nannies that take care of kids.”*

Inconsistent job requirements...cont...

- *“What are the basic criteria for someone to be here; matric or a driver’s license? We need more staff but it seems anyone can come.”*
- *“Some have grade 6, I may have a diploma, so that is the dilemma that the child and youth care profession is facing.”*
- **Qualifications vs Experience**

Mr vs Dr

Mr Lesiba



Dr Molepo



Discussion of findings...cont...

- **Lack of professional growth and development opportunities**
 - *At the universities and the technikons and the private colleges this is one course that was never really available.”*
 - *“The most highly paid person is a chief child and youth care worker or a supervisor.”*
 - *“Shortage of centres, shortage of work. There are no opportunities, so that is why you settle for what you get.”*

Discussion of findings...cont...

- **Inadequate working conditions: shifts, long hours and being on standby**
 - *...when they feel sick, they call in the evening or at midnight for help.”*
 - *...I’m doing night shift, then the boyfriend would ask: ‘are you a security?’*
 - *“My last born asked me: ‘Mama, why do you not leave the job and come and stay with us, because you are scarce?’*

...being on standby

- *“Sometimes I will say to my family I will take you to the shopping mall. Then an issue of ... (name of institution) will come up. Then the plans to go to the mall fail. Then we quarrel.”*

Conclusion

- Given that the study was situated within an ecological systems theory, the impact of other systems such as poor stakeholder relations in working with individual children (**microsystem**), within communities (**exosystem**), with families, with communities (**mesosystem**) and within the broader society (**macrosystem**) became evident.

Conclusion...cont...

- CYCWs' commitment to their jobs and field became evident. The participants have, however, shared their frustrations with the ultimate goal of remaining effective and productive members of the social service sector.
- 16 participants (17%) have spent eight years in the CYC field, and 3 participants had over 30 years experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Professional titles and registration**
 - Titles: **learner CYCW, auxiliary CYCW, professional CYCW, and specialist CYCW** are supported.
 - For how long would the CYC field in South Africa like to maintain this system of differentiated titles?
 - **2030 in line with NDP.**

RECOMMENDATIONS...cont...

- **Education, training and development**
 - An incentive strategy that will encourage those who join the field at a basic level to continue studying towards the highest qualifications available.
 - The number of tertiary institutions that can offer CYC qualifications through Open and Distance Learning mode should be increased. Traditional residential tertiary institutions to consider offering CYC qualifications through ODL mode.

RECOMMENDATIONS...CPD points

- The speedy introduction and enforcement of CPD processes for CYCWs. A creative and progressive way of offering CPD must be explored, because very few CYCWs can afford such courses if they have to pay out of their own pockets.

RECOMMENDATIONS...Research

- The impact of registration on CYCWs is an area that can be researched.
- A multi-disciplinary research within the social services sector to establish the contribution that CYCWs and other professionals make.
- Research that involves the perceptions and experiences of children and youth – on-going.
- Further studies using other frameworks such as the feminist approach as it may be relevant to matters pertaining to “the unequal power relationships between men and women and adults and children.”

Thank you

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