INTRODUCTION

Most of the available research 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).

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 stressfulness 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.

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
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.
### 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 tea 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.
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 warmtimes, 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.

### 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.

---

### Table 10 Domestic Duties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Number of CCWs involved</th>
<th>Mean number of minutes</th>
<th>Mean demanding score</th>
<th>Mean handling of stress score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving children to and from activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy cleaning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing rooms for new admissions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

### Table 11 Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Number of CCWs involved</th>
<th>Mean number of minutes</th>
<th>Mean demanding score</th>
<th>Mean handling of stress score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paperwork</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling of parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12 Private Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Number of CCWs involved</th>
<th>Mean number of minutes</th>
<th>Mean demanding score</th>
<th>Mean handling of stress score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mealtimes with other CCWs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-duty hours *</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special talk with observer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- * These varied considerably — depending on the particular home and the day of the week.*
The finding that only four had, had previous experience in a children's home, ties in with those of Roberts (1981, quoted by Cannon, 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 Nie- woudt (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 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the Principals of the children's homes for their co-operation as well as to Professor L. S. Gillis, Miss C. Morris and Miss M. B. Smith for making this study possible.

Our heartfelt and humble thanks to everyone we approached for guidance, all of whom responded with enthusiasm and able assistance. Finally, our deepest gratitude to the child care workers for their honesty and warmth in sharing their experiences with us.

REFERENCES


SLOTOPMERKINGS

'N Paar ander interessante resulgate van hierdie ondersoek was die volgende:

- Die graad van spanning waaraan verpleegpersoneel teenwoordig in hospitale onderhewig is, kan as besonder hoog bestempel word.

- Wyssings van verpleegprosedures word tê dikwels aangebring en dit skep dikwels verwarring.

- Verpleegkundiges in die provinsiale hospitale in Transvaal blyk meer taak- en proseduregerig, en minder pasiënt-georiënteer, in hul pasiënt-benadering te wees.

- 'n Strenge burokraatiese 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 gebleek dat daa 'n veelvoud van faktoere is wat ontevredenheid onder die geregistreerde verpleegkundiges in provinsiale hospitale in Transvaal veroorsaak, waarvan ongeregelleerde werk en die salarissstruktuur (veral ontoereikende salarissdifereensiasie), gebrekke rig vir en ondersteuning van verpleegdiens-besluiters, ontoereikende beoordelingsgeleenthede en te min deelnaam aan besluitneming, die belangrikste was.

VERWYSINGS


