The Professionalisation of Child and Youth Care: Perspectives of Child and Youth Care Workers in eThekwini, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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Abstract

The professionalisation of child and youth care (CYC) has long been an important milestone for the profession. This article will further add to the voices of child and youth care workers (CYCWs) about this process. It focuses on and explores the perspectives of CYCWs in eThekwini, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on the process of CYC professionalisation. The researchers conducted an in-depth qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 12 purposely selected CYCWs from different children's homes in eThekwini. Their perspectives showed that there is still a lack of understanding of the concept and that there are aspects of CYC professionalisation that still have not been achieved while others have. The research findings revealed that the process of CYC professionalisation is important for the growth, status, and continuous stability of the CYC profession. The researchers concluded that the research findings highlighted will offer important insight for the stabilisation of the CYC profession.

Keywords: professionalisation; child and youth care; child and youth care worker; registration; education and training

Introduction

Professional child and youth care (CYC) work practice focuses on the infant, child and adolescent, both normal and with special needs, within the context of the family, the community, and the life span (SACSSP 2023). For the purposes of this study, CYC will be defined as "a regulated profession comprising a body of scientific knowledge and competencies practiced by persons registered in terms of section 18B of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978" (SACSSP 2023, n.p.).

Mkhize, Sibiya and Hlengwa (2022, 2) define child and youth care workers (CYCWs) as front-line service professionals who work in constant contact with children and youths and who are responsible for their daily living needs. The legislative framework that governs CYC practice specifies that a CYCW is obliged to meet prescribed education requirements for registration as a CYCW with the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP) in terms of section 18A of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (SACSSP 2023).

CYCWs in South Africa have been passionate about the professionalisation and uniqueness of CYC for a long time. Globally, CYC has existed for many years and has taken many forms. For instance, residential CYC practice in South Africa has a long history and has evolved in the context of complex socio-political and economic challenges (Khan 2021, 292). In South Africa, CYC has recently been professionalised (Allsopp 2020). The quest for statutory regulation and professional recognition has taken decades (Jamieson 2013, 22). A network for sharing information and supporting the profession's development, the National Association of Child and Youth Care Workers (NACCW) was founded in 1975. Today it is an independent body offering professional training, and a range of support services to CYCWs (Jamieson 2013, 27; NACCW 2014). In the United States (US) and Canada, professionalisation of the field began around the 1960s when the residential workers formed alliances of states and provincial associations (Molepo and Delport 2015, 150). CYC work was first professionalised in European countries where legal status was allowed to the profession in France in 1965 (Allsopp 2020). The professionalisation motive developed in the US as early as 1970, recognising the valuable role of CYCWs in the lives of children in residential care, and the voices in consent of professionalisation, within and outside the field (Allsopp 2020).

Lodge (2013, 2) states that the first Professional Board for Child and Youth Care (PBCYC) in South Africa was elected in 2004 and inaugurated in 2005. The role of the PBCYC was to regulate the professional field of CYC in South Africa (Chimange and Bond 2020). Professional Boards, such as the juristic person's (Council) delegates, are established in terms of section 14B of the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (RSA 1978). The Professional Boards are responsible for specific legislative requirements that are related to the professionalisation of CYC. Currently, the fourth PBCYC was elected and appointed as of 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2027 (SACSSP 2022,

20). Therefore, the voices of CYCWs on professionalisation in South Africa are important as CYCWs have fought for professionalisation for many years.

The first section of the article reports on literature gathered from other studies and offers an overview of the theoretical framework and research methodology used in the study. The second and third sections focus on the findings of the study and a critical discussion thereof.

Theoretical Framework

The current study was guided by Forsyth and Danisiewicz's (1985) model of professionalisation, as illustrated in figure 1. Although this model was developed in 1985, it is considered relevant to inform the process of professionalisation in South Africa as a generic model applicable to different professions. Dellgran and Höjer (2005, 43) describe professionalisation as a collective process, of how a specific occupational or professional group by various means, upholds and improves its status, authority, discretion, and control over education and working conditions. The model is segmented into three phases, each having its own considerations.
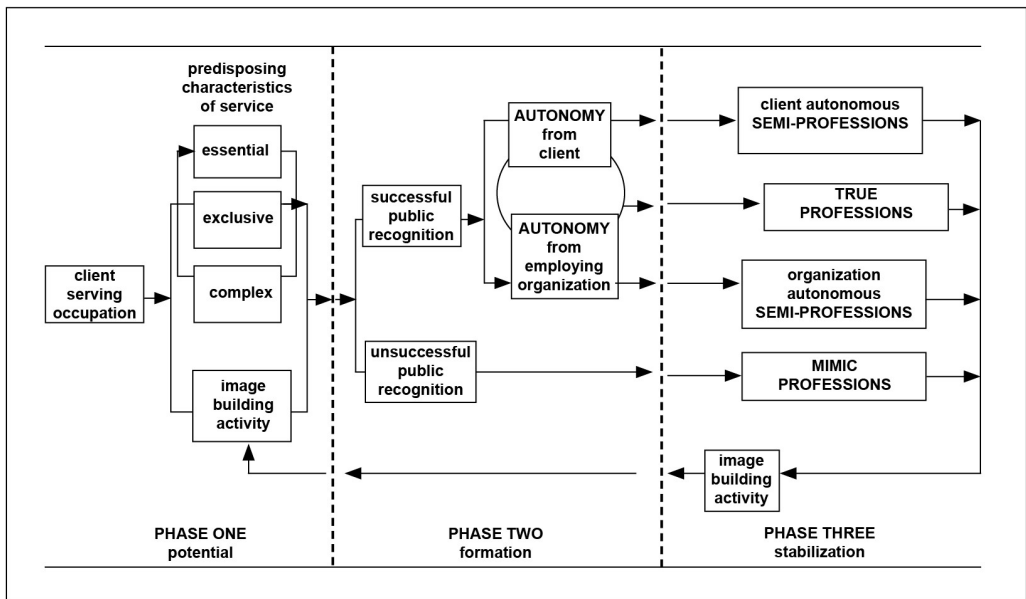

Figure 1: Forsyth and Danisiewicz's Model of Professionalisation (1985)

Phase 1: Potential

This phase addresses the potential of the profession for establishing a professional status. Under this phase, two considerations are of value, namely: (a) predisposing characteristics; and (b) image-building activity.

(a) Predisposing characteristics has three components. The first component, "essential", is about the extreme importance of the profession, therefore, it refers to the actual need for the profession (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985, 62). The second component, "exclusive", is about the professional practitioners having domination (monopoly) over the profession. This means a profession is more advanced in achieving desirable outcomes. Competence is a source of monopoly. "If a particular occupation is superior in obtaining desirable effects, its exclusive hold on a service task is enhanced. Legal or coercive elimination of competitors, as well as reputation, may also produce exclusive control" (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985, 62). The third component, "complex", is about the different strategies (which are not routine) used in the profession to respond to the client's needs (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985, 62). The complex component includes the selection, combination and order of application that are adjusted in response to feedback from the human and nonhuman objects of concern (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985, 62).

(b) The image-building activity is where the professionals try to publicly display the profession as essential (needed), exclusive (unique/special) and complex (adjustable) (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985, 64).

Phase 2: Formation

This phase is about the public evaluation of the profession's professional status and the formation of professional autonomy (i.e. autonomy from clients and employing organisations) influenced by successful public recognition. The clients and employing organisations express whether the services provided by the profession are needed by them; are unique when compared to other professions; and adjustable to meet their unique needs (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985).

Phase 3: Stabilisation

This phase entails the stabilisation and maintenance stages. In case of unsuccessful public recognition (in phase 2), the profession results in being a mimic profession, which means it has the attributes of a profession, but it has no power nor recognition as it is similar to an already existing profession. Therefore, it must reconsider its image-building activity. If a profession has obtained successful public recognition from the clients or employing organisations only, then in phase 3, it is recognised as a semi-profession. When a profession has been recognised by both its clients and employing organisations, it is experienced as a true profession (Forsyth and Danisiewicz 1985).

Research Design and Methods

The study was conducted in 2020, using a qualitative approach to gather in-depth and meaningful information from the participants. The study aimed to engage with CYCWs to explore their understanding, perspectives, and experiences of the professionalisation of CYC as a significant milestone in this field. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample as the researchers relied on their judgment in choosing participants whom they believed would be able to answer the research questions. The qualitative research design also allowed the researchers to interact with the participants on their terms. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect data. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the perspectives of CYCWs on the process of CYC professionalisation. The study population was professional CYCWs from eThekwini, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), and the sample consisted of 12 CYCWs (labelled CYCW P1 to P12) from three different Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs), formerly known as children's homes. These CYCCs were purposefully selected and approached by the researchers as per the inclusion criteria of the study (labelled CYCC A, B and C). Permission was sought from the participants to record the interview discussions. The data was thematically analysed following Tesch's eight steps of data analysis. Tesch (1990 cited in Zhang and Wildemuth 2005, 4) explains that "qualitative content analysis allows you to assign a unit of text to more than one category simultaneously". The process of data analysis included reading through the transcripts to get a general understanding of the data; obtaining key features from the data; grouping the topics; and then generating codes. The researchers formulated themes and sub-themes based on the participants' accounts of the phenomenon under study. The study commenced once full ethical clearance was granted by the Durban University of Technology, Institutional Research and Ethics Committee (Reference Number 074/20).

Findings

Five main themes and sub-themes emerged from the data collected. These themes and subsequent sub-themes and verbatim quotations from the participants are included to support the study findings.

Theme 1: Child and Youth Care Professionalisation

Sub-theme 1.1: Understanding of Child and Youth Care Professionalisation

The participants expressed different understandings of CYC professionalisation and what they know to be associated with the process:

> Er, I think I can say it's where you work bearing in mind that you are being guided by the, by the uhm, ethics, the code of ethics. (CYCC A; Supervisor P4)

> Uhm, well, I heard that we will be professionalised as child and youth care workers, in my mind I thought, uhm, recognition, and I thought, uhm, salary increase, and being

part of the certificate and the even the qualification is all over making sure that all the universities and institutions understand about childcare. (CYCC B; CYCW P7)

Sub-theme 1.2: Views towards the Existence of Child and Youth Care Professionalisation

In contrast to what most of the participants had expressed on what they regard CYC professionalisation to be, one of the participants felt strongly that CYC professionalisation does not exist. The participant expressed that it could be because CYCWs do not claim their status in the workplace:

> I don't know if it's us child and youth care workers who do not represent ourselves as professionals when we are employed to practise. We just come to the workplace, and we just blend in. I think we forget our skills. (CYCC B; CYCW P6)

Theme 2: Perspectives of Child and Youth Care Workers Prior to Professionalisation/Statutory Regulation

Sub-theme 2.1: Perspectives of Child and Youth Care Workers Prior to Professionalisation/Statutory Regulation

Some of the participants expressed gratitude for the role of CYC veterans in ensuring that the field has been professionalised:

> I can say that they are part of the people who played a very huge role in this profession because we are where we are, although they did not get the chance to receive the skills we have, but they were very much able to advocate for developing CYCWs. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

> Those people I would say, I salute them, because though, they didn't know much about this qualification … they managed because they kept organisation going even though they had no training … We took over from them. (CYCC A; CYCW P2)

Sub-theme 2.2: Negative Perspectives Prior to Professionalisation

The participants also shared rather negative perspectives prior to professionalisation such as that the CYCWs did not get a chance to be well represented in professional positions:

> It was not an independent profession to a point even the CYCWs were not supervised and managed by other childcare workers. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

> They were working in an institution where the principal is not a child and youth care worker. (CYCC A: CYCW P3)

Some of the participants shared their concerns by stating that they had doubts whether CYCWs prior to professionalisation were guided by ethics:

I'm not too sure but I would say, they were not guided much about ethics. It was not quite the same as now, everyone is guided by the children's rights, so whatever you do you must make sure you do not violate the rights of children. (CYCC A; Supervisor P4)

I was thinking maybe they were just working without knowing rules to be followed. I think it wasn't easy because they had no guidelines, they just do what they thought is okay. (CYCC C; CYCW P8)

We didn't have many policies that guided us, at that time, people were not much exposed to it. There wasn't much ethics that were accurate and straight. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

Some of the participants mentioned that the CYCWs prior to professionalisation were not quite aware of how they were required to do their job. They also indicated this was not benefiting the children. The participants explained how the lack of undefined roles affected professional practice and how this affected young people:

All they knew was they had to look after the kids – that was it. They did not have knowledge they were not aware how to actually go about doing it even though they had some sort of knowledge, they did not know how to actually treat the kids. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

I think they did not know what they were doing … Sometimes, they were doing the job for the sake of doing it. It was not actually helping the child or the young people. (CYCC B; CYCW P12)

Theme 3: The Importance of Child and Youth Care Professionalisation Regarding Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

Sub-theme 3.1: Child and Youth Care Skills Are Unique and Provided Directly to the Young Person

Some of the participants mentioned that CYCWs possess unique skills. Other participants discussed that most CYC skills are provided directly to young people:

So, the skills that we were lucky enough to receive under this profession I can say that they are very helpful and unique. They are not like other professions, but they stand out on their own … We work in the life space that's what makes us so different from other professions. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

When we look at the skills, you have to have passion. You must know how to implement and teach skills to young people. So, without having these skills, you cannot do work with the children. (CYCC C; CYCW P10)

Sub-theme 3.2: Acquisition of Significant Knowledge by Child and Youth Care Workers

Included in the knowledge that is of importance in CYC, the participants mentioned that CYCWs need to be knowledgeable of boundaries. There are things within their scope of work they should do and others they should not do:

> I think knowledge helps us to know our boundaries, as in what are we supposed to do exactly, and not end up doing things that are not mine to do. Or maybe even undermining the other person's duties. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

> Child and youth care workers don't make decisions, but they refer. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

The participants also mentioned that CYCWs must be knowledgeable about the laws governing CYC. The participants emphasised that CYCWs need to be aware of children's laws and acts:

> You have to have knowledge of what you need to do and knowledge of what are the laws of the country and children's laws. You have to understand all of that. We are guided by the rules from the government, that is how we take care of the children. (CYCC B; CYCW P7)

> You do things by the law as we have children's acts. (CYCC A; Supervisor P4)

Sub-theme 3.3: Child and Youth Care Workers Uphold Positive Values

Some of the participants mentioned that CYCWs uphold positive values. These values include respect, care, love, honesty and truthfulness towards young people. CYCWs use these values to build strong relationships with young people and promote their healing:

> When it comes to values, they are unique, they are respect, care and sometimes love and honesty and truthfulness. These values make the child to be able to build a strong relationship especially if there was a something he or she was going through. They make the child to heal faster. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

> You have to give them love and care. (CYCC A; CYCW P2)

> When working with children give them love and care. (CYCC B; CYCW P12)

Sub-theme 3.4: Child and Youth Care Workers Model Positive Attitudes towards Young People and Colleagues

The participants mentioned that CYCWs cannot work with children if they model negative attitudes. They should be able to conduct themselves professionally with both the young people and their colleagues:

I think regarding the attitudes, if I'm going to come with the negative attitude, the children won't learn … I am here to guide and protect them. I need to be positive towards them and I must have a way I conduct myself, so they will be able to conduct themselves. (CYCC C; CYCW P10)

I think it's important that you have a manner of approach when you are talking with people at work and also behave well, like the way you would like them to you. (CYCC C; CYCW P8)

Sub-theme 3.5: Child and Youth Care Workers Have Positive Beliefs

CYCWs deal with young people in their care who are from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the participants indicated that it is important for CYCWs to be culturally sensitive and respect that young people have a right to practise their unique cultures. The participants mentioned that this also applies to their colleagues:

It is just that we need to respect each other's beliefs because we are living in a diverse world. As we are living in a diverse world, I believe in something else, you believe in something else, the next person believes in something else. (CYCC B, CYCW P7)

We are working with children who are Indians, Coloureds and Africans. We are trained to treat them the same and allow them to practise their culture and religion. Like it was at Diwali, we allowed them to celebrate it. Even fasting, they let us know that this is my fast month from this time to this time, so we allow them to practise it. (CYCC C; CYCW P11)

Furthermore, some of the participants expressed that they believe every young person deserves a second chance. Some of the participants discussed that such a second chance may include equipping young people with survival skills to help them in the future, such as internships:

The theme of this home is, to break the cycle that when children leave this home, they should be able to afford life. The principle is to make sure that when children leave, they can at least even get an internship. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

We believe that children have a second chance, they don't have to be affected by the backgrounds they are coming from. Everyone has a bright future even though they are coming from poor families, and even whatever abuse they have been through, when they come to our centre and we support them. (CYCC B; CYCW P12)

Theme 4: Aspects of Child and Youth Care Professionalisation Achieved

The participants also discussed the aspects of professionalisation achieved in CYC professionalisation, such as registration with the SACSSP, education and training, as well as attendance of professional conferences.

Sub-theme 4.1: Registration by the South African Council for Social Services Professions

The SACSSP is the statutory council for CYCWs governed by the PBCYC. The participants acknowledged that registration with the SACSSP was the desired outcome in terms of the professionalisation of CYC work. One of the participants emphasised that the SACSSP must ascertain that CYCWs applying for registration do not have a criminal record or have been in any incidences of trouble with the law:

> There is progress because even with council it is differentiated, when we register, we no longer fall under social work. That is one of the progresses that has happened. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

> It is important that you register to be recognised and be noted that you are okay to work with children and you don't have a criminal record. (CYCC A; CYCW P2)

The researchers observed that the participants had a strong opinion that professional registration with the SACSSP would enhance the recognition of CYC as a profession. The participants indicated that professional CYCWs register to gain recognition from the different role players in CYC such as policymakers and the Department of Social Development (DSD) which the participants referred to as the government:

> To register it will help you a lot because you can't practise and work with the child if the government doesn't know you do. (CYCC A; CYCW P3)

> As professional child and youth care workers we need to be recognised by the government like any other professions out there. (CYCC A; CYCW P2)

Some of the participants confirmed that proof of registration with the SACSSP is essential as employers are only allowed to employ registered CYCWs:

> People are registering by paying for council and taking it serious as many organisations are saying they are no longer going to be allowed to employ a person who is not paying for council ... Everyone who's practising as far as I know paid for registration with council. (CYCC A; CYCW P4)

> When you register, you get a registration number. It also gives you that authority to work as a child and youth care worker. (CYCC C; CYCW P10)

Accountability was another important perspective of professional registration covered by the participants. The participants indicated that CYCWs need registration to account for their work with children in care:

> There is a lot of things that people can do to children for example take advantage on them … If you're not registered it's not easy for you to be accountable. But when you are registered you become accountable when you are working with the children. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

Sub-theme 4.2: Education and Training for Child and Youth Care

The participants mentioned that before professionalisation, anybody was accepted to become a CYCW – with or without any form of education or training. Originally, some short courses and in-service training were offered in CYC, but since professionalisation an increasing number of training institutions are engaged in formal training of CYCWs, including university courses where CYC graduates are delivered:

> There are institutions that now teach and train child and youth care rather than before it was taught and trained by the NACCW only. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

> I am happy with the path we are moving towards and the direction we are going because we started from diploma to degree, from degree we moved to master's. This tells us that we are on a right direction. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

> Okay, CYC I studied it in Unisa, and I completed my diploma, it is a diploma and I completed it in 2013. (CYCC C; CYCW P11)

Sub-theme 4.3: Attendance of Professional Conferences

Some of the participants discussed the importance of attending the NACCW conferences. They indicated that CYCWs from around the world come together to share new knowledge; however, they also mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on conference activities in the past three years:

> I went to a conference, the people who were speaking were from outside … It was very impactful because they spoke about a lot of things that as a childcare worker I thought we should be doing. (CYCC B; CYCW P7)

> We used to go to conferences, even last year before Covid-19, but now there are no invitations. (CYCC C; CYCW P11)

Theme 5: Aspects of Child and Youth Care Professionalisation That Have Not Been Achieved

Sub-theme 5.1: Lack of Job Opportunities

The participants expressed that an important concern was the lack of job opportunities. Some of the participants expected that professional registration would bring about more job opportunities, especially in the government sector:

> The government promised CYCWs that they will pay them to work in government sectors but now it's not happening, yeah, there's a problem there. (CYCC A; CYCW P3)

> We were told that when we are registered, we will be recognised as a profession, and to me that meant we will be working in more places. (CYCC B; CYCW P6)

Sub-theme 5.2: Poor Remuneration

Most of the participants indicated poor remuneration as an ongoing challenge despite professionalisation. They mentioned that in workplaces, such as residential care facilities, most CYCWs, including graduates, were earning a maximum salary of R3 500 per month:

> But if we think about it for decades, a childcare worker was earning R3 500 in a children's home, even now they still earning that money. (CYCC C; CYCW P11)

> Our rate is not the same as others even though we went to the universities for many years and studied … we are still not getting enough salary. (CYCC C; CYCW P9)

Sub-theme 5.3: Undefined Roles and Limited Recognition by Other Professionals

Although the participants previously mentioned that professional registration is important for recognition purposes, some of the participants indicated that CYCWs are not fully recognised by other professionals. They are still labelled negatively, and their roles, even as graduates, remain undefined. Some mentioned that they are still referred to as "aunties" and "uncles". One participant mentioned that CYCWs are often excluded from discussions about and decisions on the young person's growth and development, ignoring their knowledge and skills in the field:

> It is lacking somewhere, we are professionals … we studied, and we are graduates, only to find we are being called aunties, and uncles which I personally, I do not like it … so if they can change that. (CYCC A; CYCW P2)

> I've heard in another home that the child and youth care workers were supposed to be cleaning the home. I personally do not like that … all I know is in a setting like a residential home there are different departments including the cleaning department, there are people who are supposed to clean the home, not child and youth care workers. (CYCC B; CYCW P5)

> It's important for child and youth care to be recognised as a profession like other professions and be taken seriously because sometimes the information other professionals know about a child, they took it from the child and youth care worker. (CYCC A; CYCW P1)

Sub-theme 5.4: Slow Registration Process

The participants were of the opinion that the process of registration with the SACSSP progresses at a slow rate and that those who have applied are waiting for lengthy periods to receive their registration certificates:

> I think there is a backlog with our registration. Because there are CYCWs that are in practice, but they are not registered. They did apply but they are still waiting. Some are just paying their money without any registrations, because they are fighting not to lose their jobs, I think that's where we are lacking. (CYCC C; CYCW P10)

> You register for child and youth care, but you wait for a long time, like forever. I had to go to Pretoria, and when I got there it did not even take 20 minutes for them to give me my certificate. I did not understand why it took so long before because I always called them and emailed. I had to spend so much money to go there. (CYCC B; CYCW P6)

Even though certain aspects of CYC professionalisation have been achieved, delayed registration processes with the SACSSP, limited job opportunities, poor remuneration, and wider recognition of CYCWs are hindering progress in terms of optimal transition into professionalisation.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the national restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, CYCWs from only three CYCCs in eThekwini, KZN, participated in this study. The option of telephonic interviews was also rejected. New settings had to be approached and only three CYCCs granted permission for the study. Therefore, the findings are not representative of the views and experiences of the broader CYCW community in South Africa and cannot be generalised.

Discussion

The study aimed to engage with CYCWs in order to explore their understanding, perspectives and experiences of the professionalisation of CYC as a significant milestone in this field. Some of the participants initially struggled to understand the term "professionalisation", which the researchers had defined as per the SACSSP definition. This definition is in agreement with Lochhead (2001) that a field is only professionalised when it has proper education programmes and a code of ethics to govern it. Most of the participants demonstrated knowledge of CYC professionalisation and acknowledged that it involves ethics, education, values and training which should lead to recognition and better employment opportunities. The researchers did not uncover much disagreement on the existence of the professionalisation of CYC as only one participant indicated that it is just a myth, and it only exists on paper. However, the participants further expressed distress that the process of acquiring their certificates of professional registration from the SACSSP is challenging, slow and unreliable. This led to an understanding that this aspect of professionalisation for the CYC profession was one of the challenges.

Two participants expressed positive perspectives for CYCWs before professionalisation as they acknowledged the work done by veteran CYCWs. However, seven participants expressed negative perspectives as they were not content with the experiences, situation and nature of CYCWs before professional recognition. The participants mentioned that before professionalisation, CYCWs did not have defined roles. The CYCWs were also regarded as housemothers, housefathers, nannies and childminders. Williams and Lalor (2001, 76) also argue that CYCWs in residential care are considered to be "babysitters"

or "social workers in slippers". The information provided by the other three participants regarding CYCWs prior to professionalisation, was not relevant as they provided insufficient information.

Nonetheless, some of the participants mentioned that CYCWs now acquire skills that are unique and very helpful. They use their skills to observe, encourage and motivate the holistic growth of young people. They focus on their strengths and observe their areas of growth, therefore, most of the CYC skills are provided directly to the young people in their own life space. Some of the participants stated that CYCWs use their values to promote healing to young people. These values include respect, care, honesty, and truthfulness. The participants also included love and support. Stuart (2013, 8) suggests that young people come into care after having suffered many adversities and, therefore need care thus CYCWs should value practising care.

The participants also mentioned that it is important for CYCWs to know their boundaries in their work functions. This will help them avoid having to be involved in duties that are not their responsibilities, thereby overstepping boundaries.

CYCWs should model positive behaviour. The participants suggested that CYCWs should not work with children if they have negative attitudes. It was the participants' view that CYCWs should also be able to work with different professionals, personalities and colleagues at various levels of professional development and from other fields. The participants also commented that respecting the beliefs of others is very important as CYC work involves working with young people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The participants also expressed that beliefs do not only refer to cultural beliefs but include providing young people with a second chance. In addition, the participants emphasised that young people deserve to be given a second chance to break the cycle that has brought them into care.

With regard to aspects of professionalisation being achieved, the SACSSP is one of the important factors as it is the registration council for CYCWs. The participants acknowledged that CYCWs have gained registration under this council and are now registered like other professions. Even though CYC registration is attained, the SACSSP must ensure that the individual has never conflicted with the law. This is supported by Jamieson (2013, 22) who states that the SACSSP and the Professional Boards are responsible for supporting a profession by regulating who may practise the profession. The participants highlighted that CYCW registration leads to recognition by policymakers and singled out the DSD as a major role player in the employment of CYCWs and the professionalisation of CYC. The participants indicated that since employers give preference to registered CYCWs, proof of professional registration has become essential.

Education and training for CYC is another aspect the participants mentioned to be achieved in CYC professionalisation. The participants acknowledged the importance

for CYCWs to acquire knowledge through education and training and even indicated the different platforms for training, such as the NACCW, Isibindi and institutions that offer CYC courses at a university level and produce CYC graduates. Williams and Lalor (2001) emphasise that education is an important aspect of training, not only to improve the status of CYC as a profession but also to improve child care practice for the benefit of young people, families and communities. Professional conference attendance was also mentioned as an achievement. The CYCWs value the conferences as CYCWs from all over the world gather to share new developments in CYC. As such concerns were raised that after the Covid-19 pandemic there might not be a conference any time soon. However, this was not the case, as the 23rd NACCW conference was held virtually from 5–6 October 2021.

One of the aspects of CYC professionalisation not being achieved, lack of job opportunities, raises concerns with the CYCWs. They thought that since professional registration has become such an important requirement from them, it was going to bring many job opportunities. Instead, they have experienced the contrary. In CYC, the challenge of finding full-time employment usually starts when students are in their final year of study. The government has cut back funding for social services, and as a result, employers receive many applications for the same vacancy (Moscrip and Brown 2002). Another big concern is the lack of salary increase. One of the participants indicated that for a long time, the maximum pay for CYCWs in residential care has been R3 500. The participants were concerned that in many workplaces, CYCWs always receive the lowest pay compared to all other professionals. The issue of the lack of defined roles and recognition by other professionals – even when CYCWs are graduates – continues to persist. Their view was also that other employing organisations do not know the job description for CYCWs, and this violates their rights; as a result, they are usually excluded in discussions on the young person's growth and development.

The delays in the registration process cause challenges for CYCWs in securing employment as registration has become a requirement for employment in this field. Several participants reported a lengthy process from applying for registration to the point where they received their registration certificates. One participant indicated that she had to personally collect her certificate from the office of the SACSSP in Pretoria, Gauteng, after numerous unsuccessful enquiries via telephone and e-mail. The participants questioned the SACSSP's readiness for and engagement towards the professionalisation of CYC.

Recommendations for Future Research

The key role players in the advancement of CYC professionalisation in South Africa are the SACSSP, PBCYC, employers of CYCWs, and the government. The significance of the current study is that it will increase the representation of CYCWs in decision-making to inform policy on matters related to the recognition of CYC as a profession.

Therefore, the study suggests that employers should remunerate CYCWs per their categories of registration. The main role players mentioned above should work with academia to increase the number of universities offering CYC courses to promote the rate of professionalisation. Furthermore, the study will further equip the NACCW to advocate for CYC care to advance, thereby offering quality service to social service recipients.

Furthermore, the study recommends that the SACSSP, through the PBCYC, should put more effort into ensuring that all CYCW students and practising CYCWs are registered as stipulated in the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978 (RSA 1978) as this will advance ethical standards and uphold the level of professionalisation in South Africa. The SACSSP should also assist the PBCYC to draw a smooth career path for student CYCWs, followed by auxiliary CYCWs and professional CYCWs, which will be aligned to proper salaries related to each level of registration, in terms of employers of CYCWs.

The study also recommends that the DSD in South Africa should increase the implementation of the integrated service delivery model which seeks to intensify collaboration among social service professionals. This legislation should filter down to workplaces where CYCWs and social workers, for example, meet, exchange ideas, and share their scope of practice, and they should refer to the SACSSP regulations which map the scope of practice. In addition, regular in-service training should be provided to consolidate the role of each social service profession, including CYCWs.

Conclusion

The current study has shown that the passion for caring for and working with young people is still a major motivation for CYCWs to pursue this profession. Unfortunately, the unachieved aspects of professionalisation make it difficult for them to stay in the profession, thereby resulting in a high staff turnover. The present challenges faced by CYCWs are similar to the ones CYCWs encountered before professionalisation, such as, undefined roles; limited employment and career development opportunities; and a general lack of recognition in workplaces and among colleagues. Overall, the CYC profession does not seem to have received successful public recognition despite the increasing need for suitably qualified CYCWs to assist the high numbers of children, youth and families in South Africa facing severe economic and psychosocial challenges.

Thus, policymakers and stakeholders need to be encouraged to take the lead in ensuring the successful professionalisation of CYC. Indicators of a successful professionalisation should include, inter alia, better working conditions; more competitive salaries; clearly defined roles for CYCWs, employing parties, clients and other professionals; an expedited registration process with the SACSSP; and public awareness campaigns to enhance respect for and recognition of CYC as a profession. The researchers recommend that more research be conducted on similar topics or perspectives that will

include a larger number of CYCWs from more CYCCs, different employing facilities, and other geographical locations.

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