

## THE CAUSES OF STRESS IN A CHILD WELFARE ORGANIZATION

- A. The C.A.S. attempts to help people who often have significant problems in a number of crucial areas. In more voluntary agencies, the problems are often less chronic and more situational. As a result it takes more energy to help induce change.
- B. Some clients are often not initially motivated to change and this causes a number of C.A.S. stress.
1. The need to expend more energy to start movement.
  2. Client energy is often directed in a negative manner towards getting the social worker to back off.
  3. Apathy-futility Syndrome identified by Polansky.
  4. The social workers do not see immediate, significant changes in the client situations. We all need to see results at some point in our jobs.
  5. The court process itself.
- C. The identified problems of many clients are only symptoms of greater social, economic, educational and life style problems which often appear to be overwhelming. Often we may feel that our help is only providing 'bandaids' for a limited period of time.
- D. The social worker often has the extra stress of having to advocate and negotiate for the clients in a bureaucratic structure (i.e. housing, welfare, bills, etc.) and this often preoccupies social worker time and prevents the feeling of actually doing 'therapy' with clients. There is sometimes the stress of conflict with other organizations and institutions as a result of the attempt to advocate.
- E. Some clients see us as threatening and we can become frustrated that our attempts to help are not taken as such.
- F. There is the issue of the dual role of the C.A.S. to being an agent of society that is instituted to uphold a social standard of care to children, while attempting within that structure to be a service to individuals who have their own set of unique values and problems. Sometimes these two objectives appear incompatible for social workers in a C.A.S.
- G. Sometimes we do not feel respected or understood by the public in spite of our efforts.
- H. Social workers spend time at school learning about social worker values, ethics and techniques for intervention. The real world sometimes appears to place a higher value on paperwork, accountability, computerization, expenses, recession, etc.

I. It is sometimes difficult to advocate for children and to protect them from harm while still treating parents as clients as well.

**IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT THE SOCIAL WORKER OR CLERICAL PERSON EMPLOYED BY A C.A.S. HAS TO COME TO SOME SOLID, BELIEVABLE, CONSISTENT, AND ETHICAL, BELIEF SYSTEM IN ORDER TO COPE WITH THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES AND STRESSES DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH OUR WORK. THIS BELIEF SYSTEM SHOULD DEFINE OUR APPROACH TO OUR WORK AND DESCRIBE OUR CLIENTS.**

**AT THIS POINT WE CAN LOOK AT SOME POINTS WHICH DO JUST THIS IN THE HANDOUT "REFLECTIONS OF A CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKER".**

The last page of the article provides one possible 'Work Cycle'. Edelwich and Brodksy identify four stages in the development of Burnout which appear to fit within the 'work cycle'.

First stage: **IDEAL ENTHUSIASM**

This period is characterized by high hopes, high energy, and unrealistic expectations. The job promises to be everything, there is overidentification with clients and excessive, inefficient expenditures of energy. This stage is not to be confused with normal enthusiasm for work.

Second stage: **STAGNATION**

The job is no longer considered so thrilling and is no longer the substitute for everything else in life. One's general needs and issues of income, working hours, career development take on importance.

Third stage: **FRUSTRATION**

The worker questions his effectiveness in doing the work and the relevance and value of the work as such. Emotional, physical and behavioral problems may develop at this stage.

Fourth stage: **APATHY**

The worker feels chronically frustrated on the job, yet needs the job to survive. He seeks to put in the minimum required time, avoid challenges and clients if possible, and protect himself from anything that could endanger the secure position that compensates, although inadequately, for the lack of job satisfaction.

\*\*\*\*The authors point out that:

- a. anyone may go through the burnout process once or several times; \*\*\*\*
- b. this process is neither linear nor inevitable, but rather cyclical;

- c. intervention to stop the process may occur at any stage;
- d. burning out is contagious and can spread in all direction; from clients to workers; from worker to worker; and from workers to clients.

### **THE CAUSES OF STRESS WITHIN US**

The absence or presence of the following possible motivations for seeking out type of career may cause and burnout. Get in touch with you individual motivations. All of them when kept in proportion are normal motivations. Remember, everybody is unique and things that are stressful for one may not be for another.

- a) the need to feel needed. However, social workers are 'expected' to put clients needs first. \*
- b) the desire to learn more about ourselves and to resolve certain personal conflicts.\*
- c) the need to exert a certain degree of control.
- d) we may identify with clients and therefore want to help them. In the process we may over identify and cause ourselves tremendous stress since we have touched our own pain and unresolved issues. \*\*\*C.A.S. work may be the most painful area of social services since it often deals with the most sordid, painful, and extreme situations which are often never discussed in any detail within any other setting.

A few examples --- our own possible sexual or physical abuse, as children.

- sexual assault at any age
- domestic violence between spouses
- our own fears for our own children
- our own sense of loneliness
- our own sense of loss (death, divorce, etc.)
- the relationship with our own parents
- unresolved adoption issues
- poverty
- view of authority
- takes us back to adolescent issues.

Also....Remember, we don't have to have experienced the terrible situations to be extremely upset by what we are dealing with or clerically reading or keyboarding.

\*\*\*\* Let's spend a significant amount of time on d). It is often a huge issue that effects all employees directly or indirectly. \*\*\* What are our strategies to cope with this.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES**

1. High case loads.

2. Forced economic restraint.
3. Polarization and misunderstanding of roles and attitudes by various departments.
4. Isolation between employees depending on work stations and locations.
5. Inadequate resources.

Strategies for coping with the above. Small group exercise.

**LIST OF STRATEGIES:**

- a) Have someone to provide feedback and venting.
- b) Discuss some issues as a team.
- c) Plan break periods during the day so as to not to be intensely working at the time.
- d) Vary type of workloads or cases.
- e) Pursue excellence.
- f) Build in schedule flexibility.
- g) Prepare new people for stress and reality so that the work environment will not be as cyclical in regards to stress. Help them and it will have a positive effect on yourselves.