Salient Factors Influencing Resident Advisor Turnover: An Exploratory Study

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**ABSTRACT:** Child care workers have been in the forefront of using their expertise in planning and staffing Community Living Arrangements (e.g., small group homes and apartments) for mentally retarded children and adults. Unfortunately, many child care workers who entered the field of Resident Advisorship (e.g., houseparents) with enthusiasm have voluntarily left after a short period of time. This study examines the results of several open-ended interviews with Resident Advisors working in apartment-based Community Living Arrangements for the mildly and moderately retarded. These interviews were conducted to identify those factors they perceived as sources of job "satisfaction" and "dissatisfaction," contributing to employment longevity. Herzberg's formulations regarding the attractiveness of employment are presented as a logical way of interpreting the data.

With deinstitutionalization a reality in many areas of the country, the number of community living arrangements (CLAs; small group homes or apartments) for mentally retarded children and adults has been growing at an increased rate in recent years (O'Connor & Sitkei, 1973; Vitello, 1976). For example, in Pennsylvania, a state with one of the largest and most developed networks of publicly supported CLAs, there were 2,755 retarded citizens residing in 925 CLA sites in 1977-78. The goal is for 6,455 individuals to reside in 2,152 sites by 1982-83 (OMR, 1979). This growth has created a demand for Resident Advisors (RA), formerly referred to as houseparents, to provide the supervision, training and support needed by the residents of CLAs. Child Care Workers have been in the forefront of examining how their
expertise could be applied to providing quality CLA services for mentally retarded children and adults. Not surprisingly, many RA positions have been filled by those trained as Child Care Workers.

Unfortunately, most RAs voluntarily leave CLA employment with the mentally retarded after a very brief period of time. Dellinger and Shope (1978), for example, found that in Pennsylvania the mean length of RA stay was only 6.8 months. Assuming that: (1) in most cases environmental consistency and staff stability are needed for well-planned, diagnostically responsive and articulated programming, and (2) it takes considerable time for staff and clientele to get to know each other well enough to develop satisfying, supportive, interpersonal relationships, it is essential that the reasons contributing to high RA turnover be identified and ameliorative steps initiated. At the moment there is little if any empirical data identifying the reasons for turnover.

**Purpose and Scope**

The purpose of this investigation was to initially identify salient factors which appeared to be contributing to the high rate of RA turnover, so that a series of well-designed research studies could focus on validating the factors isolated and explaining the dynamics of RA longevity and productivity. The reader should note that this is not a well controlled scientific study and the results should be interpreted with caution, no matter how logical they seem. In essence, the data in this paper emerges from an exploratory information collecting endeavor consisting of several lengthy, open-ended interviews with RAs employed in apartment settings for the mildly and moderately retarded in the metropolitan Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area, whose RA tenure ranged from four months to more than two years in one case. The questions posed to the RAs emanated from their casual comments, answers to preceding questions and impressions gathered from CLA program managers and supervisors. Comments of program developers in Pennsylvania, Vermont and Toronto (Canada), interviewed during the past half year, were also influential in suggesting particular lines of questioning.

**Selected Literature**

The importance of identifying sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction is supported by Vroom (1970). He reported that job satisfaction was dependent upon situation and personal variables and