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## **THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF CAR GUARDS: INTERVENTIVE ROLES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER**

*Prof H Strydom and Dr C Strydom, School for Psycho-Social Behavioural Sciences: Division Social Work, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, Potchefstroom.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In South Africa unemployment is a major problem and many people are desperate to make an earnest living and are prepared to do any job as long as it brings in enough money for a roof over their heads and food on the table. Crime has become a major social problem within the South African society and motor vehicle thefts and car burglaries are high on the list of crime statistics. Police and security protection services are unable to keep guard over all the parking areas and informal car guards did not provide the answer. To address this problem, car watch organisations were introduced in the city centers. Social workers should identify those people who are especially vulnerable, including car guards, and ensure that their abilities and potential are developed and strengthened. The objective of the research project was to study the survival skills of car guards relating to their economic and social circumstances. The phenomena of difficult customers, dangerous and harsh working conditions, and poor remuneration were investigated. A qualitative study accompanied by a phenomenological research design was implemented for the study. Field research and specifically in-depth personal interviewing and naturalistic observation were used as research procedures.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article focuses on the psycho-social circumstances of car guards and the role that the social worker can play in improving the life circumstances of car guards. The problem statement, the objective of the study and the research methodology will be dealt with. The findings of the study will be discussed under identifying particulars, physical appearance, financial position, family life and working conditions. Finally, the article looks at intervention strategies by the social worker in addressing the phenomenon.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In South Africa unemployment is a major problem. According to Naidoo (2003:2), Director of the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (Naledi), 41% of South Africa's labour force currently is unemployed. Especially people who are not well educated or have not been trained for a specific job have problems finding suitable employment. According to the South African Prison Service Report (1989:23), the average person in prison was poorly educated, lacked employable skills, was unemployed at the time of arrest and had limited or no resources in the community. On the other hand, many people are desperate to make an honest living and are prepared to do any job as long as it brings in enough money for a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Crime has become a major social problem in South Africa (Glanz, 1994). Crime remained more or less constant between 1975 and 1982, but increased from 1983, rising dramatically from the beginning of the 1990's (Glanz, 1996:35). According to the Institute for Security Studies Report (2000:1-4), crime figures for 1999 indicated an all time high of reported crimes. Motor vehicle

thefts and car burglaries are high on the list of crime statistics. According to figures supplied by the Crime Information Analysis Centre of the SA Police Services (2001:1), 74 281 motor vehicles (including motorcycles) were reported stolen nationally and 2 999 in the North West Province in 2001. According to the same source, theft out of or from motor vehicles and motorcycles amounted to 151 277 nationally and 6 764 in the North West Province during 2001.

Police and security protection services are unable to keep guard over all the parking areas. Informal and uncontrolled car guards did not provide the answer, as they did not help to combat crime and the public considered them a menace (Van Staden, 2003:5). This type of car guard was inclined to intimidate people, fight with other guards and damage vehicles (*Beeld*, 1998:9; Henriët, 1998:8; Van Wyk, 1998:1). Two informal car guards from Cape Town received suspended sentences for verbally insulting a customer. They were of the opinion that the customer's tip (R1) was hopelessly inadequate for the time (the whole day) they had watched over her vehicle (*Beeld*, 2000:1).

To address this problem car watch organisations were introduced in the city centres. The Johannesburg metropolitan council trained 326 car guards with the aim of combating vehicle thefts, providing assistance to the public and supporting the traffic and police officers (De Lange, 1998:14). The presence of car guards has drastically reduced the rate of car thefts over the past two years in a shopping centre in the north of Johannesburg (Campbell, 1999:1). In Secunda vehicle theft in the town's business area has declined by 33% since organised motor guard associations were established in 1998 (Henriët, 1998:8). Since the introduction of organised guards in Grahamstown there has been a drop in thefts from cars and the vandalising of parking meters has been greatly reduced (Carlisle, 1998:1). The car guards in Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Jeffrey's Bay now also have to be registered, trained and controlled after many complaints were received from the public concerning the bad behaviour of informal guards (*Burger*, 2002:1; Brümmer, 2002:1; Van Wyk, 1998:1).

Potchefstroom also had to cope with a high rate of vehicle thefts (Van Staden, 2003:5) and a lack of job opportunities. Therefore during 1995 car guard associations were established in order to ensure that car guards operated in an organised and legalised manner in Potchefstroom.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this research project was to study the survival skills of car guards relating to their economic and social circumstances. The phenomena of difficult customers, dangerous and harsh working conditions, and poor remuneration were investigated. The second objective was to provide guidelines to social workers in addressing this social issue.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was of a qualitative nature (Babbie, 2001:36-37; Neuman, 2000:417-418) and therefore a phenomenological research design (Patton, 2002:69) was implemented for this study. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche en Delpont (2002:273), the phenomenological approach aims to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives. Field research and specifically in-depth personal interviewing and naturalistic observation were used in this study.

Field research can be described as the observation or participation in social behaviour and the endeavours to try and understand the behaviour (Rubin & Babbie, 2001:388-389). The researchers themselves were responsible for the fieldwork. In-depth personal interviewing using a self-developed questionnaire was used to gain a detailed picture of participants' beliefs and perceptions related to certain aspects (De Vos *et al.*, 2002:302; Neuman, 2000:271-274; Padgett, 1998:373-

374; Silverman, 2000:290-294; Wolcott, 2001:88-90). Naturalistic observation in this sense can be defined as an unobtrusive observation of participants in a natural setting (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001:441).

The universe consisted of the car guards in Potchefstroom. The two main shopping centres, where guards operated, were selected. Purposeful sampling (De Vos *et al.*, 2002:207) was utilised and the sample consisted of 27 guards who were available at the time of the research. All the guards who were approached were prepared to take part in the research. They were able to answer the questions easily and could converse in a pleasant manner. Some of them were initially sceptical and suspicious at the beginning of the interview, however, but opened up later. All the interviews were conducted while the guards were on duty, which had the added bonus of the researchers being able to observe them on the job.

All appropriate ethical issues were taken into consideration throughout the study, including informed consent, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, as well as no harm to and/or deception of respondents (De Vos *et al.*, 2002:63-69; Monette, Sullivan & De Jong, 1998:55-63).

A number of limitations were noticed and taken into consideration in the study. Very little literature is available on the topic and that which is available is not always of a scientific nature. The fact that the interviews took place on the specific spot where respondents worked could have had a detrimental effect on the quality of the responses seeing that respondents might not have given their full attention to the researchers.

### IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS

- Gender

**TABLE 1**  
**GENDER OF RESPONDENTS (N =27)**

Sex	Numbers	Percentage
Male	17	62,96
Female	10	37,04
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

The higher percentage of male respondents can be attributed to the fact that car watching could be considered a strenuous job. Taking into account the harsh weather conditions, the difficult clients, the long and awkward working hours and the possibility of becoming a victim of crime, it makes sense that more men than women would undertake to do car watching. Blaauw & Bothma (2003:30) conducted a similar study in Bloemfontein and found that 28 of the 88 car guards were female.

- Age

**TABLE 2**  
**AGE OF RESPONDENTS (N = 27)**

Age	Numbers	Percentage
Under 20 years old	2	7,41
20-29 year old	6	22,22
30-39 year old	6	22,22
40-49 year old	6	22,22
50-59 year old	4	14,82
60 years and older	3	11,11
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table it is clear that car guards can be of all ages, but the largest number falls between 30 and 50 years of age. Because of the strenuous physical nature of the work (harsh weather conditions, long hours and standing), older people find the work very tiring. In the study conducted in Bloemfontein it was found that the average age of the car guards was 39 years (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30).

- Marital status

**TABLE 3**  
**MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS (N =27)**

Marital status	Number	Percentage
Never been married	7	25,93
Married	13	48,14
Divorced/Separated	5	18,52
Widowed	2	7,41
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

As could be expected the group of respondents who were married comprised the largest number (almost 50%). The respondents who had never been married and the group of divorced/separated respondents were more or less similar in size.

- Highest academic qualification

**TABLE 4**  
**QUALIFICATION (N = 27)**

Academic grade	NUMBER	Percentage
Grade 6	1	3,70
Grade 8	3	11,11
Grade 9	3	11,11
Grade 10	10	37,04
Grade 11	2	7,41
Grade 12	8	29,63
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

A number of the respondents added that they had obtained certificates in various fields, such as computer literacy, secretarial courses, security training and a qualification in grain grading. On the whole, it is obvious that their academic qualifications (Grade 10 being the average school-leaving standard for the respondents) were inadequate for them to obtain jobs with a relatively high income.

- Home language

Of the 27 respondents, 21 were Afrikaans speaking, while the remaining 6 were Tswana speaking. Thus only two of the official languages were represented in the sample, of which almost 80% of the respondents came from the Afrikaans speaking group. This is not extraordinary as Tswana and Afrikaans are the major languages of the North West Province, of which Potchefstroom forms part.

- Number of children

**Table 5**  
**Number of children (N=27)**

<b>Children</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No children	3	11,11
One child	3	11,11
Two children	8	29,63
Three children	4	14,82
Four children	6	22,22
Five children	3	11,11
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table it is obvious that the majority of the respondents have children and that the mean number of children per respondent is two.

### **PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF CAR GUARDS**

The car guards were neatly dressed in uniform and did not have a shabby appearance. They looked friendly and pleasant. One could see that some of them were used to the better things in life. As one female guard said: “One’s life situation can change easily. I owned three cars and a spacious house, but lost everything when I incorrectly invested my pension money in a scheme”.

The guards saw to it that they drank and ate enough during the day - most of the guards brought cooler bags with them. Despite using hats and sunscreen, most of their faces showed traces of skin damage. Most of the guards were not over-weight, and four of the guards looked frail and over-burdened. This could be expected, as their work is physically exhausting.

## FINANCIAL POSITION

- Total monthly net household income

**TABLE 6**  
**TOTAL MONTHLY NET HOUSEHOLD INCOME (N=27)**

Income	Number	Percentage
0-R500	0	0,00
R501-R1000	9	33,33
R1001-R1500	10	37,04
R1501-R2000	4	14,82
R2001-R2500	1	3,70
R2501-R3000	0	0,00
R3001-R3500	0	0,00
R3501-R4000	3	11,11
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table it is obvious that the guards' monthly household income is very low at more or less an average of R1470, especially taking the number of dependants into consideration. The fact that nine of the ten female guards were breadwinners is not uncommon, because women are increasingly entering the labour market in order to provide their families with financial stability (Rossouw, 1999:61).

- Main source of income

Twenty-three of the car guards indicated that guarding cars was their only source of income. One female said that her husband was employed, but received a small salary. One male said that his wife worked for a small salary, while two males mentioned that they received a small income from their pensions.

- Supporting dependants on their income

Two respondents said that they did not have to support anyone else; two respondents had to support one person; five respondents had to support two people; eight respondents had to support three persons; five respondents had four dependants, while five guards had to support five people. On average respondents had 3 dependants. Dependants included spouses, children, brothers, sisters, nephews and parents. It could be deduced that most of the guards did not only have to support their minor children, but other family members as well.

- Monthly net income as car guard

**TABLE 7**  
**AVERAGE MONTHLY NET INCOME FROM WORK AS CAR GUARD (N=27)**

Average income	Number	Percentage
R600	3	11,11
R800	4	14,82
R1000	3	11,11
R1200	2	7,41
R1400	1	3,70
R1600	10	37,04
R1800	0	0,00
R2000	3	11,11
R2200	0	0,00
R2400	1	3,70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

It can be concluded that guards receive an average amount of more or less R1 340 per month. The findings from this table correspond closely with their total monthly household income (see Table 6). This indicates that the income as a car guard is the only family income in most cases. In Johannesburg the car guards receive around R1 800 a month and are given incentives (Campbell, 1999:1), while in Bloemfontein the average monthly income is about R1 350 (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30). In comparison, the average income of the car guard is R5,70 per hour, while R5,00 per hour is the minimum wage of a domestic servant as set by the government (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30).

Taking into account the number of dependants, their income can be regarded as very low. In the Living Standards Development Survey poor people are defined in absolute terms as those whose cut-off expenditure level was below R301 per month per 'adult equivalent' (De Jongh 2002:445). Most of the car guards felt that they struggled to support their families financially and that no luxuries could be afforded. Only two of the guards had their own cars.

It is the responsibility of the parents to see to it that the necessary means are provided to support the family adequately (Rossouw, 1999:61). Financial stability means that a sufficient income is sustained, which in turn ensures that the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing are satisfied. If the parents are unable to support the family system financially, this will usually mean that the living standard drops. Normally this is accompanied by a possible shortage of food, housing, medical care and greater dependence on others (South African Council for Social Work, 1997:136). Poverty is seen as a contributing factor to social disorganisation, therefore unfavourable economic and social circumstances can lead to delinquent behaviour (Gibson-Cline, 2000:221).

### **THE FAMILY LIFE OF THE GUARDS**

Children are socialised within the family in order to assume certain roles in the family and in society. Forming an identity is also an important facet of socialisation. The socialisation process also enables the child to take on the identity of a particular group as a well-adapted person who

can thus fulfil his social roles properly (South African Council for Social Work, 1997). Class-specific cultures in a society can exert powerful motivational pressures on a person's behaviour (Farrell & Swigert, 1982:199). Society labels people according to their economic and social status and divides its members into lower, middle and upper classes.

Children's self-esteem and identity are greatly affected by the quality and nature of the attachment to peers (Podell, 1989:65). In the words of one guard: "School funds cannot be paid. Our children would also like to have the same clothes and possessions as their peers." The children had to be satisfied with only the most basic commodities. One guard said: "We could have been happier, if our income was bigger". Three of the guards said that, although they struggled, their family life could be considered to be happy.

It was also difficult for the children to come to terms with their parents' work as car guards. The long hours and low pay do not make it a very attractive job. As one guard said: "My children are shy of my work. A breadwinner should have a permanent job". Another guard agreed: "I am fairly happy with my circumstances, but I wish that my family could be more understanding and supportive of my job." Affordable accommodation was very scarce and even a bachelor's flat was rented for about R700. The guards mentioned that their accommodation was mostly overcrowded, some stating that they had to share their homes with 9, 14 and even 28 people. This could lead to a lack of privacy, quarrelling, overcrowding and unhygienic conditions.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

- Expenses regarding their work as car guards

The guards at the shopping centres each have to pay R25 per day to the organisations in order to operate in the parking areas. In Bloemfontein the guards also pay R25 per day, while in Secunda guards also have to pay an amount per day (Henriët, 1998:8). Other expenses include transport costs such as taxi fares and petrol for two of the respondents' cars. Tickets placed on the windshields of cars must also be purchased from the firm they work for.

- Working hours

At one of the shopping centres the working hours during the week are from 8:00 until 18:00; Saturdays between 8:00 and 15:00 and Sundays between 9:00 and 13:00. At the other shopping centre the two shifts are from 8:00 to 15:30 and from 15:30 to midnight every day of the week. The two shifts can be attributed to the fact that the complex has cinemas, restaurants and coffee shops that are open until late at night. They usually work five days and then have one or two days off. The Bloemfontein study found that the car guards worked an average of 9,2 hours per day (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30). In Secunda the hours are between 8:00 and 17:00 at the shopping centres, but they can also guard cars at the restaurant in the evenings (Henriët, 1998:8). The guards seldom take breaks during their shifts. They try to work all their shifts as the principle of "no work, no pay" is applicable. In other words, if they are ill or injured, they have no income. There are a few guards who are on stand-by to fill in during sicknesses or holidays.

- Reasons for becoming a car guard

The guards mentioned the following reasons for becoming car guards:

"It was the only job I could get." (17)

"I was retrenched as a result of affirmative action." (5)

"I accepted a retirement package." (3)

“I thought that I would be able to make a lot of money.” (1)

“I could not keep my previous job, due to ill health.”

“I used to do security work, therefore I like this type of job.”

“My two sons were killed in motor car accidents, and I felt that I had to do something to help me keep my sanity - that is how I became a guard”.

“In the beginning the job was a challenge, but later I kept on doing the job to help my mother financially.”

It can thus be seen that most car guards took the job because it was the only job they could find. In the Bloemfontein study 78% of the guards mentioned that they would prefer another job (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30). Retrenchment and retirement also played a role in the lives of some of the respondents.

- Working experience of a car guard

Table 8: Experience of car guard (N=27)

<b>Working experience</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than a year	2	7,41
1-2 years	1	3,70
2-3 years	7	25,93
3-4 years	5	18,52
4-5 years	6	22,22
5-6 years	6	22,22
Total	27	100

From the table it is obvious that the majority of guards have been doing this job for more than three years. This could be an indication of the lack of other job opportunities, as most of the guards said that they would prefer a more permanent job, with a fixed salary, including a pension, medical aid and other benefits. In Bloemfontein there are many guards who have been doing the job for more than 10 years (Van Wyk, 1998:1).

- The method of car watching

The guards mentioned that they see their function as more than just protecting the cars against theft. They direct traffic in the parking area, see to it that trolleys were not pushed against cars, check cars for scratches or marks, see to it that cars' windows were closed and the lights switched off, and see to it that cellular telephones, handbags and other valuables did not lie visible on the seats of the cars. They stay alert and are always on the move in their territory on the parking areas. The guards rotate territories regularly to allow each one to work in the more popular parking areas.

They said that they keep watch over all the cars in their territory irrespective of whether the people requested their service. The guards in Bloemfontein also mentioned that they look after all the cars in their areas, because they take pride in their work (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30). They wait until a person gets out of the car before they approach him. They greet the person in a friendly manner and enquire whether they could watch over the car. A ticket is placed on the windshield if the person answers in a positive manner. They carefully note which car belongs to which customer.

When the customer returns, they help him to pack the shopping parcels in the car. They then remove the ticket and direct the person out of the parking space.

- Difficulties experienced

The following are some of the difficulties that are work related:

“Some of the customers are very rude and unpleasant.” (21)

“They say unkind things such as ‘You are culprits’ or ‘Let them steal my car - the insurance will pay’” (20)

“It is unpleasant to work in a wide range of extreme weather conditions, such as extreme heat and cold and thunder storms.” (11)

“Beggars and sellers make a nuisance of themselves.” (7)

“The police and security protection units do not give their full support and co-operation to assist us.” (6)

“People say that they have no cash, but then they buy trolleys full of food - why can they not pay for the service with a cold drink or pie.” (6)

“Some customers pretend not to hear me.” (6)

“Car washers interfere with the customers and the guards.” (5)

“The job can be dangerous, as I have been physically attacked and held at gun point.” (5)

“The management does not pay attention to our complaints.” (5)

“Some people want you to watch over the car, but dodge you when they come back.” (3)

“Criminals have threatened us on occasions that they will kill us after hours.” (3)

“I suffer from arthritis and the long hours on my feet are very painful.”

“Some of the customers deliberately park on unauthorised parking places, such as places reserved for the disabled.”

The rudeness and unkindness of some customers can be noticed as the main problems experienced by car watchers. A wide range of extreme weather conditions and dangers attached to the job also were mentioned by a number of car watchers.

- Coping abilities

The following are some of the coping abilities used by the guards to deal with the problems mentioned earlier:

“I ignore unpleasant people.” (10)

“I say to people to have a nice day even though they are nasty to me.” (8)

“I sometimes feel like attacking them, but we are taught not to lose our temper.” (6)

“I accept the problems because I have to work.” (5)

“I am positive about my work.” (4)

“I will not backchat people.” (4)

“I stay friendly, even when people make negative comments.” (6)

“I try not to be over-sensitive.” (3)

“My strength comes from the Lord and therefore I seek Him.” (3)

“I have become accustomed to the circumstances.” (3)

“I know that I am rendering an important service.” (2)

“I am self-assertive towards the car washers and beggars, who interfere in our work.”

The following strategies were mostly followed by respondents to cope with problems they experienced: to ignore unpleasant people, to curb oneself not to explode in anger, to remain friendly, to keep quiet because they have to work, to depend on the Lord and to keep calm because they know that they are rendering an important service to the public.

- Positive aspects of the work

The guards see the following as positive aspects of their work:

“You really get to know people!” (8)

“People who are friendly brighten up my day.” (5)

“I meet different people all the time.” (4)

“I am able to observe well.” (4)

“The regular customers are pleasant.” (4)

“People realise that we render an important and honest service.” (4)

“The guards support and encourage each other.” (4)

“I learn to socialise.” (2)

“I realise what life is all about.”

“I learn body language.”

“It is a worthwhile and interesting experience.”

“People who appreciate the work we do.”

From the responses it can be seen that there also are some positive aspects attached to car watching. The fact that one really gets to know people, that one meets new people all the time, that some people are friendly and realise that they render an important service and the encouragement from each other can be noted as some of the most important positive aspects of the work.

- Amount paid for service

The guards estimate that the average amount paid by customers for less than an hour is R0,50, while the average amount paid for more than an hour came to R2,00. The study in Bloemfontein also found R2,00 to be the average amount paid (Blaauw & Bothma, 2003:30). The time of the year or month has an effect on the amount – people at Christmas and at the end of the month being more generous. There were instances where guards were paid as little as R0,02 and as much as R50 or R100 for their services.

The guards felt that their income as car guards has declined over the past years as people were paying less for their services. According to Terreblanche (2002:15), the income of the poorest half of the population has decreased by 50 percent since 1970 to 1994 and since 1994 with a further 10 percent.

- Perception of car guards

The car guards mentioned the following perceptions that people have of them:

“People appreciate our work, saying that ‘this is the best thing that could have happened in our town.’” (10)

“People see us as beggars or as a nuisance, saying that ‘you are like mosquitoes that are always around.’”(10)

“People hold us in low esteem.” (9)

“People think that car guards receive monthly salaries.” (3)

“People think that we earn a lot of money.” (3)

“People have no time for guards.”

“I have never seen such a neat and tidy tramp.”

From the previous qualitative comments by car watchers it can be seen that many customers appreciate the service rendered by the car watchers, but others hold them in low esteem and say nasty things to them. Some people even think that they earn a huge salary and should not receive anything more from the customers. From outside Potchefstroom the following comments were made. A customer from Pretoria wrote to the daily newspaper saying that one has sympathy with car guards, seeing that they have to earn their daily bread in a wide range of weather conditions (Prinsloo, 1997:6).

The car guards operating in Secunda once found a wallet and bracelet in the parking area and gave it to the rightful owners. They have also provided the registration numbers of cars driving away from an accident scene in the parking area (Henriët, 1998:8). In Jeffrey’s Bay a number of organised car guards were involved in heroic stunts. One guard captured a shoplifter, placing his own life in danger (*Burger* 2002:1). Some people tell them in a rude manner to get away, while other good-natured folk accept the gesture of having their vehicles guarded (Campbell, 1999:1).

- Type of customers

The guards mentioned that only about 20 percent of the people make use of their services. Regular customers were the friendliest. Most guards could not distinguish a group of people who were better or worse customers. Four guards mentioned that the people with the most expensive cars were sometimes the rudest. Most of the guards felt that there was an equal number of people who were positive and negative towards them. People often asked them for information or directions. One guard mentioned that some people came to her for advice and “counselling.”

- Treatment by customers

The following are some of the remarks they made concerning the treatment by customers:

“People should be friendly and treat us with respect and dignity.” (18)

“They should at least greet us friendly.” (5)

“I do not want to be lectured on the negative aspects of the job I do – people should respond with a firm yes or no.” (5)

“People should treat me in the same pleasant way as I treat them.” (3)

“People should not be rude to us.” (3)

“People should have the liberty to ask us to watch over their cars.” (3)

From the comments of respondents it can be seen that car guards require customers to be friendly and to treat them with respect and dignity. Customers should also not try and lecture respondents on certain aspects of the job they do and should rather only say yes or no as a response to the question whether they would like their vehicle to be guarded.

## **INTERVENTIVE ROLES OF THE SOCIAL WORKER**

Social workers should identify those people who are especially vulnerable, like the car guards, and ensure that their abilities and potential are developed and strengthened (Roux 2002:116).

In order to assist a client to reach his/her potential, while identifying and implementing a solution to the problems, the social worker takes on a variety of interventive roles. The worker's interventive roles constitute the behaviour expected of the social worker by both the client and the social worker to accomplish objectives (Compton & Galaway, 1999:309). In other words, social workers' roles are dependent on client needs (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994:76). Five interventive roles, which could enhance the social functioning of car guards, will be discussed below.

### **Social broker**

A social work broker links the client with other community resources in order to accomplish the objectives. This requires a broad knowledge of community resources so that the social worker can help a client find and use a needed resource (Compton & Galaway, 1999:309).

The social worker can help the car guards to find suitable and affordable housing, as most of them complained about overcrowded and dilapidated accommodation. They also complained about high school fees, in which case the social worker could put them in touch with the educational authorities, who could arrange for a subsidy in this regard. They could also be informed of the possibility of child care grants and be referred to the Department of Social Services, Arts, Culture and Sport.

### **Enabler**

In the enabler role the social worker assists clients to find the coping strengths and resources within themselves in order to produce the changes required by the objectives (Compton & Galaway, 1999:31). The enabler's work is built upon a helping relationship with client systems (Hoffman & Sallee, 1994:86).

Most of the car guards mentioned the negative attitude of the public towards them. The social worker could help the guards to improve their self-concept and to become more self-assertive, so that he/she does not feel inferior or worthless. They should be helped to improve their communication skills in dealing with difficult customers, car washers and beggars. The guards mentioned a number of coping abilities to deal with problems and the worker could help them to enhance these positive traits. Where there are unresolved issues, such as retrenchment and hardship, the worker needs to show them how to deal with their feelings.

## **Teacher**

In the teacher role the social worker provides clients with new information necessary for coping with problem situations, assisting clients in practising new behaviours or skills, or model alternative behaviour patterns. Whereas the enabler helps clients to mobilise existing resources, however, the teacher introduces additional resources into client systems (Compton & Galaway, 1999:311).

The guards mentioned that the low status and poor remuneration of their jobs lead to conflict within the family. The social worker could provide the parents with information regarding child development for coping with conflict and problems of children.

The guards could also be supplied with shopping and nutritional information in order to make ends meet. Because their work is detrimental to their physical well-being, the social worker should provide information on basic health care. The social worker could also arrange for some expert to demonstrate self-defence techniques, as some of the guards had been physically attacked in the past. The guards should be trained to provide a friendly and professional service to customers.

## **Mediator**

Mediation involves efforts to resolve disputes between the client system and other persons or organisations. In the mediation role the social worker assists clients and the other party to find a common ground on which to resolve the conflict (Compton & Galaway, 1999:311).

The guards mentioned that their employer did not pay attention to their complaints or suggestions. In this case the social worker should work at facilitating communication between the parties by encouraging them to talk to each other over certain issues, such as uniforms, two-way radios, registration, training and remuneration. The parties should be assisted to identify common interests and to realise that they have more at stake in having a good relationship than the issue of the specific conflict. The guards felt that the police and security protection units gave them insufficient support and co-operation. Here again, the social worker could arrange for a meeting between the two parties to establish a better working relationship.

## **Advocate**

As an advocate the social worker presents and argues the client's cause when this is necessary to accomplish the objectives. In mediation the effort is to secure resolution to a dispute through give and take on both sides; in advocacy the effort is to win for the client (Compton & Galaway, 1999:312).

With the permission of the car guards, the social worker could present their case to the municipality in order to improve their working conditions, especially with regard to pension and medical and other benefits. The media could be involved in giving positive publicity to car guards. At conferences or meetings the social worker could also seek support for car guards. The public should be educated to realise the important role that guards play in parking areas and be encouraged to treat them with respect and dignity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The work entails long hours in various harsh weather conditions, a lot of standing with the minimum of rest intervals, and the possibility of being attacked or abused. They receive a small income, with no pension, bonuses, medical or other benefits. Taking into account that most of the

guards were the only breadwinners and that they had a number of dependants, there definitely was an indication of hardship and poverty.

According to the police very few car thefts and thefts from cars have taken place since the introduction of the organised car watch system. Therefore it can be concluded that car guards have an important role to play in combating crime. But in order for the guards to provide a good service to the public, certain issues should be addressed. The social worker is the most suitable and best qualified person to enable the car guards to enhance their social functioning.

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