

The disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood: A forensic social work perspective

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LANGUAGE CERTIFICATION

LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the English language editing of this dissertation by Mrs Y van Huyssteen was done by Mrs C Nel.

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STATEMENT

I, **Yolanda van Huyssteen**, hereby state that the manuscript entitled:

The disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood: A forensic social work perspective

is my own work

.....
Y van Huyssteen

.....
Date

ABSTRACT

The disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood: A forensic social work perspective

Key terms: Disclosure; sexual abuse; middle childhood; forensic social work perspective

Working with sexually abused children and conducting forensic assessments is a difficult task for many professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse. In this specialised field, it is imperative that professionals are aware of the disclosure process, as well as what contributes to, or hampers the disclosure of sexual abuse.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood years from a forensic social work perspective. Research indicates that there are numerous factors that can play a role in the disclosure of sexual abuse, but that there are still shortcomings about disclosure in literature.

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach to explore the disclosure patterns of sexual abuse during middle childhood with professionals working in the field of forensic social work. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals who have experience in forensic social work. The interviews focused on the disclosure patterns of children during middle childhood, as well as the relationship with the perpetrator, the responses of the caregiver that is characterised by shock and denial, how long children take to disclose sexual abuse, the relationship between the caregiver and the child concerned, as well as recommendations in the context of forensic social work and the disclosure of sexual abuse.

The data from the semi-structured interviews was analysed and divided into themes and subthemes, which were further described and linked with the relevant literature. It

became clear that the disclosure of child sexual abuse is a complex phenomenon, which is valuable when working in the forensic context.

The disclosure process was explored, and certain factors were highlighted that contribute to the disclosure of sexual abuse, as well as factors that hamper disclosure. Some of these factors include intra- and extra-familial abuse, the developmental stage of the child concerned, negative responses from the caregiver, the presence of threats and grooming as characteristics of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator, positive attachment with a caregiver that contributes to disclosure and the highly individualised cases of child sexual abuse. The respondents also made practical recommendations regarding disclosure and indicated how important it is to have the necessary training in order to handle the disclosure of sexual abuse in the correct manner.

OPSOMMING

Die onthulling van seksuele misbruik gedurende die middelkinderjare: 'n Forensiese maatskaplike werk perspektief.

Sleuteltermes: Onthulling; seksuele misbruik; middelkinderjare; forensiese maatskaplike werk perspektief

Die forensiese assessering van kinders wat seksueel misbruik word, is dikwels 'n moeilike taak wat baie professionele persone in die gesig staar wat in die veld van seksuele misbruik werk. In hierdie spesialis-veld, is dit noodsaaklik dat professionele persone bewus is van die onthullingsproses, sowel as van faktore wat tot die onthulling van seksuele misbruik bydra of dit beperk.

Die doel van die studie was om die onthulling van seksuele misbruik gedurende die middelkinderjare vanuit 'n forensiese maatskaplike werk perspektief te verken en te beskryf. Navorsing dui aan dat daar verskeie faktore is wat 'n rol kan speel in die onthulling van seksuele misbruik, maar dat daar steeds tekortkominge oor onthulling in die literatuur bestaan.

Die navorser het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering tot die onthullingspatrone van seksuele misbruik gedurende die middelkinderjare gevolg met professionele persone wat in die veld van forensiese maatskaplike werk spesialiseer. Agt semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer met professionele persone wat ervaring het in forensiese maatskaplike werk. Die onderhoude het gefokus op die onthullingspatrone van kinders tydens die middelkinderjare, sowel as die verhouding met die oortreder, die reaksie van die versorger wat gekenmerk word deur skok en ontkenning, die tydsverloop totdat kinders 'n onthulling van seksuele misbruik maak, die verhouding tussen die versorger en die betrokke kind, sowel as aanbevelings in die konteks van forensiese maatskaplike werk en die onthulling van seksuele misbruik.

Die data van die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is ontleed en in temas en sub-temas verdeel, wat verder beskryf en verbind is met relevante literatuur. Dit het duidelik geword dat die onthulling van seksuele misbruik 'n komplekse fenomeen is, wat baie waardevol is wanneer daar in die forensiese konteks gewerk word.

Die onthullingsproses is verken en verskeie faktore is uitgewys wat bydra tot die onthulling van seksuele misbruik, sowel as faktore wat onthulling beperk. Sommige van hierdie faktore sluit in intra- en ekstra familiêre misbruik, die ontwikkelingsvlak van die betrokke kind, negatiewe response van die versorger, die teenwoordigheid van dreigemente en seksuele aanvoring as eienskappe van die verhouding tussen die kind en die oortreder, positiewe binding met die versorger wat bydrae tot onthulling en die hoogs geïndividualiseerde gevalle van seksuele misbruik in kinders. Die respondente het ook praktiese aanbevelings gemaak rakende onthulling en aangedui hoe belangrik dit is om die nodige opleiding te hê ten einde die onthulling van seksuele misbruik op die korrekte wyse te hanteer.

FOREWORD

The article format was chosen in accordance with regulations A.11.2.5 for the degree MA (Social Work in Forensic Practice). The article will comply with the requirements of the journal, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AUTHORS

SOCIAL WORK/MAATSKAPLIKE WERK

The article format was chosen in accordance with regulations A.11.2.5 for the degree MA (Social Work in Forensic Practice). The article will comply with the requirements of the journal, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*. The journal publishes articles, brief communications, book reviews and commentary articles already published from the field of Social Work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style of presentation does not conform to the practice. Commentary on articles already published in the Journal must be submitted with appropriate captions, the name(s) and address (es) of the author(s), preferably not exceeding 5 pages. The entire manuscript must be submitted, plus one clear copy as well as a diskette with all the text, preferably in MS Word (Word Perfect) or ACSII. Manuscripts must be typed, double spaced on the side of the A4 paper only. Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word for word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s), year of publication and the page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1976:12). More details concerning sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors.

SECTION A:

THE DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: A FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many children find it difficult to talk about their experiences of being sexually abused (Jensen *et al.*, 2005:1396). According to Collings *et al.* (2005:270–271), studies of disclosure in child sexual abuse indicate that disclosure tends to be the exception, rather than the norm, with estimates of non-disclosure varying from 33% to 92% for girls and from 42% to 100% for boys. A concerning dynamic in the trauma of child sexual abuse occurs when the child victim delays or completely withholds disclosure of the sexual abuse (Alaggia, 2004:1214). The researcher is of the opinion that the disclosure of sexual abuse is one of the most important facets of sexual abuse and one of which professionals should have some knowledge. If the dynamics of this process is not understood, it may have devastating consequences. In 2002 Paine and Hansen (cited in Alaggia 2004:1214), made the following statement:

“A child’s self-disclosure of sexual abuse is a critical component in initiating intervention to halt the abuse, address its immediate effects and decrease the likelihood of negative long-term outcome”.

According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1156) further investigation is needed, especially in relation to how children disclose such sexual abuse experiences. They further state

that research to date has revealed two key findings: delays in disclosure in children are common and a significant proportion of children do not disclose until adulthood. In addition, a significant number of children deny that they were abused, even when corroborative evidence is available that abuse occurred and recant allegations of abuse are later substantiated. It is therefore of central importance to the welfare of children that the dynamics involved in the disclosure process are investigated and understood (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1156).

The undesirable consequences of such non-disclosure of sexual abuse sparked a debate in child abuse literature regarding the process of disclosure. This debate tends to focus on issues relating to the reasons why victimised children do not disclose and patterns of disclosure in child sexual abuse (Collings *et al.*, 2005:271).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The sexual abuse of children has enjoyed increased attention, both in the media and in the empirical research field. The sexual abuse of children is not new in South Africa (Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith, 2004:23) and it has an enormous impact on the victim, as well as on the community as a whole. Sexual abuse can be described as any action that violates, humiliates or exploits the body or dignity of the victim, and which has an element of a sexual nature (Lawrence & Janse van Rensburg, 2006:128). For an act that can be seen as a sexual crime, the victim's consent is not consciously given. However, in certain cases involving a minor, a case for a sexual crime can be made even if consent was given, as a child cannot give consent to any sexual act (Lawrence & Janse van Rensburg, 2006:128). From a legal point of view, sexual abuse is defined by the Criminal Law Sexual Offence Amendment Act, 32 of 2007 as any person that engages a child (a person under the age of 18) in a sexual act without the child's consent.

Statistics about sexual abuse in South Africa are concerning and show the extent of this problem. According to the South African Police Service (SAPS) (2013), no comparisons can be made between the number of sexual abuse cases before and after December 2007, when rape was exclusively described as vaginal penetration by

a male sex organ. The concept of sexual abuse, as a legal definition, now includes a variety of descriptions that were never part of rape or indecent assault as defined in previous legislation, and sexual abuse now includes sex work, pornography, immorality and human trafficking, as well as any form of penetration, as stated in the Criminal Law Sexual Offence Amendment Act, 32 of 2007. The new Criminal Law Sexual Offence Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, brings about changes to the definition of rape and other sexual offences, and ultimately to the procedure for prosecuting such cases and to the evidence required to obtain a conviction, thus providing a whole new legislative framework (Kaliski, 2006:162).

During 2010/2011, 63 603 sexual offences were reported to the SAPS, and 28 128 of these cases include children younger than 18 years (SAPS, 2013). These statistics only represent the cases that were reported and are the latest statistics available on the sexual abuse of children. The true extent of sexual abuse is far worse, as South Africa is known for its culture of underreporting of sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2012:1). Van Niekerk (2006:101) alleges that most professionals working in the field of child protection, as well as in the management of sexual crimes against children, note that there is an underreporting of sexual abuse by children and their families; hence the true nature of statistics are unknown.

It is widely acknowledged that cases of child sexual abuse that are reported to the police represent no more than the tip of the iceberg (Collings, 2006:34). Empirical findings show that the vast majority of child sexual abuse cases are never reported to the police or welfare agencies (Collings, 2006:34). This is evident in studies done by Collings (2006:34), where a sample of 246 South African woman, 120 respondents (48,8%) reported at least one childhood sexual abuse experience prior to their eighteenth birthday, with only 18% of child sexual abuse victims indicating that they had ever reported their abuse to the police or to a welfare agency. Only one in five child sexual abuse victims make immediate (same-day) disclosures (Collings, 2006:36).

It is evident that a relatively low percentage of victims disclose the fact that they have been sexually abused, either to the police or to a welfare organisation. It is thus

important to know why children come forward with disclosures. Are there any factors that contribute to children making disclosures, making it easier for professionals working in the field of sexual abuse to report the crime, and lessening the effects that this sexual abuse can have on the development of the sexually abused child?

It is very important that, before the nature and extent of child sexual abuse disclosure can be discussed, a clear understanding of what is meant by the term of “disclosure” (Collings, 2006:43). According to Collings (2006:34), formal disclosures can be seen as someone making a formal statement to the authorities, and informal disclosures refer to children telling someone about their abuse. For the purposes of this study, the researcher will make use of the latter definition, where a child informally discloses to someone about the sexual abuse, followed up by a formal disclosure, where a formal statement is made to the authorities.

Theories concerning sexual abuse disclosure have largely focused on understanding and explaining non-disclosure, delayed disclosure and recantation (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:245). However, the question remains: what prompts children to ultimately disclose sexual abuse? Very little attention has been paid to understanding motivations for, and factors that facilitate disclosure (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:245–246; McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:930). According to McElvaney *et al.* (2014:931), the process of disclosure is described as a fundamentally dialogical process that becomes easier if children perceive they have an opportunity to tell, involving enough privacy and prompts to help them share their experiences, and where there is a connection established or a shared understanding of the substance of the disclosure. The importance of others’ responses, especially the mother’s, to disclosure is central (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:931). Jensen *et al.* (2005:1407–1409) and Malloy *et al.* (2013:246) confirm the above by stating that the disclosure process seems to be facilitated when the possibility of abuse was addressed or activated in some way, resulting in a joint context that establishes a shared frame of reference to the sensitive topic. An example of this is viewing a programme on television where the topic of sexual abuse is discussed. The victim can feel that there is an opportunity to talk about his/her own sexual abuse and use it as a frame of reference to disclose his/her own sexual abuse. This setting creates the right context to discuss this sensitive topic. The

probability for disclosure is enhanced if the child perceives that there is an opportunity to talk, a purpose for speaking and a connection to what they are talking about (Jensen *et al.*, 2005:1409). It may be difficult for children to initiate discussions about sexual abuse, especially given the nature of the topic and the typical lack of conventional scripts for discussing these issues (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:246).

According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:526–528), there are numerous factors influencing the disclosure process. Some of these factors include the following:

- Developmental factors
- Gender
- Type of abuse: intrafamilial versus extrafamilial
- Fear of negative consequences and
- Perceptions of responsibility.

Alaggia (2004:1215–1216) and McElvaney *et al.* (2014:934–939) add to the above factors by including factors such as being believed, being asked, shame/self-blame, fears and concerns for self and others, peer influence, age, relationship to the perpetrator and cultural considerations.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher wants to focus on the child in middle childhood. Louw *et al.* (2004:326) and Kruger and Spies (2006:159) refer to middle childhood as the pre-adolescent stage of life that begins around age seven, approximately primary school age, and ends around the eleventh or twelfth year. Middle childhood is significant in terms of the cognitive, social and emotional development that takes place during this stage (Louw *et al.*, 2004:326). According to Papalia *et al.* (2008:329), this stage is also called the school years, which is the central experience during this time. Children in this phase make major advances in thinking, moral judgement, memory and in literacy. Individual differences become more evident and the peer group become more influential than before (Papalia *et al.*, 2008:329). Children in the middle childhood years can perform many tasks at a much higher level (Poole *et al.*, 2007:351). At this developmental stage, they know and experience what is happening to them, which makes the sexual abuse very traumatic. The

development of children in middle childhood has undergone significant changes – they are able to think more concrete, their memory has enhanced and their language abilities have also improved in that they can express themselves more verbally than before. The researcher is of the opinion that the child in middle childhood is able to provide more detail regarding the sexual abuse and is often the most targeted. Paine and Hansen (2002:274) confirm this statement by adding that preschool children are more likely to disclose sexual abuse accidentally and in response to a precipitating event, while older children are more likely to disclose in a purposeful manner.

The stage of development during which the abuse occurs is relevant, as development in this stage may be adversely affected (Spies, 2006:53). If one developmental stage is affected, the proceeding stages will also be affected. It is important to note that children internalises certain messages to create an internal working model, which will ultimately become the base from which the child will respond to, or interact with the outer world (Spies, 2006:53). Therefore, a child who has been sexually abused will internalise information that will influence that child's behaviour and impact on the child's life in various ways (Spies, 2006:53). The impact of child sexual abuse is profound and include a feeling of loss and powerlessness, a low self-esteem, anger and hostility, guilt and shame, avoidance of intimacy, inappropriate sexual behaviour and self-destructive behaviour and dissociation (Spies, 2006:53–58). The most pervasive consequence of sexual abuse trauma is the loss of a childhood that a child has never experienced.

The process through which a child discloses sexual abuse is probably one of the most important factors of child sexual abuse and plays an integral part of any case of child sexual abuse. The researcher is of the opinion that disclosure is one of the most important aspects that need to take place before a case of child sexual abuse can be opened at the authorities or a welfare organisation. Unfortunately, children who have been sexually abused often do not tell and fail to disclose sexual abuse until adulthood (Fouché, 2006:211; Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:526).

Because there is often little, if any, physical evidence of sexual abuse, intervention depends heavily on children's disclosure (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:526; Paine &

Hansen, 2002:272). Children often have fears of retribution and abandonment, feelings of complicity, embarrassment, guilt and shame – all of which contribute to silencing children and inhibiting their disclosures (Cronch *et al.*, 2006:196; Schaeffer *et al.*, 2011:347; Fouché, 2006:211). Despite these obstacles, some children do come forward, taking the brave step to reveal their victimisation (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:526).

Few of the studies available in literature contain data on the type of confidant the child chooses towards whom to disclose the sexual abuse initially (Paine & Hansen, 2002:278). It is widely believed that perceived support is an important factor mitigating children's willingness to spontaneously disclose sexual abuse (Paine & Hansen, 2002:279). Paine and Hansen (2002:279) found that children whose mothers were non-supportive were significantly more likely to recant their initial disclosure of abuse than children whose mothers were supportive.

A review of literature on children's disclosure of child sexual abuse concludes that, although there is a sizable body of literature on child sexual abuse, there is a need for more research on the circumstances surrounding children's disclosures of abuse (Jensen *et al.*, 2005:1397). Few studies provide data regarding children's impetus for disclosure or for the circumstances that may facilitate disclosure (Jensen *et al.*, 2005:1397; Malloy *et al.*, 2013:245). A child's self-disclosure of sexual abuse is a critical component in initiating intervention to halt abuse, addressing its immediate effects and decreasing the likelihood of negative long-term outcomes.

Children's ability and willingness to report their victimisation plays a critical role in legal and therapeutic intervention (Paine & Hansen, 2002:271–272). Considerably less research has focused on who children decide to tell about sexual abuse and why, and what influences their decisions to disclose sexual abuse (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:245). For theoretical and practical reasons, we must understand what motivates children's disclosure of sexual abuse. For theoretical reasons, it is important to understand how abused children reveal transgressions to others, and whether there are developmental or other differences in how and when they do so. Practically, understanding children's sexual abuse disclosure patterns, including why and whom they tell, can help the legal

and child protection systems detect and respond to sexual abuse effectively, whereas non-disclosure and delayed disclosure prevent the timely treatment of victims and the prosecution of offenders (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:245–246).

Social workers specialising in the field of forensic social work and forensic assessments assist children that have been victims of sexual abuse. For the social worker to intervene, the child must have made a disclosure of sexual abuse, or there must be a suspicion of alleged sexual abuse with the child. These suspicions usually come from concerns that parents, teachers, family members or other people may have. Despite the sizeable body of literature on child sexual abuse, many researchers and professionals working in the field have identified the need for increased knowledge regarding the circumstances of children's disclosures (Paine & Hansen, 2002:273). As mentioned, very few studies provide data on the impetus for disclosure or circumstances that facilitate disclosure (Paine & Hansen, 2002:291; Jensen *et al.*, 2005:1397). Much of the existing literature aimed at understanding children's disclosure of sexual abuse has been restricted in the sense that either that the research is retrospective, involving adult survivors questioned about their disclosure experiences as children, or children are questioned in laboratory analogue settings about the disclosure of adult wrongdoing in hypothetical vignettes (Malloy *et al.*, 2013:246).

What then determines disclosure of sexual abuse when an abusive event has occurred? The abovementioned information clearly indicates that there is a gap in literature regarding the circumstances that facilitate the disclosure of sexual abuse in children. What can be seen as the contributing factors that prompt the disclosure of sexual abuse in children in spite of all the odds against disclosing sexual abuse? In South Africa, with its unique challenges, it is imperative to know children's reasons for the disclosure of sexual abuse in order to detect and respond to sexual abuse effectively – in that way, the legal and child protection systems will also be assisted.

With the above information in mind, the following research question can be formulated: What are the reasons for the disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood?

3. AIM

To explore and describe disclosure of sexual abuse during the middle childhood years from a forensic social work perspective.

4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

When social workers practising forensic social work understand the reasons why children disclose sexual abuse, they will be able to deal with it more effectively. Knowledge concerning motivations for disclosure may aid in designing appropriate prevention programmes and interviewing strategies that are most likely to elicit disclosures from abused children. The long-term negative effects of abuse can also be prevented if a disclosure was made in a short period of time after an abusive incident has occurred. The researcher also aimed to elucidate the phenomenon and provide professionals with new approaches to the disclosure of sexual abuse in children and to build a foundation for universal/general ideas and theories that can later be utilised to undertake a more comprehensive study of the phenomenon.

5. TERMINOLOGY

5.1 DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The “disclosure of sexual abuse” is a difficult concept to define and literature has different interpretations regarding this term. Sorenson and Snow (1991) and Summit (1983) (cited in Hershkowitz *et al.*, 2007:112) describe disclosure of sexual abuse as gradual, a process with definable phases rather than a single event. In 2005, Ceci and Bruck (cited in Hershkowitz *et al.*, 2007:112) concurred that the majority of literature claims disclosure of sexual abuse as a process, yet they stated that based on a review of research, very limited scientific basis for these claims exists.

According to Collings (2006:34), it is important that any discussion regarding the nature and extent of child sexual abuse disclosure needs to be preceded by a clear understanding of what is meant by the term. Collings (2006:34) further states that a formal disclosure of abuse is someone making a formal statement to the authorities,

and an informal disclosure is a child telling someone about his/her abuse. It is the opinion of the researcher that the disclosure of sexual abuse of children in the South African context usually include both a formal and informal disclosure. Victims of child sexual abuse disclose informally, prior to a formal disclosure being made to the relevant authorities.

For the purpose of this study, the term “disclosure of sexual abuse” will refer to both formal and informal disclosures. From the literature, disclosure can thus be described as an ongoing process, rather than a once-off incident. An understanding of how and under which circumstances a child discloses abuse is essential and necessary in order to assist and empower the sexually abused child.

5.2 MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Piaget classifies middle childhood as children who enter the stage of concrete operations; when they can use mental operations to solve concrete (actual) problems (Papalia *et al.*, 2008:351). Louw *et al.* (2004:326) and Kruger and Spies (2006:159) refer to middle childhood as the pre-adolescent stage of life that begins around age seven, approximately primary school age, and ends around the eleventh or twelfth year. Middle childhood is also significant in terms of the cognitive, social and emotional development that takes place during this stage (Louw *et al.*, 2004:326). According to Muller and Hollely (2009:157), this stage lasts from approximately seven to eleven years and is the stage in which thought is logical when stimuli are physically present. The child is also less egocentric, enabling him to understand the perceptions and beliefs of other people, and he will now be able to answer questions about the feelings of others, as well as have a better understanding of the sequence of events (Muller & Hollely, 2009:158). It must, however, be noted that children in this stage still have great difficulty answering abstract and hypothetical questions (Muller & Hollely, 2009:158).

Middle childhood is thus a developmental stage where children has reached a certain maturity in terms of their cognitive and language capabilities, which makes it easier for them to communicate, specifically in the disclosing of sexual abuse.

5.3 FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

“Forensic social work” can be defined as a specialised field of social work practice that is characterised by the social worker’s primary function of providing expert testimony in a court of law (Weyers, 2001:2). According to Fouché (2006:206), it is important for professionals to understand the difference between clinical assessment and forensic assessment. Clinical assessments involve the use of deliberate problem-solving strategies to understand children with disturbances and their environment of family, school and peer relationships. The purpose of the forensic interview is to obtain a truthful account from the child in a manner that will best serve the interests of the child, while also being legally acceptable (Fouché, 2006:206).

Forensic social work is thus the investigation of relevant facts with regard to the allegations of sexual abuse. The role of the forensic social worker is not to give definite answers to questions regarding the allegations of sexual abuse, but to gather all the relevant information regarding the allegations of sexual abuse and to present this information to a court of law (Clark, 2009:70).

The goal of the forensic assessment interview is to obtain an account from a child in a developmentally sensitive, unbiased, independent and truth-seeking manner, so as to support accurate and fair decision-making in the criminal justice system (Fouché, 2006:206). The forensic assessment in cases of child sexual abuse can thus be seen as a fact-finding process performed by an objective professional person for the purposes of obtaining legally sound, reliable and credible information to be utilised in a court process.

For the purpose of this study, the disclosure of sexual abuse will thus be viewed from a forensic social work perspective and not from a therapeutical context.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Since forensic social work is a relatively new field in South Africa, only a limited number of social workers are trained in forensic social work and have the necessary

experience in this specialised field. The research was thus limited to a smaller population of participants who qualified with regard to the inclusion criteria of the study.

The researcher was also limited in terms of the geographical boundaries and only included those professionals working in the Pretoria region, and no professionals working in other areas of South Africa.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of investigation includes a literature study and an empirical study.

7.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review refers to a scrutiny of all relevant sources of information (De Vos *et al.* 2011:137). It places the research problem in a theoretical perspective and aims to get a better understanding of the nature and significance of the problem that is identified (Fouché & Delport, 2005:123). The literature study provided the researcher with a framework from which important questions could be answered, and guided the researcher on the necessary steps that had to be taken in the intended research. According to Neuman (2000:446), the goal of the literature review is to demonstrate the researcher's familiarity with a body of knowledge in order to establish credibility, to integrate and summarise what is known in the particular area of research, and to learn from others. When undertaking of the literature study, the researcher put the research problem in a theoretical framework by studying the literature relevant to the research (Silverman, 2000:85).

The researcher made use of literature from the North-West University library services. In order to conduct a meaningful literature review, the researcher made use of a diversity of databases of the North-West University, including EbscoHost, ScienceDirect, SAePublications, Google Scholar and ProQuest. The researcher also made use of scientific books and journals and studied other fields related to the research, including psychology.

The researcher explored possible themes that might arise, such as sexual abuse, the disclosure of sexual abuse, the middle childhood years and forensic interviewing of

child sexual abuse victims. Other themes the researcher also explored were the development of children, their temperament, as well as the emotional and social development of the child. Attachment styles and the significance of the child's family and socio-economical background were also studied.

7.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The research design is the plan according to which the researcher will systematically work. For the intended research, a pure qualitative research approach was utilised.

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:308), the qualitative research approach is an approach to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon, rather than explaining it, in a natural setting that is sensitive to the people and places that are being observed, rather than using a controlled measurement. De Vos *et al.* (2011:308) continue to say that a particular important factor in qualitative design, is personal interest and curiosity as a source for the topic. The intended research originated from the personal interest of the researcher, as the researcher is a social worker practising forensic social work and works with sexually abused children on a daily basis. As can be seen in literature, the intended study is complex in nature, and an in-depth study of the phenomenon requires the use of a qualitative approach.

In line with the qualitative approach to the research, the study also consists of a descriptive research design. The researcher wanted to learn more about the subject, as well as the important components thereof, in order to describe it accurately (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:96). A descriptive research design was utilised, as there is confined knowledge regarding the disclosure of children who are sexually abused, and the contributing factors as to why some children disclose sexual abuse, while some children will never disclose it. The researcher wanted to acquire specific knowledge regarding the disclosure of sexual abuse in middle childhood. Descriptive research further refers to a more intensive examination of the phenomenon, and deeper meanings lead to thicker description. It presents a picture of the specific details of a situation and focuses on the "how" and "why" questions (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:96). The researcher aimed to answer all the "how" and "why" questions with the research and to understand the phenomenon. The researcher also aimed to elucidate the

phenomenon and provide professionals with new approaches to the disclosure of sexual abuse in children and to build a foundation for universal/general ideas and theories that can later be utilised to undertake a more comprehensive study of the phenomenon.

7.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method refers to data gathering, data analysis and ensuring rigour in research (Botma *et al.*, 2010:199).

7.3.1 Research population

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:110), the research proposal must include information on the population and provides answers to questions, such as who will form part of the population during the research. The research population can thus be seen as the individuals/systems that are selected for the intended study. Strydom (2011:223) notes that in research on child sexual abuse, the population might include social workers working in a welfare organisation. During this research, the researcher included social workers practising forensic social work and having experience in the field of forensic assessments of child sexual abuse as part of the research population. The research population was focused specifically on social workers working in the Pretoria district. The researcher also made use of social workers at various organisations, such as the Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (South African Women's Federation) (SAVF), NG Welfare, children's homes, the Department of Social Development, the SAPS, and social workers in private practice, after written informed consent had been granted to the researcher.

7.3.2 Sampling

A sample comprises elements or a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. It can also be viewed as a subset of measurements drawn from a population in which one is interested (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:223–224). According to Botma *et al.* (2010:199), there are two guided principles in qualitative sampling, namely appropriateness and adequacy.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher made use of purposive sampling. According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:232), this type of sampling is based entirely on the

judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics of the population that serve the purpose of the study best. According to Silverman (2000:104), purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose a case in which the researcher is interested.

A mediator that is also a qualified social worker and experienced in social research was appointed and trained in order to identify respondents that will take part in the research. The mediator was trained by studying and considering all the ethical aspects, as well as the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria. Careful consideration was taken by the mediator to ensure that the best possible respondents were chosen for the research study.

The sample consisted of social workers practising forensic social work in Pretoria, and who have considerable experience in the field of child sexual abuse. The researcher approached the head of each organisation where respondents were identified, who would act as the gatekeeper. The researcher explained the goal and purpose of the research to the gatekeeper in order to gain goodwill permission to obtain access to the respondents in order to conduct the research. After the gatekeeper had granted permission to the researcher to conduct the research, the mediator approached the possible respondents that were identified by the mediator and explained to them that the researcher wanted to conduct research. Thereafter, the researcher explained the goal and purpose of the research to the respondents.

The researcher then made use of the mediator, who approached the respondents individually and obtained their written informed consent to take part in the research. After the mediator has made contact and approached the respondent and they agreed to take part in the study and have given written informed consent, the researcher made contact with the particular respondent in order to conduct the research. As previously explained, the mediator identified social workers at various organisations that represent most of the welfare organisations, including the SAVF, NG Welfare, children's homes, the Department of Social Development, the SAPS and social workers in private practice, as suitable respondents after the researcher obtained goodwill permission from the gatekeeper. The mediator recruited respondents by

means of making personal contact with possible respondents and informing them about the planned research. After respondents had been informed about the research, they were allowed five days to consider taking part in the research, after which the mediator made contact with them again. If the respondent agreed, he/she signed the written informed consent form in order to participate in the study. Only after this the researcher personally made contact with the respondents and scheduled appointments for semi-structured interviews.

7.3.3 Inclusion criteria

For the purposes of the study, the researcher included social workers who were fluent in Afrikaans or English and, who had considerable experience in child sexual abuse, especially with regard to disclosure and the process of disclosure. Social workers who formed part of the research had a minimum experience of at least five years in the field of working with sexually abused children. The researcher also focused on social workers staying in the Pretoria area. Only persons who gave written informed consent participated in the study and was included in the sample. The following respondents formed part of the research:

- Social workers practising forensic social work at various organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government departments, the SAPS and social workers in private practice from the Pretoria region participated.
- Social workers taking part in the study must have had a minimum of at least five years' experience in dealing with child sexual abuse and the disclosure process of children who had been sexually abused.
- All social workers participating in the study had given written informed consent to take part in the research.
- All respondents were fluent in Afrikaans or English.

7.3.4 Sample size

It is generally stated that the larger the population, the smaller the percentage of that population the sample needs to be, and vice versa (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:224). The sample size of the specific research study depended on data saturation. Respondents

took part in the semi-structured interviews as data collection method until data saturation occurred and the researcher terminated the study.

7.3.5 Data collection

Interviews are the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research (Greeff, 2011:342). Greeff (2011:296) also states that semi-structured interviews are utilised in order to obtain the richest data possible.

An individual interview is an interview that allows the object of the study to speak for him-/herself, rather than providing the respondents with a battery of predetermined hypothesis-based research questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:53). There are a variety of interviews that can be utilised as an information collection method. For the purposes of this study, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting information. The semi-structured interview can be contemplated as an interview where the researcher obtains a detailed picture of the respondent's beliefs or perceptions of a specific subject, and that provides the researcher with more flexibility during the research (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010:277). According to the literature, it can be said that semi-structured interviews are undertaken to gather the most comprehensive data on a specific topic (Greeff, 2011:296).

The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to get a detailed picture of the reasons and circumstances leading to the disclosure of sexual abuse in children. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the respondents and utilised open- and closed-ended questions by means of an interview schedule. The interview was guided by an interview schedule, but was not rigid (Greeff, 2011:296). All interviews are interactional events, and the researcher establishes an understanding of what is going on within the individual (De Vos *et al.* 2011:342).

The researcher collected data by means of semi-structured interviews with the respondents of the study (see addendum 2). Data was collected by making individual appointments with respondents at a time best suitable for the respondent, after written informed consent had been given by the respondent to participate in the study. The researcher made use of an interview schedule that was compiled prior to the semi-

structured interview and that consisted of questions relevant to the disclosure of sexual abuse. This interview schedule guided the semi-structured interview, but the researcher also evaluated the information that was given during the interview and asked questions relevant to the answers given by the respondents. The researcher recorded all semi-structured interviews with the respondents for purposes of data analysis by means of a tape recorder. All interviews took place in a private and confidential setting, with no disturbances. The interviews thus took place in a setting where only the researcher and the respondent were present, in a setting that was not accessible to other individuals who did not form part of the research study.

The interview schedule was drafted by consulting with social workers who have specific expertise in the field of forensic social work. Questions were thoroughly discussed and have been well thought through. All questions that were asked during the semi-structured interviews were relevant to the research topic and contributed towards achieving the specific aim of the research.

7.3.6 The role of the researcher

The researcher made use of the following procedures in order to conduct the study:

- The aim of the research was explained to the respondents before they gave their written informed consent.
- The mediator obtained written informed consent from the respondents.
- An interview schedule was compiled.
- Interviews with the respondents were held in a suitable and confidential facility with no disturbances.
- Appointments were made with all the respondents.
- Semi-structured interviews took place according to the interview schedule.
- The researcher wrote detailed reports after each interview.
- The researcher analysed the information obtained from the interview.
- The researcher compiled the research report.

7.3.7 Data analysis

The researcher recorded all the semi-structured interviews on audio. It is important to note that, after completion of the study, all recordings of the interviews will be kept for a maximum of five years at North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

When analysing the data, the researcher considered the words, context and frequency of certain comments (Greeff, 2011:373). The researcher also made use of Creswell's (2009:184) qualitative analysis approach, which uses the approach of Tesch, as is used in De Vos *et al.* (1998:343-344). This approach is divided into three steps, namely the collection of qualitative data, the identification and analysis of themes, which, in turn, led to the identification of particular themes. After data had been collected, it was analysed by making use of Tesch's approach (De Vos *et al.*, 1998:343-344). The researcher got a complete picture of the data, after which one interview's data was studied and notes were made in order to identify unique themes that took the researcher back to the data.

7.4 ETHICAL ASPECTS

According to Bless *et al.* (2006:140), research ethics are developed to protect respondents from abuse by researchers. Ethical aspects are very important during the research and will have its own ethical aspects. It is important to note that the researcher took all the ethical aspects that are applicable to the research into consideration. If the respondents had any questions, they could contact the researcher, Mrs Y van Huyssteen, directly at the following numbers: 082 430 8280 or 012 393 2358. They could also contact Mrs Carolien van Zyl from the Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support on 018 299 2094 or email her on Carolien.VanZyl@nwu.ac.za.

The research proposal was approved by the AUTHeR Research Unit of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University. Written permission **NWU-0027-09-A1** (Addendum 1) was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University for the main research project Forensic Social Work Practice.

The following ethical considerations were taken into consideration for the purposes of the study:

7.4.1 Voluntary participation

Participation was voluntary at all times and no one was forced to participate in the project without penalty. As mentioned above, participants were able to withdraw at any time from the study and was not forced to participate in the research. Respondents were given time to think about the research. The researcher also explained to the respondents what the aim of the research was, so that they had a clear understanding of what the study entailed.

A maximum of five days were given to each respondent to decide whether he/she was going to take part in the research study. During this time, respondents were able to think about the research study and if they wanted to take part in the study. They were also able to utilise this time to inform their families whether they will be taking part in the research and the possible impact it might have on them.

The respondents knew that they could withdraw at any stage and had a choice to participate in the research. No participant was pressured to form part of the study (Babbie, 2014:64). If a respondent withdrew from the research, there would be no negative consequences for that respondent. If a respondent withdrew from the study after data collection, all collected data would be destroyed accordingly and the researcher would not make use of this data. Recordings would be deleted and destroyed.

7.4.2 Written informed consent

Written informed consent implies that all possible information or sufficient information regarding the goal of the research, the procedures that would be utilised during the study, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers that the respondents could be exposed to, as well as the reliability of the researcher, must be furnished to all potential respondents (Ruben & Babbie, 2005:77). The researcher obtained written informed consent from all the participating respondents before the research was conducted. The researcher explained to the respondents what the aim of the study was, as well as what procedures will be followed during the research. It is only after

written informed consent was given, that the respondents took part in the study. Possible advantages and disadvantages were also communicated to the participants.

7.4.3 Deception of subjects and/or respondents

The researcher was not allowed to restrain any information or provide wrong information to the respondents (Struwig & Stead, 2001:69). The researcher thus told the respondents before the research is conducted what the aim of the research was and no important information was restrained from the respondents and no information was misrepresented, so that the respondents got a clear understanding of what the research was about, as well as the purpose thereof.

7.4.4 Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality

Privacy indicates to personal privacy, while confidentiality is indicative of information that must be handled in a confidential way. Information that was obtained from the respondent was obtained in a confidential manner, so that participants could not be identified at a later stage (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:119). The obtained data will also be kept safely at the North West University in a locked, fireproof cabinet, and will be password protected. When using semi-structured interviews as data collection method, the researcher did not write any names down of the respondents, but assigned a code to each participant. Semi-structured interviews took place in a confidential setting with no interruptions. The researcher recorded all interviews, but did not record the identity of the respondent. All recorded interviews will be destroyed after the research is completed. The interviews did not reflect any names or identifying characteristics of the actual participants. Information about the respondents and the actual participants in the study was password protected and kept strictly confidential. The researcher gave a number to the participants beforehand, such as participant 1; participant 2, in order to maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality was also maintained by carefully explaining the general aim of the study and the procedures to be followed.

7.4.5 Actions and competence of researchers

When sensitive research is undertaken, the researcher and fieldworkers must be qualified and equipped to undertake the research (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:124). In this case, only the researcher was involved in data collection, since the data was of a sensitive nature. The researcher is a registered social worker at the South African

Council for Social Service Professions with the registration number 10-29920 and has four years' experience in the field of investigations of sexual abuse of children.

7.4.6 Harm to respondents

In order to protect the respondents against any harm, sensitivity towards emotionality and physical comfort was maintained during the interview (Strydom, 2011:115). The respondents' right to withdraw from the programme at any time was respected and communicated to them and the researcher emphasised this during the information sessions with the respondents. During this information sessions, the researcher explained to the respondents that if they choose not to participate, it would be respected.

7.4.7 Remuneration of participants

Respondents taking part in the study did not receive any remuneration. The participants voluntarily took part in the study and did not receive any remuneration or incentives for taking part in the research.

7.4.8 Debriefing of participants

Debriefing can be seen as the opportunity respondents get directly after the study, where they can work through their experiences. By doing this, the researcher can also avoid possible emotional harm to the respondents (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:123). The researcher gave the respondents the opportunity to debrief, by discussing their feelings of the study directly after the interviews. Debriefing of the respondents were strictly dealt by a person that was not part of the research and was not provided by the researcher herself. A person who would provide debriefing to all respondents, was appointed.

7.4.9 Risks and advantages of the research study

During a research study, risks and advantages will always form part of the research study. The following risks and advantages formed part of the research:

- **Risk:** Possible traumatisation of respondents during the semi-structured interviews
- **Advantage:** Respondents got a chance to talk about traumatic experiences and share it with the researcher;

- **Advantage:** Taking part in the research helped other professionals working in the field of forensic social work;
- **Advantage:** Respondents got the chance to contribute to research, specifically in the field of forensic social work, where there is limited research available, specifically in the South African context;
- **Advantage:** Taking part in this research, contributed to developing new research that might rise from this specific research study.

7.4.10 Setting for the collection of data

The research took place in a confidential area. When the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, it was strictly private and no other person could get access to the setting used to collect data. The comfortable and confidential setting contributed to putting the respondents at ease, knowing that no other person was able to hear what was discussed during the interview.

7.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

According to Botma *et al.* (2010:232), trustworthiness has four standards, namely truth value, consistency, applicability and neutrality.

The quality of the data was kept in mind during the research and there was a focus on credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (De Vos *et al.*, 2011:419–421). The researcher planned to get trustworthiness by making sure that the research process flows logically and that data throughout the process was well documented.

The researcher undertook the following in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (De Vos *et al.* 2011:419–421; Shurink *et al.*, 2011:419–421):

TABLE 1: STANDARDS, STRATEGIES AND APPLIED CRITERIA TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Epistemological standards	Strategies	Application
Truth Value	Credibility (This strategy is used to make sure that the research was conducted in a manner that the	The researcher ensured that proper engagement took place with the respondents during the semi-structured interviews, by establishing rapport with participants during the semi-structured interviews. Notes that were made during

	subject has been accurately identified and described).	data collection were put in a comprehensive report immediately after the collection of data. The researcher also worked objectively with the data throughout the research.
Consistency	Dependability (With this strategy, the researcher ensured whether the research process was logical, well documented and audited).	Data was collected by making audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews. An independent researcher was also used in order to get a fair and independent opinion. Data was presented to the independent researcher and findings were compared.
Applicability	Transferability (The researcher ensured whether the findings of the research could be transferred from a specific situation to another).	Data saturation was achieved through the respondents that were part of the study. The researcher knew when data saturation occurred, when no new information could be obtained.
Neutrality	Conformability (If the findings of the study could be confirmed by another; evidence that corroborates with the findings of other data).	Notes made by the researcher was comprehensive in nature and will always be available for auditing. Data was well documented.

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section discusses the respondents' profile and their perceptions of the disclosure of sexual abuse of children in middle childhood from a forensic perspective.

8.1 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Eight social workers from various organisations took part in the research project. Three of the social workers are from the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit (FCS), three social workers are in private practice, one social worker is working for an NGO and one social worker is from the Department of Justice. The researcher referred to the social workers as respondents 1 to 8.

8.1.1 Age and gender of the respondents

TABLE 2: AGE AND GENDER

Respondent number	Age	Gender
R1 (Social worker)	51-55	Female
R2 (Social worker)	31-40	Female
R3 (Social worker)	31-40	Female
R4 (Social worker)	31-40	Male
R5 (Social worker)	41-50	Female
R6 (Social worker)	41-50	Female
R7 (Social worker)	31-40	Female
R8 (Social worker)	51-55	Female

The table indicates that there were eight respondents, with only one male who participated in the research. From the eight social workers, two respondents were between the ages of 51-55, two between the ages of 41-50 and four between the ages

of 31-40 years. From the research, it appears as if more female social workers are specialising in the field of forensic social work. This is supported by Earle's (2008:23) findings, which reveal that social workers are overwhelmingly female and that the South African welfare service is a female-dominated service industry.

8.1.2 Qualifications of the respondents

The respondents have the following qualifications:

TABLE 3: QUALIFICATIONS OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent number	Degree (B.SW)	Master's Degree (M.SW)
R1 (Social worker)	1	Busy (incomplete)
R2 (Social worker)	1	1
R3 (Social worker)	1	1
R4 (Social worker)	1	1
R5 (Social worker)	1	1
R6 (Social worker)	1	1
R7 (Social worker)	1	1
R8 (Social worker)	1	1

All of the respondents have a degree in social work, while seven of them completed a Master's Degree and one is still in the process of completing a Master's Degree. Four of the respondents specifically have a Master's Degree in Forensic Social Work. Forensic interviews must be conducted by specially trained child forensic investigators (APSAC, 2012:3). From the received responses, it is clear that the respondents have the necessary qualifications to conduct forensic investigations.

9. THEMES AND SUBTHEMES OBTAINED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were held with professionals trained in forensic social work and which have considerable experience in this specialised field. The participants

consisted of eight social workers, who are all trained in forensic social work. The interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and English.

The themes and subthemes can be summarised as follows:

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

<p>Question 1</p> <p>What have you observed about children’s disclosure patterns?</p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Intra- and extrafamilial abuse has an effect on child sexual abuse disclosures.</p> <p>Subtheme 2: If a child does not feel safe enough to disclose the sexual abuse, he/she will not do it.</p> <p>Subtheme 3: Most disclosures of child sexual abuse is accidental disclosures.</p> <p>Subtheme 4: Every case is individualised (unique) and every child handles disclosures differently – one pattern cannot be identified to describe all cases of sexual abuse disclosures.</p> <p>Subtheme 5: Cognitive- and language development, as well as the age of the child, plays a role in child sexual abuse disclosures.</p>
<p>Question 2</p> <p>What were the responses of the people they disclosed to?</p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Denial and shock is a regular and common response when primary caregivers are informed about sexual abuse, especially in intrafamilial abuse, which have an impact on the disclosure of the sexual abuse.</p> <p>Subtheme 2: External factors, such as divorce, can lead to false accusations and false allegations of child sexual abuse.</p> <p>Subtheme 3: The proper way to handle a disclosure is in a professional setting.</p>

	<p>Subtheme 4: The response of the caregiver depends on his/her own abuse history of sexual abuse.</p>
<p>Question 3</p> <p>How long after the sexual abuse did the child disclose?</p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Every child sexual abuse case is unique and it is difficult to establish how long after sexual abuse occurred a child will disclose sexual abuse.</p> <p>Subtheme 2: Extra- and intrafamilial abuse has an impact on the time elapsed since sexual abuse occurred until the child discloses the abuse.</p> <p>Subtheme 3: Grooming and the presence of threats have an impact on disclosure (relationship with the perpetrator).</p>
<p>Question 4</p> <p>How was the relationship of the child that disclosed the sexual abuse with the primary caregiver?</p>	<p>Subtheme 1: A child will disclose sexual abuse more often if a positive attachment is present between the caregiver and the child concerned.</p> <p>Subtheme 2: A child who has more confidence will disclose sexual abuse more easily than a child who is shy, or with a lower self-esteem.</p> <p>Subtheme 3: Intra-and extrafamilial abuse will have an impact on whether the child will disclose sexual abuse to the primary caregiver.</p> <p>Subtheme 4: Every case of child sexual abuse is unique and it is difficult to establish whether the relationship was positive or negative between the child concerned and the caregiver (depends on the dynamics of the family environment).</p>

<p>Question 5</p> <p>Describe the relationship between the child and the offender.</p>	<p>Theme:</p> <p>The relationship between the child and offender is characterised by ambivalent feelings towards the offender: A relationship that is characterised by threat and force on the one side and a loving relationship on the other side.</p>
<p>Question 6</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to add? (practical recommendations)</p>	<p>Theme:</p> <p>Training of professionals working with children on how to handle a disclosure of child sexual abuse.</p>

Question 1: What have you observed about children’s disclosure patterns?

The following subthemes emerged:

Subtheme 1: Intra- and extrafamilial abuse have an effect on child sexual abuse disclosures.

Subtheme 2: If a child does not feel safe enough to disclose the sexual abuse, he/she will not do it.

Subtheme 3: Most disclosures of child sexual abuse are accidental disclosures.

Subtheme 4: Every case is individualised (unique) and every child handles disclosure differently – one pattern cannot be identified to describe all cases of sexual abuse disclosures.

Subtheme 5: Cognitive and language development, as well as the age of the child, play a role in child sexual abuse disclosures.

Children's disclosure patterns of sexual abuse were explored. The responses with regard to these patterns will follow.

Subtheme 1: Intra- and extrafamilial abuse has an effect on child sexual abuse disclosures.

According to Paine and Hansen (2002:276), children who are sexually abused by a close family member are particularly hesitant to disclose their abuse. Research findings also consistently indicate that children abused by a close family member are less likely to report their abuse than those abused by a stranger (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276).

Five of the respondents indicated that the dynamics of intra- and extrafamilial abuse have an effect on the disclosure of the sexual abuse. Three of the respondents stated that when a child is sexually abused by a non-family member, there will be a more positive outcome on the disclosure, namely that they will disclose this sexual abuse more often and quicker. One respondent specifically indicated that the disclosure will be easier: "*Onthulling is makliker as dit 'n buite persoon is.*" [Disclosure is easier if it is to somebody from outside the family.] Another respondent consistently had the same statement and agreed that children who experience extrafamilial abuse, will disclose quicker: "*Ekstra-familiêre misbruik is baie makliker om te hanteer, die kind vertel ook gouer.*" [Extrafamilial abuse is easier to handle, the child also discloses quicker.] Another respondent pointed out that extrafamilial abuse dynamics can be considered as a motivating factor to disclose sexual abuse: "*Ekstra-familiêre misbruik is net makliker, want die kind kan makliker daaroor praat omdat dit nie iemand binne die gesinsverband is nie.*" [Extrafamilial abuse is just easier, because the child can talk about it more easily as it is not someone that forms part of the family.]

According to two respondents, when a child is sexually abused by a family member, it has a great influence on disclosure, in that children find it difficult to disclose the sexual abuse because of the identity of the perpetrator (the perpetrator is known to the victim). One respondent pointed out that when a child is sexually abused by somebody that is known to him/her, they will not disclose that easily: "*Kinders wat slagoffers is van intra-*

familiêre misbruik onthul eenvoudig moeiliker, omdat die verhoudings so intens is en dit vertrouwe is wat verbreek word.” [Children who are victims of intrafamilial abuse have difficulty in disclosing sexual abuse, because of the relationships that are so intense and a breach of trust in these relationships is going to take place.] Another respondent stated that intrafamilial abuse is much more complex than extrafamilial abuse: *“Wanneer seksuele misbruik in die familie plaasvind, is dit moeilik om die seksuele misbruik aan iemand te onthul, veral as dit die ma (primêre versorger) se kêrel of eggenoot is – kinders steek meer weg as dit ’n familielid is.”* [When sexual abuse takes place within the family environment, it is much more difficult to disclose the abuse to somebody, especially if it is the mother’s (primary caregiver) boyfriend or the spouse – children hide more if it is a family member.]

One respondent also indicated that intrafamilial abuse has a delayed effect on the disclosure of the sexual abuse and that the type of relationship between the perpetrator and the child can also play a role: *“With intrafamilial abuse, children are more prone to recant at a later stage, because of the threats from the perpetrator to the victim. It is usually threats that are made to the child, for example where the perpetrator is the provider in the house. They will usually threaten the child by saying things like: If you say this thing, we will no longer have a house.”* Another respondent also pointed out that intrafamilial abuse takes longer to disclose: *“Die kind wat seksueel misbruik word in die gesinsisteem vat langer om te onthul, omdat die oortreder bekend is aan die kind. Kinders word gedreig deur te sê dat die polisie gaan vir Oupa toesluit. Wat gaan van Ouma word as Oupa nie meer daar is nie? Skuldgevoelens is ook meer in intra-familiêre misbruik as teenoor die buurman onder in die straat.”* [The child who are sexually abused in the family takes longer to disclose, because the perpetrator is known to the child. Children are threatened by saying that the police is going to lock Grandfather up and what will happen to Grandmother if Grandfather is no longer there? Feelings of guilt is also more prominent in cases of intra-familial abuse in relation with the neighbour living down the street.]

These findings support Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:537), who point out that children whose abuse was intrafamilial took longer to disclose their abuse than children whose abuse was extrafamilial. Paine and Hansen (2002:276), as well as Collings *et al.*

(2005:273; 281) and McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1156), agree with this statement and state that children who are sexually abused by a close family member, are particularly hesitant to disclose their abuse than those abused by a stranger.

London *et al.* (2005:205) indicate that victims of familial abuse tends to perceive that more negative consequences would result from disclosure, which in turn will be associated with the time taken to disclose this abuse. Victims of intrafamilial abuse may be more concerned than extrafamilial abuse victims about betraying a parent or about potential punishment as a result of their disclosure. They may also fear family disruption if they disclose or feel that they are at least partially to blame for their abuse – these factors may relate to children’s willingness to disclose sexual abuse, which ultimately results in longer delays of disclosure (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:527).

It is clear from the interviews with the respondents, as well as from literature, that intra- and extrafamilial abuse do have an effect on the disclosure of the sexually abused child. Intrafamilial abuse, especially when the perpetrator is known to the victim, will cause a delay in the disclosure of the abuse.

Subtheme 2: If a child does not feel safe enough to disclose the sexual abuse, he/she will not do it.

According to London *et al.* (2005:205) older children tend to perceive that more negative consequences would result from disclosure, which in turn is associated with the time taken to disclose. Sexually abused children face a serious dilemma in deciding whether or not to disclose, indicating that the truth is longer than a lie (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:931).

Five of the respondents indicated that a child needs to feel that the environment he/she is in is not hostile, but safe in order to disclose the sexual abuse. One of the respondents agreed with this statement: “*Wanneer ’n kind onveilig voel, sal hy nie onthul nie. ’n Kind moet veilig voel.*” [When a child does not feel secure in his/her environment, he/she won’t disclose. A child needs to feel safe.] Another respondent also pointed out that safety plays a role: “*Die mate waartoe ’n kind veilig voel, speel ’n*

rol in die onthulling van seksuele misbruik en die persoonlike omstandighede van die kind dra ook daartoe by.” [The degree to which a child feels safe plays a role in the disclosure of sexual abuse, as well as the personal circumstances of the child concerned.]

These findings concur with findings based in literature. McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1159) suggest that the child’s world is divided into those who do know and those who do not know (the sexual abuse). Children must continue to make first disclosure decisions, continually evaluating trust, likely response and consequences of telling in each new relationship. The withholding of the sexual experience on an intrapersonal level (before the child has confided), may give the child a sense of control and safety in an unsafe world. Keeping the secret may be a way of gaining and maintaining control through managing the flow of information and the accompanying distress associated with sharing this information (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1167).

Another respondent stated that if there is no danger for the child to disclose the sexual abuse, it is bound to happen: *“If they feel safe, they will disclose, otherwise not. If for example the perpetrator is in the house, they will not feel safe and they won’t disclose the sexual abuse.”* One of the respondents also indicated that safety is imperative in the disclosure of sexual abuse: *“Kinders onthul nie as hul nie veilig voel nie, veral binne die gesinsopset. As hulle voel hulle gaan hul gesinsisteem verloor, sal hulle nie sommer seksuele misbruik onthul nie.”* [Children do not disclose if they don’t feel safe, especially within the family system. If they feel they are going to lose their family system, they seldom disclose the sexual abuse.] Another respondent also pointed out that safety contributes to the disclosure of the child: *“Hoe veiliger ’n kind voel, hoe makliker en meer onthul die kind seksuele misbruik. Die kind is dan ook meer geneig om by sy onthulling te staan.”* [The safer a child feels, the easier and more the child discloses sexual abuse. The child will also keep to this statement if he feels safe.]

The child’s feelings also have a significant impact upon the willingness to tell about the sexual abuse experiences. Other variables that also contributes and inhibits children to disclose sexual abuse, is the lack of opportunity to tell, the lack of understanding of what happened, a mistrust of adults and professionals, and a fear of

the consequences of disclosure (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:930). They go further and state that disclosure is a fundamentally dialogical process that becomes easier if children perceive they have an opportunity to tell, involving enough privacy and prompts to help them share their experiences, where there is a purpose for speaking and where there is a connection established or a shared understanding of the substance of the disclosure (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:931).

The researcher concurs with the findings from the interviews, as well as with the literature. Children will disclose sexual abuse when they feel safe, meaning that they will be believed when they tell, where the family system is strong and provides enough support for the child. This will contribute in quicker disclosure by children who are sexually abused.

Subtheme 3: Most disclosures of child sexual abuse is accidental disclosures.

During the exploration of the patterns of disclosure, other aspects were also identified. One respondent stated that most of the cases that were referred regarding sexual abuse, were accidental disclosures and the child did not formally make a disclosure: *“Dit is baie selde dat kinders vertel van die seksuele misbruik en dis gewoonlik ‘accidental’ onthullings, waar iemand die kind waarneem en kan sien dat daar gedragsveranderinge is.”* [It is very seldom that children tell about the sexual abuse and it is usually accidental disclosures, where somebody observes the child and notices behavioural changes in the child.]

Another respondent also stated that most cases of sexual abuse in the middle childhood years are accidental in nature: *“Most of the children disclose accidentally and not in a formal manner. When parents are bathing their child, they will see something, for example blood on the underwear. They don’t come out on their own, there must be some form of evidence.”* The respondent also made the following statement: *“Children disclose when there are campaigns at school. They also disclose to friends and that is how parents now know that the child has been sexually abused.* One respondent also pointed out: *“It is mostly accidental disclosure of sexual abuse,*

the child will just make a disclosure. Sometimes they hear other people tell, and then they will also tell. They will just say it or share it, for example they will share it in class.”

Accidental disclosure can be defined as a situation where a second party becomes concerned about the child’s welfare as a result of observed injuries, behavioural changes, and/or changes in the child’s emotional status (Collings *et al.*, 2005:276; Collings, 2006:38). According to a study done by Alaggia (2004:1218) of 24 adult survivors of child sexual abuse, only six were purposeful disclosures of sexual abuse. This is confirmed by Collings (2005:276–277), where accidental disclosure was involved in 43% of the cases that they reviewed. They had a total of 1737 cases reviewed, with the average age of the victimised children 9.9 years. According to Collings *et al.* (2005:279–280), purposeful disclosure is likely to be less common than accidental detection, with children in the middle childhood range being significantly more likely to have their abuse detected by significant others, a prediction that is consistent with the present findings.

From the experience of the researcher, accidental disclosures are more common than purposeful disclosure and the researcher thus agrees with the findings that resulted from the semi-structured interviews.

Subtheme 4: Every case is individualised (unique) and every child handles disclosure differently – one pattern cannot be identified to describe all cases of sexual abuse disclosures.

According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1159), the search for elusive typical patterns and the assumption that patterns exist and can be generalised to all children, may be misleading. The variability and multiplicity of influences operating on the individual child needs to be better understood to help children disclose their experience of abuse (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1159).

Four respondents indicated that children disclose sexual abuse in different ways and that it is difficult to assign a specific pattern to the disclosure of sexual abuse. One of the respondents had the following statement: *“Dit is moeilik om te sê of daar ’n*

spesifieke patroon is. 'n Mens kry verskillende patrone, waar 'n kind onmiddellik sal onthul, of waar jy 'n lang pad moet stap met die kind voordat hy 'n onthulling maak." [It is difficult to say whether there is a specific pattern. You get different patterns, where a child will disclose immediately or where you have to take time before the child discloses.]

Another respondent also indicated that disclosure depends on the individual child: *"Disclosure comes in different ways. One will disclose immediately, while another will display it through his behaviour"*. One respondent agrees with this statement that every case is unique: *"Dit hang af van kind tot kind en die kind se persoonlikheid. Huislike omstandighede speel ook 'n rol"*. [It differs from child to child and the personality type of the child. The family circumstances also play a role.] Another respondent pointed out that there is no specific pattern: *"Nee, elke saak is anders. Dit wissel absoluut"*. [No, every case is different. It absolutely varies.]

McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1171) support the findings of the research and states that children's experiences of disclosure are multidetermined and a multifaceted and multisystemic approach to prevention and intervention is needed. According to Alaggia (2004:1222), victims of child sexual abuse disclose in varied and complex ways that remains multifaceted, concurrent with statements of the respondents during the research.

Subtheme 5: Cognitive and language development, as well as the age of the child, plays a role in child sexual abuse disclosures.

According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:526) developmental factors, particularly cognitive limitations, may inhibit disclosure in young children. Age is also associated with time to disclosure, with older compared to younger children taking longer to disclose (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:533).

Three respondents indicated that the developmental stage in which the child is functioning in, contributes to the disclosure of sexual abuse and certain patterns that might exist with disclosure. According to the respondents, older children will be able

to give more detail with regards to the sexual abuse experience, while younger children won't be able to give much detail. One respondent indicated that the developmental stage that the child is functioning on is imperative in the disclosure of sexual abuse: *“Die kognitiewe (geheue) vaardighede, taalvaardighede en ouderdom speel 'n belangrike rol in die onthulling van seksuele misbruik”*. [The cognitive (memory) skills, language development and age plays an important role in the disclosure of sexual abuse.] This respondent indicated that children will take longer to give information about the sexual abuse depending on their age, as well as the cognitive level on which the particular child is functioning. If it is an older child, the child is beginning to understand the legal implications of the sexual abuse and if there is a good relationship between the perpetrator and the child, it will also influence the disclosure.

According to London *et al.* (2005:208) there is several possible explanations to account for these developmental differences in children's abuse disclosures. They could reflect the single influence or combined influences of linguistic, cognitive and social-emotional factors. Thus, younger children may not have the same linguistic skills to convey their abuse experience, or younger children may not understand the “meaning” of abusive acts and thus fail to make explicit disclosures (London *et al.*, 2005:208). Sexually abused children face many imposing obstacles to disclosure and these barriers include cognitive and developmental factors (Paine & Hansen, 2002:290).

Another respondent stated that the developmental stage the child is in, is crucial in the disclosure process: *“Ouderdom en kognitiewe ontwikkeling speel 'n rol in die onthulling van seksuele misbruik. Jonger kinders kan goeie detail gee.”* [Age and cognitive development plays a role in the disclosure of sexual abuse. Younger children can give detailed information about the abuse.] Another respondent also had the following to say: *“Die emosionele taal van die betrokke kind is ook 'n probleem met die onthullingsproses en oor dit wat gebeur het”*. [The emotional language of the child concerned creates a problem with the disclosure process and about what has happened.] According to this respondent, the child who is a victim of sexual abuse often have difficulty in giving detailed information about the abuse incident, because

of his lack of certain skills, including language and emotional skills. Due to these factors, children will not disclose the sexual abuse or may find it difficult to explain the abuse experience.

According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1158) and Faller *et al.* (2010:574), the child's age, as well as other factors, determine the time to disclosure. They also noted that the course of disclosure varies according to children's cognitive capacities, their social experiences and the particular situation in which they find themselves. With increased cognitive abilities, children become aware of their disclosures and they inhibit their disclosure of events (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1158; Paine & Hansen, 2002:287).

Two of the respondents confirmed what the literature say in this regard and indicated that age is a contributing factor in whether a child will disclose sexual abuse or not. One of the respondents stressed the fact that numerous factors play a role, but age definitely has a huge impact on whether a child will disclose sexual abuse to the primary caregiver: *“Dit hang af van baie faktore. Ouderdom speel definitief ’n rol hier en dit is gewoonlik kinders tussen 7-12 jaar wat aan die primêre versorger ’n onthulling sal maak. Groter kinders sal nie sommer aan die primêre versorger ’n onthulling maak nie, maar eerder aan maatjies.”* [It depends on a lot of factors. Age definitely plays a role and it is usually children between 7-12 years that will make a disclosure to the primary caregiver. Older children will seldomly make a disclosure to the primary caregiver, but will rather disclose the abuse to friends.] Another respondent also pointed out that age is a factor when disclosing sexual abuse to the primary caregiver: *“Die ouderdom van die kind speel ’n rol of hy aan die versorger gaan onthul al dan nie.”* [The age of the child determines if he is going to disclose to the primary caregiver or not.]

Age is associated with time to disclosure, with older compared to younger children taking longer to disclose (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:533). According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1158) and Faller *et al.* (2010:574), the child's age, as well as other factors, determines the time to disclosure. Jensen *et al.* (2005:1396) confirms this statement and agree that age is a significant variable influencing the disclosure of the child.

From the responses of the respondents, age is a contributing factor in the disclosure process of sexual abuse. This is also confirmed by literature that older children will take longer to disclose sexual abuse than younger children.

The researcher is of the opinion that the developmental capabilities of the child is essential in the disclosure of sexual abuse and contributes to delayed disclosure. Smaller children find it difficult to explain and describe the sexual abuse that took place, while older (more matured) children possess all the skills and cognitive capabilities in order to make a meaningful disclosure of sexual abuse.

Question 2: What were the responses of the people they disclosed to?

The following subthemes emerged:

Subtheme 1: Denial and shock is a regular and common response in child sexual abuse cases when primary caregivers are informed about the sexual abuse, especially in intrafamilial abuse which have an impact on the disclosure of the sexual abuse.

Subtheme 2: External factors, such as divorce, can lead to false accusations and false allegations of child sexual abuse.

Subtheme 3: The proper way to handle a disclosure is in a professional setting.

Subtheme 4: The response of the caregiver depends on his/her own abuse history of sexual abuse

The responses of the people children disclose their sexual abuse experiences to, were explored. The responses follow:

Subtheme 1: Denial and shock is a regular and common response when primary caregivers are informed about sexual abuse, especially in intrafamilial abuse, which have an impact on the disclosure of the sexual abuse.

During the semi-structured interviews, six of the respondents indicated that, when children do disclose sexual abuse to a person or caregiver, they react with mixed feelings, including denial and shock. According to McElvaney *et al.* (2014:940), in a study they conducted, some parents described how they reacted with disbelief and shock, even when they believed their children, thinking it is incredible that such a thing could have happened. Parents described the incredulous reaction they experienced when their child disclosed to them and see sexual abuse as something that happens in other families, to other children (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:940).

One of the respondents pointed out that caregivers usually have a wrong response and reaction to the abuse, which in turn influences the disclosure: *“They usually have mixed feelings, but most typically it is shock and anger that they display and this has an effect on the disclosure of the child. They will ask the child why they did not tell them earlier.”* Another respondent pointed out that the typical response of a caregiver is that of shock and denial, but that it also depends on the circumstances: *“Daar is maar altyd skok. Wanneer dit die pa is, sal die ma dit ontken en sê dat dit nie waar kan wees nie en wil dan by die kind antwoorde hê.”* [There is always shock. When it is the father, the mother will deny it, and say that it can't be true, and want answers from the child.] According to this respondent, there is always a mother who does not want to know and then blames the child for the sexual abuse and threatens the child to stop lying about the sexual abuse: *“Ek het nog nooit 'n ouer gekry wat die onthulling reg hanteer het nie. Die ma kan veroorsaak dat die kind die onthulling wat hy/sy gemaak het terugtrek.”* [I have never had a parent who handled a disclosure correctly. The mother can cause the child to recant the statement of sexual abuse.] One respondent had the following to say: *“They usually react with shock, especially if it was somebody they didn't expect to do it. They will keep on saying it is unbelievable.”* According to this respondent, some caregivers do not believe the statement the child has made about the sexual abuse, but after a long process of investigation, they do start believing the child.

One of the respondents highlighted that you get different reactions from caregivers: One that goes overboard about the sexual abuse and another that does not believe the sexual abuse actually took place. This respondent believes that it will have an impact on the disclosure of the child if the disclosure is handled incorrectly: “’n Mens kry ’n ma wat ‘totally’ oorboord gaan, wat onmiddellik druk plaas op die kind. Die ma sê gewoonlik: “Dit het nie gebeur nie, jy jok, jy was uitlokkend en jy het gesoek vir dit (seksuele misbruik).” [You get a mother who goes overboard that places a lot of pressure on the child. The mother will usually say the following: “It didn’t happen, you are lying and you were looking for it (sexual abuse)”].]

According to Hershkowitz *et al.* (2007:113), parents are not necessarily supportive in such situations, with disbelieving and rejecting reactions to disclosure quite common. They go further to say that parents’ reactions to disclosure can be classified as either supportive or unsupportive, with children who reported being abused by familiar perpetrators were more likely to face unsupportive parental reactions than children who reported being abused by unfamiliar perpetrators (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 2007:119). Incredulity is a common reaction when children disclose sexual abuse in that the behaviour itself, for most people, is unbelievable (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:940).

One respondent also confirmed that the most typical response when a caregiver is informed about sexual abuse, is shock: “Hulle is gewoonlik geskok en hul asem slaan weg.” [They are usually shocked and breathless about the possibility.] Another respondent also pointed out that caregivers usually overreact, and this can contaminate the information the child is giving: “Mense reageer nie goed nie. Dit gebeur baie keer dat kinders seksueel misbruik is, maar ’n mens kry nie die ware onthulling nie.” [People don’t usually react very well. It happens that children are sexually abused, but you do not get the authentic disclosure.] The respondent also indicated that the responses to child sexual abuse is never neutral, which creates barriers to disclosing. If a person handles it in a neutral way, the child will disclose. The respondent also pointed out that the response of the caregiver will have an impact on the disclosure.

According to a study done by Collings (2006:36), with a clinical sample of 856 South African child sexual abuse victims, it was found that 26% of the respondents experienced non-supportive reactions from friends, family and community members at initial disclosure, with non-supportive reactions taking two forms: ignoring the child in 16% of cases and punishing the child or pressurising the child to deny the abuse in 10% of the cases (Collings, 2006:36). From the feedback received from the respondents, it is clear that parents react in disbelief when they find out that their child has been sexually abused. It is also clear from the semi-structured interviews that the responses of the caregiver is imperative in the disclosure process and that the type of response the caregiver displays, will have an impact on the disclosure of sexual abuse. The findings also support the research done by Collings (2006:36) and confirms all of the respondents' statements.

Subtheme 2: External factors, such as divorce, can lead to false accusations and false allegations of child sexual abuse.

According to Muller and Hollely (2009:192), one of the more well-known studies was the one that was conducted by Jones and McGraw in 1987, in which they reviewed 576 reported cases of child sexual abuse in the course of one year. In 6% of these cases there were deliberate and/or malicious attempts to make a false accusation, and of particular importance was the fact that these allegations were made by parents on behalf of their children and were related to custody disputes (Muller & Hollely, 2009:192).

Two of the respondents indicated that divorce, as an external factor, can lead to a false accusation being made by the child and that it is usually the biological mother of the child concerned who instigates this false disclosure. One of the respondents made the following statement in this regard: "*Egskeiding is 'n besliste faktor wat in ag geneem moet word wanneer die kind 'n onthulling van seksuele misbruik maak. Kinders word 'gecoach' om 'n valse onthulling te maak wanneer daar 'n dispuut tussen die ouers is.*" [Divorce is a factor that must be taken into consideration when a child makes a disclosure of sexual abuse. Children are coached to make a false allegation when there is a dispute amongst the parents.]

Although children are prone to lie to get themselves out of trouble, it indeed happens that a child might invent an allegation of child sexual abuse, but it is very rare that a child would invent such an allegation without any intimidation or conspiracy from a significant person in his or her life (Fouché, 2006:210). According to Fouché (2006:210) the increasing frequency of accusations of sexual abuse in contested divorce and custody cases means that professionals must be very cautious and remain open and objective in order to guard against a presumption of guilt. False allegations of sexual abuse in custody disputes may be the result of misinterpretation of normal caregiving practices, misinterpretation of normal sexual behaviours in children, or misinterpretation of psychological and physical signs and symptoms in the child (Fouché, 2006:210).

Another respondent also indicated that, when there is a divorce dispute between the parents, it must be thoroughly investigated: *“Met egskeiding ruk die ma dit gewoonlik uit verband uit en die kind word beïnvloed deur die ma. Dit is dan wanneer die forensiese assessering baie belangrik is om doodseker te maak dat die aantygings wel gegrond is.”* [With divorce, the mother usually takes it out of context and the child gets influenced by the mother. It is in these circumstances that the forensic assessment is very important to make sure that there is enough reason for the allegations made.]

Fouché (2006:210) further states that an accusation of sexual abuse is a very powerful weapon in a divorce and custody dispute, and may cause the child to be removed from one parent and placed in the care of another. The vengeful parent may exaggerate a non-existent or inconsequential sexual contact and build a case for sexual abuse. There is thus a need for a thorough assessment of the allegation through a non-leading interviewing protocol (Fouché, 2006:210). From the responses received, it is clear that divorce can contribute to a false allegation of sexual abuse, and that it is possible that one of the parents can impose these false allegations onto the child. The replies of the respondents are also consistent with findings in literature, which confirm that a false allegation of sexual abuse can occur in custody disputes.

Subtheme 3: The proper way to handle a disclosure, is in a professional setting.

Creating opportunities for children to tell about their experiences is crucial in facilitating disclosure (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944). Teachers are well placed to both observe changes in young people's mood and to ask young people general questions about their well-being when such changes are noted. Parents and others need to be able to ask young people appropriate questions to enquire after their well-being, thus giving them the opportunity to disclose and be able to respond to disclosures in such a way that children's need for containment is met (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944).

One of the respondents indicated that there needs to be proper training for teachers, as it will have an influence on the disclosure if they don't handle it in the proper manner: *"Dit gaan oor die ervaring van die onderwyser. Die onderwyser aan wie die kind onthul, sê gewoonlik: 'Kom vertel Juffrou alles, ek belowe dit sal 'n geheim bly.' Wanneer die kind se onthulling verkeerd hanteer word, sal dit ook 'n invloed op die proses van onthulling hê."* [It is about the experience of the teacher. The teacher to whom the child discloses usually say something like: 'Come and tell me everything, I promise it will stay our secret. When the disclosure of the child is handled incorrectly, it will have an influence on the disclosure process.]

Two of the respondents pointed out that, in order to get a proper disclosure from the child, it must be handled by a professional person in a professional setting. These respondents agree that, when a child discloses sexual abuse, a person must have the necessary training in order to get a proper disclosure. According to Fouché (2006:207–208) professionals who conduct forensic interviews, must be independent, neutral and impartial, and should display integrity.

Another respondent pointed out it is best to handle the disclosure of the child in a professional manner, as this will ensure that the disclosure process will be handled correctly and that the correct procedures will be followed: *"Wanneer die opset waarbinne die onthulling plaasvind, professioneel van aard is, en die kind onthul, sal die hele proses veiliger verloop."* [If the setting in which the disclosure of the abuse

takes place is professional and the child disclose, then the process of disclosure will be safer.]

According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1157) it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain accurate information if the first disclosure is made outside a formal setting (to a parent, friend or teacher). Parents and others need advice and guidance on how to ask children questions in an appropriate non-leading manner that will provide children with the opportunity to tell when they have been sexually abused (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944). The reality is that many victims of child sexual abuse first disclose to family, friends or partners who do not have the training to know how to respond to this information (Alaggia, 2004:1222). From the literature as well as the responses from the respondents, it is clear that some form of training is required in order to conduct forensic assessments as to get all the necessary information from the child concerned. Social workers are not properly trained in forensic social work, but due to this scarce skill, continue to do assessments without the necessary training. It is the opinion of the researcher that the professional conducting the assessment must have the relevant training in order to do justice to the forensic assessment process.

Subtheme 4: The response of the caregiver depends on his/her own abuse history of sexual abuse.

Only two respondents indicated that own abuse history of the caregiver has an impact on the response. According to the respondents, the caregiver who has also been a victim of sexual abuse, will react differently to the disclosure of the child than an individual who has never been a victim of sexual abuse.

One respondent pointed out that it depends if the caregiver themselves, have been through the trauma of sexual abuse: “*As die versorger ook misbruik was, is hulle baie egosentries. Die kind sal die onthulling maak, maar die versorger sal hom ignoreer, of ’n tipe van ’n vertraagde reaksie toon. Wanneer ’n professionele persoon dit dan bevestig, soos ’n maatskaplike werker, dan eers sal die versorger dit besef. Dit is asof hulle uit hul eie dissosiasie kom.*” [If the caregiver was also abused, they are usually very egocentric. The child will make the disclosure, but the caregiver will ignore him,

or will have a delayed reaction. If a professional person confirms the abuse, like a social worker, it is only then when the caregiver will realise the abuse actually happened. It is as if they get out of their own dissociation.] According to this respondent, the caregiver usually does not know why they did not believe the child, or why they had such a delayed reaction. Another respondent also experienced the same tendency. According to the respondent, the dynamics of the family environment plays a big part in what type of response the caregiver will have: *“Dit hang baie af van die dinamika in die gesin, asook die omstandighede, asook die misbruik geskiedenis van die versorger en of hy of sy ook ’n slagoffer van seksuele misbruik was.”* [It depends on the dynamics of the family, the circumstances as well as the abuse history of the caregiver and if he or she was also a victim of sexual abuse.]

According to Hershkowitz *et al.* (2007:113), parents’ inability to be supportive may reflect their own distress, especially when they themselves had been abused. This is consistent with the respondents’ findings. Although these findings are consistent, the researcher is of the opinion that further research must be conducted to investigate this phenomenon. From the responses and the literature, it is imperative that victims of sexual abuse should receive the necessary therapy in order to deal with the effects of the sexual abuse, in order to avoid situations as mentioned above. Unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of sexual abuse and the fact that people never disclose sexual abuse, victims of sexual abuse never get the chance to receive this important therapy, and never gets a chance to be empowered.

Question 3: How long after the sexual abuse did the child disclose?

The following subthemes emerged:

Subtheme 1: Every child sexual abuse case is unique and it is difficult to establish how long after sexual abuse has occurred, a child will disclose sexual abuse.

Subtheme 2: Extra- and intrafamilial abuse has an impact on the time elapsed since sexual abuse occurred until the child discloses the abuse.

Subtheme 3: Grooming and the presence of threats has an impact on disclosure (relationship with the perpetrator).

The time it takes before a child discloses sexual abuse was explored. The responses with regards to how long after sexual abuse took place, a child will disclose, follow:

Subtheme 1: Every child sexual abuse case is unique and it is difficult to establish how long after sexual abuse occurred a child will disclose sexual abuse.

According to Alaggia (2004:1222), victims of child sexual abuse disclose in varied and complex ways that remains multifaceted. All of the respondents indicated that cases of child sexual abuse are so unique. This makes it difficult to determine how long after a child has been sexually abused they will disclose the sexual abuse. Every child is also unique and has their own reasons for disclosing the sexual abuse, which make it difficult to establish exactly how long it takes for a child to disclose the abuse.

During the interviews, one of the respondents made the following statement: *“Dit verskil absoluut. ’n Mens kry ’n kind wat seksuele misbruik onthul wat die vorige dag plaasgevind het en kinders wat tot 2 jaar en langer vat om seksuele misbruik te onthul.”* [It varies. You find a child that discloses sexual abuse that took place the previous day and children that take two years or longer to disclose the sexual abuse.] Another respondent also indicated that there is no specific time that lapse before a child will disclose sexual abuse: *“Most children will not disclose immediately, it happens after a while, even years before they will disclose to somebody.”*

Another respondent also pointed out that it is difficult to give an exact time frame on how long a child will take to disclose the sexual abuse: *“Mens kan nie die presiese tydsverloop vasstel nie, dit is maar geïndividualiseerd.”* [You can’t exactly say how long it will be, it is very individualised.] One respondent had the same experience, saying that it depends on each case: *“Dit hang af van elke saak en die dinamika van daardie spesifieke gesin.”* [It depends on each case and the dynamics of that particular family.]

One respondent indicated that some children will disclose immediately, while others take years to disclose. The dynamics of the family system also has an impact on the time it takes before a child will disclose the abuse: “*Die dinamika van die gesinsisteem speel sekerlik die grootste rol oor hoe lank ’n kind vat om seksuele misbruik te onthul.*” [The dynamics of the family system probably plays the biggest role on how long it takes before a child discloses sexual abuse.] Another respondent indicated that each case is unique, but that children will seldom disclose after one or two incidents and there is usually time that passes before a child will disclose sexual abuse. One of the respondents also pointed out that there is no specific pattern. It depends entirely on the child if he will make a disclosure of sexual abuse or not, while another respondent had the following statement: “*Daar is geen spesifieke tyd nie. Dit is al wat ek kan sê.*” [There is no specific time. That is all I can say.]

These findings support Alaggia (2004:1222) who point out that victims of child sexual abuse disclose in a variety of ways that will remain multifaceted. It is thus clear from both the literature and responses that there is no time frame for children to disclose sexual abuse and that it is influenced by external factors.

Subtheme 2: Extra- and intrafamilial abuse has an impact on the time elapsed since sexual abuse occurred until the child discloses the abuse.

Five of the respondents indicated that the type of abuse (intra- or extrafamilial) has an impact on how long a child will take before he/she will disclose sexual abuse. Most victims of child sexual abuse both long and fear to reveal the secret of sexual abuse (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1167). According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:527) children are more likely to disclose immediately in extrafamilial cases. Victims of intrafamilial abuse may be more concerned than extrafamilial abuse victims about betraying a parent or about potential punishment as a result of their disclosure. They may also fear family disruption if they disclose or feel that they are at least partially to blame for their abuse (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:527).

Two of the respondents indicated that intra- and extrafamilial abuse must be considered in order to put a specific time frame on when a child will disclose sexual abuse. One stated that this dynamic plays the most crucial part in how long it will take a child to disclose the sexual abuse: *“Intra- en ekstra-familiêre misbruik speel ’n groot rol in hoe lank die kind vat om ’n onthulling oor seksuele misbruik te maak. Daar is gevalle waar die seksuele misbruik 7 tot 8 jaar terug reeds begin het, wat nou eers uitkom.”* [Intra- and extrafamilial abuse plays a part in how long it takes the child to disclose sexual abuse. There are cases where the sexual abuse happened 7 to 8 years ago, that only gets disclosed now.] According to the respondent, in this case the abuse was intrafamilial in nature and the reason for the child waiting so long to disclose the abuse.

One respondent pointed out that, if sexual abuse took place outside of the family environment, a child will disclose the abuse sooner: *“Wanneer dit ekstra-familiêre misbruik is, sal die kind vinniger daaroor praat, veral as dit net een keer gebeur het.”* [When it is extrafamilial abuse, the child will disclose it sooner, especially if it only happens once.] This respondent also pointed out that it also depends on the child whether they will disclose the sexual abuse or not and the dynamics of the family system involved. Another respondent also confirmed that it depends on whether the sexual abuse was intra- or extrafamilial in nature: *“I had a case where the child was very close to the family. The child was then sexually abused, but did not want to tell the mother about the abuse, because she thought that her mother would be angry at her. One day she overheard her mother talking on the phone to a close friend and the mother told the friend that if somebody ever sexually abuses her child, she will do everything in her power to protect her child. It is then, after the child heard this statement from her mother, that she disclosed the sexual abuse.”*

According to London *et al.* (2005:205) older children and victims of familial abuse tended to perceive that more negative consequences would result from disclosure, which in turn was associated with the time taken to disclose. Research findings also consistently indicate that children abused by a close family member are less likely to report their abuse than those abused by a stranger (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276).

Another respondent also made the statement that a child will disclose much sooner if it is extrafamilial abuse that took place. When it is intrafamilial abuse, there are so many dynamics that must be taken into consideration and the process that takes place are very traumatic: *“Die kind moet letterlik naak sit voor die gesin as dit intra-familiêre misbruik is. Die situasie is gewoonlik baie akuut en die moontlikheid bestaan dat die kind die onthulling kan terugtrek.”* [The child literally sits naked in front of the family if it is intrafamilial abuse. The situation is usually very raw and the possibility exist that the child may recant the disclosure of sexual abuse.]

Children whose abuse was intrafamilial took longer to disclose their abuse than did children whose abuse was extrafamilial (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:537). Reviews of studies investigating disclosure have identified being abused by a family member as risk factors for delay in disclosing experiences of childhood sexual abuse (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:930). According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:528) children who waited longer than one month to disclose sexual abuse, were twice as likely to be related to the perpetrator as those who disclosed within one month. Children who were younger at the time of the abuse and who experienced more frequent abuse also took longer to disclose (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:528).

Another respondent also indicated that the dynamics of the family environment also contributes to the time taken before the child discloses the sexual abuse experience. When abuse takes place within the family environment, it may take years before any disclosure will be made from the child. According to this respondent, grooming is also a very important factor that should not be forgotten: *“Wanneer die kind vooraf so goed ‘gegroom’ is in die web van die oortreder, dat hulle nie beseef hulle word misbruik nie.”* [When the child is groomed beforehand, putting him in the web of the perpetrator, the child sometimes won’t even realise that he is being abused.] This respondent also states that grooming is the one outstanding factor why children do not want to disclose sexual abuse.

From the literature as well as from the answers of the respondents, it is clear that intra- and extrafamilial abuse has a huge impact on the disclosure of sexual abuse. The closer the perpetrator is to the child, the longer it will take to disclose the sexual abuse.

Subtheme 3: Grooming and the presence of threats has an impact on disclosure (relationship with the perpetrator)

Three of the respondents indicated that grooming and especially threats made by the perpetrator have a huge impact on how long it takes before the child discloses the sexual abuse. According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:527) a potentially important factor inhibiting children's willingness to reveal abuse, may be their knowledge of the social and familial consequences of disclosure. Perpetrators may threaten children into silence with direct threats, such as the threat of harm to the child as well as to parents or relatives (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:527). Threats decrease the likelihood that children will self-disclose sexual abuse and can take many forms, including physical harm to the victim and their loved ones (Paine & Hansen, 2002:277). According to Jensen *et al.* (2005:1396) threats to the child have been proposed as a factor inhibiting disclosure. London *et al.* (2005:205) found that children waited longer to disclose abuse when the perpetrator groomed them and established a close relationship, than if the perpetrator used force.

Mitchelle *et al.* (2012:1) defines grooming as "actions deliberately aimed at establishing an emotional connection and trust with a child or young person in order to increase the likelihood of them engaging in sexual behaviour or exploitation. Grooming may also include threats or bribes, which persuade the child or young person that it would be impossible to ask for help". One of the respondents pointed out that the presence of grooming, as well as the duration of the grooming by the perpetrator, has an impact on how long it will take the child to disclose the sexual abuse. According to this respondent, grooming is one of the key factors why children take so long to disclose the sexual abuse they have been subjected to: "*Wanneer 'n kind 'gegroom' word, sal dit 'n beslissende faktor speel in hoe lank 'n kind vat om seksuele misbruik te onthul. Hoe lank moet die kind nie moed bymekaarskraap om te vertel wat met hom gebeur het nie, veral as dit iemand binne die gesinsisteem is.*" [When a child is groomed, it will play a factor in how long it takes a child to disclose sexual abuse. How long must the child sit and encourage himself to disclose what happened to him, especially if it is someone in the family system.]

One respondent pointed out that threats and intimidation that exists in the relationship between the perpetrator and the child, definitely contributes to the time it takes before a child discloses abuse: *“Dreigemente en intimidasie beïnvloed die tydsverloop van onthulling. Die ouer sussie beskerm ook gewoonlik die ander kinders in die gesin. Ek het ’n geval gehad waar die oudste kind nooit ’n onthulling van seksuele misbruik gemaak het nie. Sy het egter swanger geword van die jarelange seksuele misbruik met haar biologiese vader en dis ook die enigste rede waarom daar enigsins ’n onthulling deur haar gemaak is. As sy nie swanger geword het nie, sou sy nooit onthul het nie. Sy het dit gedoen om haar jonger boeties en sussies van moontlike seksuele misbruik te beskerm.”* [Threats and intimidation influences the time it takes before a disclosure is made. The older sister usually protects the other children in the family. I had a case where the oldest child never made a disclosure of sexual abuse. She became pregnant as a result of years of ongoing abuse between her and her biological father. If she did not fall pregnant, she would have never disclosed. She did that in order to protect her younger brothers and sisters of possible sexual abuse.]

The above statement is confirmed by Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:537) who state in incest cases, children may want to protect family members other than the perpetrator. Children might be rightfully concerned about the results of the disclosure of sexual abuse due to their own possibly precarious quality of care and lack of nurturance from their parents and it is anecdotally reported that children disclose sexual abuse out of concern for others, such as when the child fears that the perpetrator is starting to molest a younger sibling, rather than out of concern for the self (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:537).

From the literature as well as the responses received from the respondents, it is clear that children who were groomed by the perpetrator or threatened by the perpetrator are less likely to disclose the sexual abuse. Children can also refrain from disclosing the sexual abuse in order to protect their siblings.

Question 4: How was the relationship of the child that disclosed the sexual abuse with the primary caregiver?

The following subthemes emerged:

Subtheme 1: A child will disclose sexual abuse more often if a positive attachment is present between the caregiver and the child concerned.

Subtheme 2: A child who has more confidence will disclose sexual abuse more easily than a child who is shy, or with a lower self-esteem.

Subtheme 3: Intra- and extrafamilial abuse will have an impact on whether the child will disclose sexual abuse to the primary caregiver.

Subtheme 4: Every case of child sexual abuse is unique and it is difficult to establish whether the relationship was positive or negative between the child concerned and the caregiver (depends on the dynamics of the family environment).

The relationship between the child and the primary caregiver was explored. The responses of the respondents follow:

Subtheme 1: A child will disclose sexual abuse more often if a positive attachment is present between the caregiver and the child concerned.

Five of the respondents highlighted the importance of a positive attachment between the caregiver and the child who is sexually abused. If there is a strong attachment between the caregiver and the child concerned, the child will disclose the sexual abuse more often than when there is a negative attachment. One respondent stated that most children have a positive relationship with somebody that they can trust: *“Dit is meestal aan die primêre versorger wat hul die eerste ‘disclosure’ maak. As daar ‘n sterk en positiewe binding is, sal kinders meer onthul.”* [Children usually disclose to the primary caregiver first. If there is a strong and positive attachment, children will disclose more.]

According to London *et al.* (2005:215), children whose mothers accepted the possibility of abuse (parents were labelled as supportive) were more likely to disclose the abuse compared with children whose parents were not supportive and did not believe their child had been abused. The importance of others' responses, particularly the mother, to disclosure is central, not just in terms of encouraging disclosure, but also in relation to mediating the psychological impact of the abuse and long-term mental health outcomes (McElvany *et al.*, 2014:931).

Another respondent also stressed the importance of a positive attachment between the caregiver and the child, in order to facilitate the disclosure process: *"A child will definitely disclose more if the relationship is strong with the caregiver and if there is a bond. If it is not that strong, they normally don't disclose. It is very rare that they will disclose their sexual abuse experiences."* One of the respondents also indicated that if there is a relationship between the caregiver and the child concerned, it is likely that the child will make the disclosure of sexual abuse: *"As hulle 'n verhouding het, sal die kind beter onthul. Dit gaan alles oor sekure binding."* [If they have a relationship, the child will disclose better. It is all about secure attachment.] Another respondent also pointed out that a good bond between the caregiver and the child will assist with the disclosure of sexual abuse, but also stressed the fact that there are numerous factors that could contribute in facilitating the disclosure. Another respondent pointed out that a positive attachment is needed to help the child to disclose the sexual abuse sooner: *"'n Positiewe binding tussen die kind en die versorger is gelykstaande aan 'n beter onthulling."* [A positive attachment between the child and the caregiver equals a better disclosure.]

McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1168) found that the recipient of a child's disclosure was someone they trusted, someone close to them, be it their parent, friend or other significant person in their lives. Paine and Hansen (2002:279) report that most children chose their mother as their confidant in disclosing their sexual abuse experience. Children whose mothers were non supportive were significantly more likely to recant their initial disclosure of abuse than children whose mothers were supportive.

Hershkowitz *et al.* (2007:120) state that children may anticipate their parents' likely reactions very well, although it is possible that children who have negative expectations engage in avoidant behaviours – they not only delay disclosure but also tend to disclose to individuals other than the parents – that are strongly associated with negative parental reactions. According to Alaggia (2004:1216) when the perpetrator is a significant caregiver, then attachment issues, traumatic bonding and the child's need to protect the integrity of the family are cited as possible explanations for withholding or delaying disclosure. Children who are afraid or shameful of their parents' reactions and who have negative expectations of what their parents might say, were more likely to delay disclosure (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:942).

As stated in literature, as well as from the responses of the respondents, a conclusion can be made that children who have a positive attachment with the primary caregiver, are likely to disclose abuse more often than children who do not have a positive attachment.

Subtheme 2: A child who has more confidence will disclose sexual abuse more easily than a child who is shy, or with a lower self-esteem.

Three of the respondents stressed the fact that children who have more confidence and a higher self-esteem, will disclose sexual abuse more readily than children who are shy. One of the respondents made the following statement: *“Selfgeldende en sterker kinders onthul meer seksuele misbruik as kinders wat stil en teruggetrokke is.”* [Assertive and stronger children disclose sexual abuse more than children that is shy and withdrawn.] Another respondent also highlighted the fact that a child with more confidence, will find it easier to disclose sexual abuse than a shy child: *“If a child is anti-social, he will not disclose sexual abuse, where a child who shows more confidence, will disclose sexual abuse much easier.”* One respondent also indicated that a child with a stronger temperament, will also disclose sexual abuse more than a child who is shy and withdrawn: *“’n Kind met ’n sterker temperament, sal eerder onthul.”* [A child with a stronger temperament will disclose sexual abuse.]

Paine and Hansen (2002:276) found in a study that perpetrators have identified a preference for abusing their own children or choosing passive, quiet, troubled, lonely children from single parent or broken homes. Another study also confirmed that perpetrators generally targeted children who were quiet and withdrawn and/or appeared vulnerable because of their age or friendliness (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276). A conclusion can thus be made that perpetrators specifically target emotionally vulnerable children with whom they can establish a trusting relationship (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276).

It is thus clear from both literature and the responses of the respondents that the type of personality the child display, will have an impact on the disclosure of sexual abuse. During the semi-structured interviews, actual information on the relationship between the child and the caregiver and the dynamics of this relationship, could not be obtained and a definite statement regarding a link between the relationship with the caregiver and the disclosure of sexual abuse, could not be made.

Subtheme 3: Intra- and extrafamilial abuse will have an impact on whether the child will disclose sexual abuse to the primary caregiver.

Two respondents stated that the dynamics of the sexual abuse and whether the abuse is intra- or extrafamilial, will have an impact on whether the child will disclose the abuse to the primary caregiver.

One of the respondents indicated that there is a difference in disclosing sexual abuse if the perpetrator is a family member and if sexual abuse took place with a non-family member: *“As seksuele misbruik binne die familie plaasgevind het, maak dit baie moeilik vir die kind. As dit iemand buite die familie is, sal dit moontlik makliker wees.”* [If sexual abuse happens within the family, it makes it difficult for the child. If it is someone outside the family, it may be easier for the child.]

According to Paine and Hansen (2002:276), children who are sexually abused by a close family member are particularly hesitant to disclose their abuse. Research findings also consistently indicate that children abused by a close family member are

less likely to report their abuse than those abused by a stranger (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276).

Another respondent also pointed out that, when the abuse is intrafamilial, it has an impact on the disclosure. According to this respondent, the relationship between the child and the caregiver is not necessarily positive and the child think that the caregiver will not believe her – it is all about the dynamics of the family system: *“Die kind is dikwels so oorspoel met alles wat gebeur. Die reaksie van die versorger sal ook bepaal of die kind die onthulling gaan terugtrek, al dan nie.”* [The child is usually so overwhelmed with everything that happened. The response of the caregiver will also determine if the child is going to recant the disclosure or not.]

According to Paine & Hansen (2002:279), mothers were less likely to be supportive when the alleged perpetrator resided with them compared to those who lived elsewhere. This is consistent with the statements made by the respondents, that when the abuse is intrafamilial, it will have an impact on the disclosure of the abuse – disclosure will be delayed.

Subtheme 4: Every case of child sexual abuse is unique and it is difficult to establish whether the relationship was positive or negative between the child concerned and the caregiver (depends on the dynamics of the family environment).

Two of the respondents highlighted the fact that it is difficult to say if there is a positive or negative relationship between the child and the caregiver and if it will have an impact on the disclosure. According to the respondents, it depends on the dynamics of the family environment, and each case will thus be unique and vary from one another. One of the respondents highlighted that it varies and one case can't be compared to another: *“Dit wissel baie. Soms is daar slegte verhoudings binne die familie en die kinders onthul steeds misbruik – waar jy nie kan glo hul het die ekokragte om te onthul nie, dan onthul hul vinniger.”* [It varies. Sometimes there is bad relationships within the family and children will still disclose abuse – where you can't believe they have the strength to disclose, they disclose quicker.] Another respondent also confirmed this,

stating that each case is highly individualised and that it can't be compared to another – every case is different.

The assumption that patterns exist in the disclosure of sexual abuse by children and that it can be generalised to all children, may be misleading (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1159). It is important to track the individual experiences of children and their perception of the influences upon which led them to the disclosure. Qualitative studies which are able to track the individual experiences of children and their perception of the influences upon them which led to their disclosure of information are needed (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1159).

Children's experiences of disclosure are multidetermined and a multifaceted and multisystemic approach to prevention and intervention is needed that takes account of the potentially conflicting needs of child protection, therapeutic and legal systems (McElvaney *et al.*, 2012:1171). The responses from the respondents confirmed this statement, as it is clear from their responses those factors such as age, self-esteem and the relationship with caregivers is a determining factor whether a child will disclose sexual abuse or not.

Question 5: Describe the relationship between the child and the offender.

Theme: The relationship between the child and offender is characterised by ambivalent feelings towards the offender: A relationship characterised by threat and force on the one side and a loving relationship on the other side.

The relationship between the child and the offender was explored. The following emerged:

Theme: The relationship between the child and offender is characterised by ambivalent feelings towards the offender: A relationship characterised by threat and force on the one side and a loving relationship on the other side.

According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:528), children who are abused by a family member may feel more loyalty toward the perpetrator and thus more ambivalence about disclosing the abuse. They may have more difficulty understanding that the abuse is wrong when the perpetrator is a trusted adult in a position of authority (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:528). Three of the respondents indicated that the relationship is mostly characterised by ambivalent feelings between the child and the offender, thus confirming what literature state in this regard. One of the respondents indicated that there are always ambivalent feelings towards the perpetrator. According to this respondent, there will usually not be any positive attachment between the child and the perpetrator: *“Daar is baie ambivalensie. Die oortreder vervul emosionele behoeftes waaraan die ma nie kan voldoen nie, maar die misbruik bly steeds ‘terrible’ vir die kind.”* [There is a lot of ambivalent feelings. The perpetrator fulfils emotional needs that the mother can’t provide, but the abuse stays terrible for the child.]

The victim–perpetrator relationship is often an emotionally significant one in which important needs are met for the child. Many child victims report ambivalent feelings for their perpetrator, as perpetrators employ a variety of strategies, many of which are covert and insidious, to gain and maintain their victim’s compliance and silence (Paine & Hansen, 2002:277). As a result, according to Paine and Hansen (2002:277) victims often hold ambivalent and confusing feelings for their perpetrators.

Two respondents also stressed the fact that the relationship is characterised by ambivalent feelings that the child has towards the perpetrator and that the relationship is never positive: *“Meeste gevalle is daar ’n angstig-ambivalente verhouding – 80%. Hoe ouer hulle word, kry hulle ook gevoelens van haat. Maar dit is alles slegs negatiewe gevoelens.”* [In most cases there is ambivalent feelings – 80%. The older they get, they also get feelings of hate. But it is all negative feelings.] *“Ambivalensie kom gereeld voor, veral as die oortreder nie saam in die huis bly nie. Die kind hou net nie van die seksuele misbruik nie, maar hou tog van die persoon.”* [Ambivalent feelings occur frequently, especially when the perpetrator is not staying in the same house. The child does not like the sexual abuse part, but likes the person.]

In a study that Paine and Hansen (2002:276) undertook, they noted that the child's relationship with the perpetrator filled significant deficits in the child's life in many cases. Most of the children described their relationship with the perpetrator as positive – over half said that they loved him, liked him, needed or depended on him, while nearly half also reported they hated him (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276).

Seven of the respondents indicated that there is a certain type of relationship between the perpetrator and the child concerned. It must be noted that it is never a positive relationship, but a relationship that consists out of many distortions. One of the respondents made the following statement: *“Daar bestaan beslis ’n tipe van verhouding tussen die oortreder en die betrokke kind. Daar gaan definitief geheimhouding wees en die verhouding kan gekenmerk word deur of ’n sterk liefdesverhouding of daar gaan ’n komponent van vrees wees. Maar dit is so dat daar ’n spesiale verhouding bestaan tussen die oortreder en die kind.”* [There is definitely some type of relationship that exists between the offender and the child concerned. There will be secrecy and the relationship will be characterised by either a strong loving relationship or there will be a component of fear. But there will be a special relationship between the perpetrator and the child.]

Another respondent indicated that there is always groomers and grabbers – a term that the respondent is using, which describes the relationship that may consist between the child and the perpetrator. Groomers refer to the offenders, who groom the children for a long time and enters more of a loving relationship with the child. In this relationship, threats are not so obvious. Grabbers refer to the perpetrators who always make use of threats and where the relationship between the child and the perpetrator always consists out of threats: *“These type of relationships can confuse the professional especially when the relationship consists of a more loving relationship. The child will tell you he loves this person and whatever they do, is acceptable.”* This clearly constitutes how distorted this relationship can become. One respondent stressed the fact that, in most cases, there will be a component of threat that characterises the relationship the child has with the perpetrator: *“In most cases threats are prevalent. In the beginning, the perpetrator will first groom the child, but it usually ends in threats.”*

Threats decrease the likelihood that children will disclose sexual abuse, and perpetrators often ask, bribe and/or threaten victims to keep the abuse a secret (Paine & Hansen, 2002:276). According to Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:528), the length of time until the first disclosure of abuse is not related to the severity, duration or frequency of the abuse, but if they were related to the perpetrator, took longer to disclose.

Another respondent also highlighted the fact that there are usually more threats and intimidation from the side of the perpetrator, than there is a loving relationship, but also indicates that this loving relationship does exist: *“Daar is maar meer dreigemente en intimidasie en minimaal dat daar ’n liefdesverhouding bestaan.”* [There are more threats and intimidation than there is a loving relationship.] One respondent pointed out that there are usually three factors that characterises the relationship between the perpetrator and the child, which includes dependency (on the perpetrator, whether financial or emotional), threat and intimidation – all which contributes that the child will delay a disclosure of sexual abuse. The respondent also made the following statement: *“Die sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede van die kind dra by dat hy nie seksuele misbruik sal onthul nie, maar dreigemente en intimidasie is deel van die verhouding tussen die kind en die oortreder.”* [The socio-economic circumstances of the child contributes to the fact that he won’t disclose sexual abuse, but threats and intimidation is part of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator.]

Another respondent also stressed the fact that threats and intimidation will form part of the relationship, even if it doesn’t happen when the perpetrator is busy establishing a relationship with the child, but will eventually form part of this relationship: *“Hierdie hele verhouding is ‘confusing’. Aan die begin is daar meer ’n tipe van vertrouensverhouding, maar hoe verder die oortreder gaan, hoe meer dinge moet hy in plek kry om die verhouding ‘secure’ te hou en dit sal dan noodwendig gepaardgaan met dreigemente om die verhouding te behou.”* [This relationship is confusing. In the beginning, there is a trusting relationship, but the further the relationship develops, the more the perpetrator must do to keep the relationship secure and this will include threats to keep building the relationship.]

One respondent made the following statement with regards to the relationship that exists between the perpetrator and the child concerned: *“Daar is definitief dreigemente, maar mens kry dit in verskillende grade. Die oortreder kan byvoorbeeld op die kind se gevoelens speel en so ontwikkel die kind skuldgevoelens en voel dat hy deel het aan die seksuele misbruik. Partykeer is daar erge dreigemente betrokke, byvoorbeeld waar die oortreder doodsdreigemente maak. Daar is ook verhoudings waar die oortreder ’n mate van intimidasie gebruik en sal sê dat die seksuele misbruik net hulle (oortreder en kind) se geheim is en dat die kind vir niemand mag sê nie. Dan is daar ook ’n tipe van finansiële dreigement – pa sê gewoonlik wat hy aan ma gaan doen en dat hy vir hulle sorg, so die kind mag dan vir niemand vertel nie.”* [There are definitely threats, but you get it in different categories. The perpetrator can, for example, play on the feelings of the child and the child will then develop feelings that he has a part in the sexual abuse. Sometimes there are worse threats, for example where the perpetrator makes threats that he will kill somebody. There are also relationships where the perpetrator use intimidation and will say that the sexual abuse is just their (perpetrator and child’s) secret and that the child should not tell anyone. Then there is also a type of financial threat – the father usually will tell the child what he is going to do to the mother, and that he takes care of them, so the child is not allowed to tell anyone.]

A potentially important factor inhibiting children’s willingness to reveal abuse may be their knowledge of the social and familial consequences of disclosure – perpetrators may threaten children into silence with direct threats, such as the threat of harm to the child as well as to parents or relatives (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:527). Children have reported that the perpetrator made threats such as “I’ll hurt your mother” or “I’ll kill you if you tell” and thus may often fear retaliation if they disclose (Goodman-Brown *et al.*, 2003:527). According to McElvaney *et al.* (2014:930) barriers to disclosure include threats made by the perpetrator.

It is clear from literature as well as from the responses from the respondents that the relationship between the child and the perpetrator is characterised by threats and force. The dynamics of the relationship is however complex and multifaceted and

every case (relationship) will be different. The responses of the respondents are consistent with the findings from literature, stating that children display ambivalent feelings towards the perpetrator and that the relationship is usually emotional in nature.

Question 6: Is there anything else you would like to add? (Practical recommendations)

The following theme emerged:

Theme: Training of professionals working with children on how to handle a disclosure of child sexual abuse.

As part of the exploration of disclosure of sexual abuse in middle childhood, as well as significant patterns of disclosure, the respondents were also asked whether they would like to add anything and to make some practical recommendations with regards to the disclosure of sexual abuse. The respondents made the following recommendations. This was the only theme that emerged during the semi-structured interviews:

All of the respondents indicated that there is a lack of awareness and training with regard to the field of disclosure of sexual abuse, and that a lot should be invested in training for all professionals working with children, which not only includes social workers, but professionals from numerous other working fields. Two of the respondents indicated that training in the handling of a disclosure is essential and a skill that lack many a professional: *“Daar kort opleiding – almal kort dit. Mense weet nie eers wat die proses is om te volg nie. Daar moet ’n tipe van ’n kaart gemaak word sodat almal weet wat die proses is om te volg wanneer ’n kind ’n onthulling van seksuele misbruik gemaak het. Kontakbesonderhede, asook die hele prosedure moet beskikbaar gestel word.”* [There is a lack of training – everybody needs training. People don’t even know what the process is to follow. There must be a type of a chart that shows everyone what the procedure is to follow when a child makes a disclosure of sexual abuse. Contact details, as well as the complete procedure must be made

available.] One respondent also made the following statement with regards to training: *“Die eerste rapport is belangrik, maar mense wil nie betrokke raak by seksuele misbruik nie. Vir die doeleindes van die regsisteem en die hof, is hierdie onthulling die mees belangrikste, of dit nou ’n kriminele saak is of nie. Almal moet opgevoed word in die rol wat hulle speel en hoe hulle kan bydra tot die saak.”* [The first rapport is very important, but people don’t want to get involved in cases of sexual abuse. For the purpose of the law and the courts, this disclosure is the most important, if it is going to become a criminal case or not. Everybody must be trained in the role they play and how they can make a positive contribution to the case.]

Three of the respondents also highlighted the fact that there is a lack of training with regards to the disclosure of sexual abuse, especially at schools. One of the respondents indicated that the correct training of teachers is important, in order for cases to be successfully prosecuted: *“All teachers need to be workshopped in terms of children who are sexually or physically abused. They must know where to go and what to do if a case gets reported by the child.”* One respondent also made the following statement: *“In most cases, the disclosure is not handled properly, which in turn can result in recanting of the sexual abuse. Parents as well as teachers should be educated on how to handle a disclosure, it is very important. For now, they are just messing the cases.”* Another respondent indicated that teachers should be the main focus of training, as the school is usually where sexually abuse can easily be detected or disclosures are made (to the teachers, as the children trust them): *“Daar moet opleiding vir onderwysers gegee word in terme van die gedrag wat kinders toon as hul seksueel misbruik word en die proses wat gevolg moet word indien hulle ’n onthulling maak. Hulle moet presies weet wat om te doen.”* [Teachers must receive training in terms of the behaviour that a child display when he is sexually abused as well as the process that needs to be followed if they make a disclosure. They must know exactly what to do.]

One respondent also indicated that there is a lack of training amongst therapists who specifically work with vulnerable children and stresses the need for training in these specific field as well. According to this respondent, therapists needs training on how to handle the disclosure process – specific ways on how to handle a disclosure when

a child discloses sexual abuse, as well as training on how to refer it to the correct person. Another respondent also warned that current school awareness programmes, such as sexual awareness, is currently not educating children correctly on what to do when they are being sexually abused. According to this respondent, these awareness programmes must be reviewed and evaluated if it is not doing more damage than good. The respondent also stresses the fact that more research should be done about what type of programmes are presented at schools, and that professionals should also be educated on how to handle disclosures of sexual abuse: *“Professionele persone moet opgelei word oor hoe om ’n onthulling van seksuele misbruik te hanteer. Hulle respons kan die hele saak maak of breek.”* [Professionals should be trained on how to handle a disclosure of sexual abuse. Their response can make or break a case.]

According to McElvaney *et al.* (2012:1171) a certain preparedness and sensitivity is required from the caregiver to initiate conversations or follow-up on the cues the child has offered to facilitate disclosure, and a certain readiness on the part of the child is needed to tell about the abuse experience. Collings *et al.* (2005:279) suggest that prevention programming could usefully be extended to more actively engage members of the broader community in the process of detecting and responding to the problem of child sexual abuse and suggest that such preventive efforts are likely to be both feasible and effective.

Creating opportunities for children to tell of their experiences is crucial in facilitating disclosure (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944). Parents and others need to be able to ask children appropriate questions that enquire after their well-being, giving them the opportunity to disclose and be able to respond to disclosures in such a way that children’s need for containment is met (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944). As stated by McElvaney *et al.* (2014:944), professionals often discourage parents and others involved with children from asking children direct questions about abuse, concerned at the contaminating effects this may have on later forensic investigations if abuse has occurred. Parents and others need advice and guidance on how to ask children questions in an appropriate non-leading manner that will provide children with the opportunity to tell (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944). It is reasonable to suggest that increased public awareness of the issue will help create an environment where

children will be encouraged to disclose experiences of abuse (McElvaney *et al.*, 2014:944).

10. CONCLUSIONS

- ❑ The focus of the research was on the disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood from a forensic social work perspective. The literature review indicates that there are still gaps in literature regarding the disclosure process and disclosure patterns of children who are sexually abused. The need for further research with regards to the disclosure patterns of children who are sexually abused has been highlighted.

- ❑ The method of data collection was through the use of semi-structured interviews with professionals in the field of forensic social work. Eight registered social workers participated in the research project and shared their perceptions and experience of the disclosure process of children during middle childhood.

- ❑ The purpose of this study was to explore and describe disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood years from a forensic social work perspective. This was accomplished by obtaining professionals' experience and perceptions of the disclosure process of sexual abuse in the middle childhood years.

- ❑ The study concluded that, although no specific patterns of disclosure exist, there are certain factors that play a role for children disclosing or delaying the disclosure of sexual abuse. These include:
 - Extra- and intrafamilial abuse has an effect on child sexual abuse disclosure. When the perpetrator is part of the family system, children will take longer to disclose the abuse, than when the perpetrator is not part of the family.

- In order for children to disclose sexual abuse, they must feel safe. This means that, when children disclose the sexual abuse, they will not lose their family system, but will be empowered by their disclosure.
- Developmental factors, including cognitive development and the age of the child, influence the disclosure of sexual abuse. Younger children will disclose abuse more easily, while older children can weigh up the consequences they might face when they disclose sexual abuse.
- The responses of the caregiver (or whoever the child discloses the sexual abuse to) have a huge impact on the disclosure of the child, as well as possible recanting. When the perpetrator is part of the family, the child will less likely disclose the sexual abuse.
- Grooming and the presence of threats are characteristics of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator
- A positive attachment contributes to the disclosure of sexual abuse. When children display a positive attachment with a caregiver, the child will disclose sexual abuse easier, than when there are negative attachment between the child and the caregiver.
- The child almost always display ambivalent feelings towards the perpetrator – on the one side the child hates the perpetrator for what he is doing, while on the other side the child has positive feelings toward the perpetrator.
- Every case of child sexual abuse is unique and individualised, which makes it difficult to establish specific patterns on how children decide to tell.
- Training opportunities and awareness campaigns must receive attention. Professionals working with children must be thoroughly trained on how to handle a disclosure of sexual abuse. The public, especially teachers, must also be educated on what to do when a child discloses sexual abuse.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following practical recommendations are made:

- Increased public awareness, which includes the launching of awareness campaigns in order to educate the public, especially teachers, on the importance of the disclosure of child sexual abuse;
- That professionals educate parents on the process that is followed whenever a case of child sexual abuse is reported;
- Professionals in the field of forensic social work must receive proper training on how to handle a disclosure of child sexual abuse;
- Training opportunities must be made available to other professionals working with children with regards on how to handle a disclosure of child sexual abuse;
- Sexual education programmes in school settings must be reviewed, as current programmes do not address sexual abuse in a proper way

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made with regards to further research themes:

- Current training programmes that educates professionals on how to handle a disclosure of sexual abuse
- Views of the child, as well as the parent of the sexually abused child must be conducted in order to understand why some children disclose sexual abuse while others do not.

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Section B

Annexures

ANNEXURE 1

ETHICAL PERMISSION



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Dr S Smith
Social Work

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25 September 2014

Dear Dr Smith

Ethics Application: NWU-00027-09-A1 "The development and evaluation of programs and a protocol in Forensic Social Work"

Your application to include the sub-study, entitled "The disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood: A forensic social work perspective" under the umbrella project has been approved until 30/06/2015.

Yours sincerely

Prof Minrie Greeff
Health Research Ethics Committee Chairperson

Original details: Prof Minrie Greeff(10187308) C:\Users\13210572\Documents\ETIEK\2009 ETHICS\NWU-00027-09-A1 (S Smith-Y van Huyssteen) - Approval letter.docm
25 September 2014

File reference: 9.1.5.3

ANNEXURE 2

QUESTIONNAIRE / INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SOCIAL WORKERS SPECIALIZING IN FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK

You have been a social worker working with sexually abused children:

1. What have you observed about children's disclosure patterns?
2. What were the responses of the people they disclosed to?
3. How long after the sexual abuse did the child disclose?
4. How was the relationship of the child that disclosed the sexual abuse with the primary caregiver?
5. Describe the relationship between the child and the offender.
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

ANNEXURE 3

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

DEAR RESPONDENT

FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK: WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

The disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood: A forensic social work perspective

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I am Yolanda van Huyssteen from the North-West University working on the disclosure of sexual abuse from children during middle childhood and I would like to invite you to give written informed consent and participate in my study. To follow is information about the study so that you can make an informed decision

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the disclosure of sexual abuse during middle childhood years from a forensic social work perspective. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are from the Gauteng region and you have the relevant experience in working with sexually abused children. Your information about the disclosure of sexual abuse are very valuable to us.

2. PROCEDURE:

If you agree to this study you will be expected to do all of the following:

- You will share your experience and knowledge by means of a semi-structured interview;
- The time frame of the semi-structured interview will vary between thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour;
- Data will be captured by making use of a voice recording.

Also take note of the following:

- Your participation in this study is voluntarily and you will not be forced to participate in this study. You can withdraw at any time from the study. If you withdraw from the study after data has been collected, all data will be destroyed accordingly and the researcher will not make use of this data.
- Before you can participate in this study, you must give written informed consent.
- All information regarding the goal of the research, procedures that will be utilised during the study, advantages and disadvantages and dangers that the respondent might be exposed to, will be communicated to all respondents prior to your participation.
- The researcher will not restrain or withhold any information from you regarding the research.

3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Participating in this study might have the risk of possible emotional trauma. Precaution has been taken and there will be debriefing opportunities for all participants.

Some of your privacy might be lost during this study, but your name will never be made known and your data will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. No individual identifiers will be used in any publications resulting from this study and only the researcher will work with the information that you shared. All sensitive information will be protected by locking it up and storing it on a password protected computer.

4. BENEFITS

By taking part in this study, you will be able to share your experiences, as well as possible traumatic experiences that you might have had.

Taking part in this research will also benefit the larger community and will assist in helping other professionals working in the field of forensic social work and contribute to research undertaken in the field of forensic social work where there is limited research available.

5. COSTS

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study.

6. PAYMENT

You will receive no payment for your participation and no refreshments will be provided during the interview.

7. QUESTIONS

You are welcome to ask any questions to a member of the research team before you decide to give consent. You are also welcome to contact me, Yolanda van Huyssteen at 082 430 8280 if you have any further questions concerning your written informed consent.

8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS

The findings of the research will be shared with you if you are interested. You are welcome to contact me regarding the findings of the research.

Thanking you in advance

Yolanda van Huyssteen (Researcher)

Dr. S. Smith (Study Leader)



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
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POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give written informed consent without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate, you are requested to sign below:

I, _____ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

Date

Signature of participant

Date

Witness

Date

Signature of person obtaining
consent