

**Social workers' perspectives on the use of
emotional-support dogs during the testimony of
child sexual-abuse victims in South African
criminal courts**

C Schmidt

 orcid.org/0000-0003-4738-5270

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at the North-West University*

Supervisor: Prof T.M. Robinson

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Student number: 24151629

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Social workers' perspectives on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in South African criminal courts

Abstract

Title: Social workers' perspectives on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in South African criminal courts

In this study the researcher considers that the criminal court process can be incredibly intimidating to children, and therefore extra protective measures should be set in place to prevent that the child witness experiences any further trauma or stress. The researcher found the use of emotional-support animals during the child sexual-abuse victim's testimony a one of the protective measures that is being implemented in different court systems around the world. This article focuses on the perspectives of forensic social workers on the use of emotional- support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in criminal courts in South Africa.

The aim of the study is to explore, from forensic social work perspectives, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional-support dogs for child sexual abuse victims testifying in criminal court proceedings. A qualitative and explorative study design was followed by conducting semi-structured interviews with eight social workers employed by and affiliated with The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (TTBC) and two dog handlers from Touch Our Pets therapy dogs (Top Dogs). All the participants are

SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF EMOTIONAL-SUPPORT DOGS DURING THE TESTIMONY OF CHILD SEXUAL-ABUSE VICTIMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURTS
involved in, or aware of, the emotional-support animals programme implemented by

TTBC.

Key words: Forensic Social Work; Forensic Social Worker; Emotional-support Dog; Child Sexual Abuse; Child Testimony; Protective Measures.

Opsomming

Titel: Maatskaplike werkers se perspektief op die gebruik van emosionele ondersteunings-honde tydens die getuienis van seksuele misbruikte kinder slagoffers in Suid Afrikaanse kriminele howe.

Die studie neem in ag dat die kriminele hof proses verskriklik intimiderend kan wees vir kinders, daarom is dit nodig om beskermende voornatreeëls te implimenteer om te voorkom dat die minderjarige getuie enige bykomstige trauma en stres ervaar. Die navorser het bevind dat die gebruik van emosionele ondersteunings honde tydens die minderjarige seksuele mishandeling slagoffers se getuienis, een van verskeie beskermende voornatreeëls is wat in verskeie howe reg oor die wêreld geimplimenteer. Hierdie artikel fokus op die perspektief van forensiese maatskaplike werkers rondom die gebruik van emosionele ondersteunings honde tydens die getuienis van die minderjarige slagoffer van seksuele mishandeling in die kriminele hof in Suid Afrika.

Die doel van die studie is om van uit die perspektief van forensiese maatskaplike werkers, die voordele en uitdagings, wat die gebruik van emosionele ondersteunings honde tydens die getuienis van die minderjarige slagoffer inhou, te eksploreer binne die konteks van kriminele howe in Suid Afrika. 'n Kwalitatiewe en eksplorerende navorsings proses is gevolg deur semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude te voer met agt maatskaplike werkers wat werksaam is by die Teddy Bear kliniek en twee honde hanteerders van Touch Our Pets therapy dogs (Top Dogs). Alle deelnemers is betrokke of

**SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF EMOTIONAL-SUPPORT DOGS DURING THE
TESTIMONY OF CHILD SEXUAL-ABUSE VICTIMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURTS**

bewus van die emosionele ondersteunings hond program wat huidiglik by die Teddy Bear

kliniek geïmplimenteer word.

Sleutel woorde: Forensiese Maatskaplike Werk; Forensiese Maatskaplike
Werker; Emosionele Ondersteunings Hond; Kinder Seksuele Mishandeling; Minderjarige
Getuie; Beskermende Voormaatreels.

Preface

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master's in Social Work of Forensic Practice. The Social Work Forensic Practice curriculum consists of a total of 180 credits; of these credits, the research dissertation accounts for 60 credits.

The dissertation is presented in article format in line with the general academic rules of the North-West University (NWU, 2017) utilizing the APA (2019, 7th ed.) style and referencing method. The first section of the dissertation provides a literature review, problem statement and outline of the research method. The second section provides a literature study, and the third section is the manuscript prepared according to the guidelines of the selected journal. The fourth and final section includes the conclusions of the study.

The manuscript will be submitted to the *South African Journal of Psychology* for possible publication. This journal publishes manuscripts covering all fields of psychology. The emphasis is on empirical research, but theoretical and methodological papers, review articles, short communications, book reviews and letters commenting on articles are also published. Priority is given to articles relevant to Africa and that address psychological issues of social change and development. The research topic accords with the journal's aim and scope and is within the South African context of social services and psychology. Internationally, psychologists and social workers are

SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF EMOTIONAL-SUPPORT DOGS DURING THE TESTIMONY OF CHILD SEXUAL-ABUSE VICTIMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURTS
employed as custody evaluators. In South Africa, psychologists are court ordered to compile custody evaluations.

Instructions to Author

South African Journal of Psychology

The *South African Journal of Psychology* publishes contributions in English from all fields of psychology. While the emphasis is on empirical research, the Journal also accepts theoretical and methodological papers, review articles, short communications, reviews and letters containing fair commentary. Priority is given to articles which are relevant to Africa and which address psychological issues of social change and development. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 250 words and an alphabetical list of at least six keywords should be provided. Tables and figures, with suitable headings/captions and numbered consecutively, should follow the reference list, with their approximate positions in the text indicated. Articles should be no longer than 20 pages (5 500 words) and must include the full title of the manuscript, the name(s) of the author(s) and their affiliations, and the name, postal address, and e-mail address of the corresponding author. The manuscripts should be an MS Word document in 12-point Times Roman font with 2.0 line spacing. The American Psychological Association (APA, ver. 7) style guidelines and referencing format should be adhered to. It is compulsory that manuscripts be accompanied by a declaration that the language has been properly edited, together with the name and address of the person who undertook the language editing. Manuscripts to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to sajp@up.ac.za. A covering letter with postal address, e-mail address, and telephone number should be included. The covering letter should indicate that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere and it is not under consideration for publication in another journal. An acknowledgement of receipt will be e-mailed to the

**SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF EMOTIONAL-SUPPORT DOGS DURING THE
TESTIMONY OF CHILD SEXUAL-ABUSE VICTIMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURTS**

author and the manuscripts will be sent for review by three independent reviewers. The

manuscript number must always be quoted in ALL correspondence to the editor.

List of abbreviations

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
CSA	Child sexual abuse
DSD	Department of Social Development
HREC	Health Research Ethics Committee
NPF	National Policy Framework
NWU	North-West University
SA	South-Africa
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Services Professions
SOC	Sexual Offences Court
TOP Dogs	Touch Our Pets therapy dogs
TTBC	The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
Opsomming	V
Preface	VII
Instructions to Author	IX
List of abbreviations	XI
Table of Contents	1
SECTION 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY	2
Background	2
Problem Statement	3
Rational for the study	5
Central theoretical statement	6
Aim and objectives	6
Research Methodology	7
Research Design	7
Research Setting	8
Population	8

Proposed Sample Size and Motivation	9
Process of Sample Recruitment	9
Sampling Method	10
Inclusion and exclusion criteria	10
Data-collection method	11
Research Procedures	11
Ethical Aspects	13
Experience of participants	13
Risk and benefits	14
Vulnerable participants	14
Incentive or reimbursement	14
Process of sample recruitment	15
Legal authorisation, goodwill permission and consent	16
Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy	16
Role players	16
Expertise of researchers	17
Facilities	17
Risk level of the study	17
Dissemination of results	18
Storage and archiving of data	18
Trustworthiness of the research study	19
Data Analysis	20

Limitations of The Study	21
Structure of The Report	22
References	24
SECTION 2: LITERATURE STUDY	29
Child Witnesses	29
Protective Measures	32
Emotional-Support Dogs	33
The Court Room Dog	34
Summary	38
References	39
SECTION 3: THE MANUSCRIPT	44
Introduction and Background	45
Method	48
Instruments	48
Participants	49
Procedure	50
Ethical considerations	50
Data Analysis	50
Discussion of Results	51

Profile of participants	51
Theme 1: The perceived benefits of using emotional-support dogs as support for the CSA victim in the criminal court.	52
Theme 2: The perceived challenges of using emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims in the criminal court.	54
Theme 3: The perceived cultural considerations.	58
Theme 4: The perceived openness of the South African court system for the introduction of the emotional-support dogs.	60
Conclusions	61
References	64
SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	69
Literature study	69
Empirical study	70
Method.	70
Participants.	70
Ethical Aspects.	70
Data Collection and Analysis.	71
Procedure.	71
Findings	73
Limitations of the study	74
Personal reflections	74

Recommendations	75
Reference List	77
SECTION 5: ADDENDUMS	84
A – Informed Written Consent/ Participant Information Leaflet	84
B – Letter of Goodwill:	90
C – Interview Schedule	90
D – NWU Ethical Approval	92
E– Declaration of Language Editing	94

Section 1: Orientation to The Study

Background

The criminal-court process can be challenging and intimidating to children, and therefore extra protective measures should be set in place to prevent the child witness from experiencing any further trauma or stress (Cowan, 2013; Fouché & Le Roux, 2014; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016). The use of emotional-support animals during the child sexual abuse (CSA) victim's testimony is one of the protective measures that are being implemented in different court systems around the world (Cowan, 2013; Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Grimm, 2013; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; Robinson, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2016).

The use of emotional-support animals is not a new phenomenon, and the animal-human relationship has been around since the existence of man (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Kamioka *et al.*, 2014; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; O'Haire *et al.*, 2015). According to a recent study by Wood *et al.* (2018) interaction with a therapy dog shows increases in 'feel good' hormones such as oxytocin, dopamine and endorphins, while reducing the effects and presence of cortisol and norepinephrine. The researcher has decided to look into the social worker's perspective of the use of emotional support animals during the testimony of CSA victims in South African criminal courts. The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (TTBC), which specializes in assisting child abuse victims has used emotional-support dogs in certain areas of their operations. This study contributes to the understanding of and adds to the available empirical information regarding the use of emotional support animals in CSA cases in South Africa.

The aim of the study was to explore from a forensic social work perspective, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional support dogs when child sexual abuse victims testify in Criminal Court proceedings. A qualitative and explorative study design was followed by conducting semi-structured interviews with ten participants of which eight were social workers employed and affiliated with TTBC. Two participants were dog handlers from the Top Dogs organisation. All the participants are involved in or aware of the emotional-support animals programme implemented by TTBC.

Problem Statement

According to Klemfuss and Ceci (2012), “mishandling of child witnesses or evidence provided by them can result in miscarriages of justice either through under-prosecution of criminals such as child abusers or over-prosecution of innocent people accused of heinous crimes” (p. 269). It has become evident in literature that children who testify in the criminal court are some of the most vulnerable witnesses in the judicial system (Cowan, 2013; Fansher & Carmen, 2016; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016) and that this, in turn, means that their testimonies are often just as fragile. In most cases of CSA, the victim is the only witness (Cowan, 2013; Fansher & Carmen, 2016; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016), which emphasises the importance of the testimony given by the CSA victim. The accuracy and reliability of the CSA victim’s testimony is crucial not only for a conviction but also to protect the rights of the alleged perpetrator who has been wrongfully accused (Cowan, 2013; Fansher & Carmen, 2016; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012).

In South Africa the most popular protective measure that is implemented to protect the CSA victim during testimony, is the use of an intermediary (Coughlan & Jarman, 2002; Matthias & Zaal, 2011). The United Nations Guidelines on Justice Matters

involving Child Victims and Witnesses of 2009 (UNICEF, 2009) hereinafter makes clear provisions for measures to protect the privacy and well-being of child victims and witnesses in Article 28, where it makes specific mention of the use of an intermediary. The use of an intermediary in South African court systems has seen many challenges due to the lack of available resources and training (Coughlan & Jarman, 2002; Matthias & Zaal, 2011). According to Matthias and Zaal (2011), the use of an intermediary as protective measure is implemented only in 14% of cases involving child victims or witnesses in South Africa. This leaves a great need for protective measures that are easier to implement, have a positive effect on the well-being of the child victim or witness, and at the same time do not infringe on the right of the alleged perpetrator to face his/her accuser in court and have a fair trial.

The vulnerability of the child witness has led to the introduction of numerous protective measures in criminal courts across the world, as the need for these became evident (Cowan, 2013; Fouché & Le Roux, 2014; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016). One method that has grown in popularity – and which is focused on during this study – is the availability of an emotional-support dog for the children testifying during court proceedings.

TTBC is an organisation situated in Johannesburg, Gauteng, which provides holistic services to children between the ages of three- and 18-years-old who have been victims of abuse (The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children, n.d.). TTBC has a court-preparation programme, which equips child victims of abuse to testify against the alleged perpetrators; the TTBC has implemented this programme since 1997 (The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children, n.d.). In June 2015, the TTBC and TOP Dogs joined forces to introduce the dogs into the court-preparation programme. TOP Dogs is an animal-assisted

therapy organisation which assists vulnerable groups of people (such as children) through animal interaction (Touch Our Pets Therapy Dogs, n.d.). For the court-preparation programme, the dogs dress up as court officials (such as the magistrate, state prosecutor, defence attorney and court orderly), and run a scripted trial inside TTBC's mock court, to assist the children in becoming familiar and comfortable with the court process. Dr Shaheda Omar explains (as cited in Qukula, 2018) that the programme which uses emotional-support dogs decreases fear and anxiety, while enabling the children to be competent and credible witnesses. This is the closest that emotional-support animals have come to the court process in the South African judicial system.

The research topic emerged as a result of the limited research available on forensic social workers and the use of emotional-support animals in the South African court system. Considering the observed value of dogs as participants in a court-preparation programme, and the fact that animals are used during court cases in other countries, the potential of using animals during court cases involving children has not been explored in the South African context, prior to this study. The aim of the research was therefore to explore from forensic social work perspectives, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional-support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings.

From the above problem statement, the following research question arose:
What perspective is held by forensic social workers regarding the benefits and challenges when using emotional-support dogs during child sexual-abuse cases in the South African criminal court system?

Rational for the study

The aim of the study was to explore, from forensic social work perspectives, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional-support dogs when

child sexual-abuse victims testify in criminal court proceedings, with the aim of contributing to the available literature in South Africa. With the focus on what is in the best interests of children, it is important to continue the search for protective tools that could lessen the secondary trauma possibly caused by the criminal court process in CSA cases. Due to the limited research available on the topic, the researcher saw the potential to contribute valuable information for future studies in the field.

Central theoretical statement

CSA victims and witnesses experience secondary trauma and stress during the criminal-justice process. The current protective measures available in South Africa have seen many challenges due to a lack of resources and technology. The use of emotional-support dogs has been implemented as a protective measure in different courts around the world and has proven to be successful (Crenshaw *et al.*, as cited in Burd and McQuiston, 2019; Dellinger, 2009). In exploring the benefits and challenges that the use of emotional-support dogs might hold as support for the CSA victim during testimony in the criminal court in South Africa, as perceived by forensic social workers, the researcher hopes to add value to the available literature regarding the possibility of introducing more effective protective measures in the South African criminal courts.

Aim and objectives

The aim of the study is to explore from a forensic social work perspective, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional-support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings.

The objectives of the study were:

- To acquire knowledge, by means of a literature study, on the use of emotional-support dogs, the child witness and the current protective

measures available to CSA victims throughout the criminal justice process, and

- To study the perspectives of forensic social workers regarding the benefits and challenges of using emotional-support dogs during the testimony of CSA victims in South African criminal courts.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study followed a qualitative approach to obtain information in an explorative way on the subject matter (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Thyer, 2010). According to Thyer (2010), qualitative research works primarily from an inductive perspective, which results in the study evolving from the “facts up” and then proceeds logically from a “general point of view to a specific conclusion, set of questions, hypothesis, or grounded theory” (p. 343). The purpose of an exploratory study is to gain insight into phenomena or situations, and the need for such a study arises out of a lack of necessary information or literature on an area of interest (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Thyer, 2010).

For the purpose of obtaining insight into participants’ perspectives, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the necessary data. These semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore the participants’ perspective regarding the benefits and challenges when using emotional-support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings.

Research Setting

(TTBC) – an organisation situated in Johannesburg, Gauteng, which provides holistic services to children between the ages of three and 18 years old (The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children, n.d.) who have been victims of abuse – was approached to assist with the research project. TTBC has a court-preparation programme that equips child victims of abuse to testify against the alleged perpetrators; the TTBC has implemented this programme since 1997 (The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children, n.d.). TTBC was chosen as the research setting due to the fact that their court-preparation programme includes the use of emotional-support dogs, which resulted in the social workers employed at TTBC having the necessary knowledge to participate in this study. At the time of this study, TTBC was the only organization using emotional-support dogs within the context of the court system, as support for CSA victims.

Population

The population for this study was the forensic social workers employed by the TTBC and forensic social workers in private practice affiliated with the TTBC. The rationale for including the forensic social workers employed by the TTBC and forensic social workers in private practice affiliated with the TTBC in this study was based on the fact that the TTBC has incorporated emotional-support animals in their court-preparation programme. This is the first programme to introduce emotional-support animals to the court process in South Africa. The study included forensic social workers in private practice affiliated with the TTBC to obtain a sample that is representative and to reach a point of saturation.

Proposed Sample Size and Motivation

The 13 social workers employed by TTBC in Johannesburg, and two members from TOP Dogs were selected as possible participants. The sample group were purposefully selected because of their knowledge and experience in the use of emotional-support dogs. The knowledge and experience of the proposed sample placed them in the best position to provide data for the research study.

An estimated minimum of 10 participants was set for the purpose of this study. The number of participants who gave informed consent and fitted the inclusion criteria were regarded as the sample. The researcher was able to gather data from eight social workers at TTBC, which equals 61.5% of TTBC's social-worker complement. Due to a lack of response from the remaining five social workers at the TTBC, the researcher included data gathered from two Top Dog volunteers. These volunteers work directly with the CSA victims and the emotional-support dogs. The researcher and her supervisor felt that the data gathered from these volunteers would be valuable to the findings of the research study.

Process of Sample Recruitment

The researcher started by obtaining permission from the TTBC's Board of Directors. The researcher followed up by providing the TTBC's clinical director Dr Shaheda Omar, with a permission letter of goodwill. This letter contained a summary of the goal of the research study and what would be expected of the participants.

The researcher contacted Ms Ras, at the TTBC to obtain contact information for potential participants. Ms Janette Nel, Research Assistant, assisted by visiting the TTBC to obtain the contact information of other potential participants. The researcher received a list of 13 potential social workers. The researcher contacted each potential participant and

provided the informed consent form. The researcher allowed three to seven days, depending on the feedback from the participants, before doing the data collection. The researcher was responsible for scheduling appointments and conducting the semi-structured interviews with all participants.

The researcher contacted Mr. Corrie Niemann at TOP Dogs, to recruit possible research participants from their organisation. The researcher, under guidance from the research supervisor, believed the perspectives of the dog handlers would add value to the research study.

See (Addendum B) for a copy of the Letter of Goodwill and (Addendum A) for the informed consent form.

Sampling Method

For the purpose of the study, a non-probability, purposive (judgemental) sampling method (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009; Thyer, 2010) was used. This form of sampling is described by Rubin and Babbie (2013) as a type of sampling where the researcher selects her sample based on judgment and the purpose of the study. The key informant's approach was utilised “to obtain expert perspectives from individuals who are presumed to have special knowledge about a target population’s problems and needs, as well as about current gaps in service delivery” (Rubin & Babbie, 2013, p. 150).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All qualified social workers, with at least two years’ experience in forensic social work employed by the TTBC at the time that the study was conducted, were included in the sample. Forensic social workers in private practice who were affiliated with the TTBC at the time of the study were also included in the sample. Participants were

included in the study if they met the inclusion criteria, willingly participated, and signed the informed consent form.

Due to a lack of willing participants with more than two years' experience in forensic social work, forensic social workers with less experience were included in the research study. The researcher also included two dog handlers from TOP Dogs. It was decided that the dog handlers from TOP Dogs held valuable data and perspectives that would add value and insight to the research study.

Data-collection method

The researcher used a self-designed, semi-structured interview schedule (Addendum C) to explore the participants' perspective regarding the benefits and challenges when using emotional-support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings.

Due to the explorative nature, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable data-collection method for the study, due to the flexibility of the interview structures which allowed for more in-depth data collection that could flow according to the information given by the participant. The researcher assured that the questions asked during the interviews were appropriate in answering the research question, as this was the primary purpose (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009).

The schedules of TTBC's social workers did not allow for personal interviews; accordingly, telephonic interviews were conducted. The telephonic interviews allowed for the social workers to provide sufficient and insightful information that was beneficial for the research.

Research Procedures

The following procedure was followed during the research study:

- The researcher submitted a research proposal to obtain ethical approval from the North-West University's Health Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained, with project number **NWU-00138-18-A1**, see Addendum D.
- The researcher started the study by conducting a literature overview of the use of emotional- support dogs as support for the CSA victim.
- Approval was obtained from TTBC's Board of Directors and goodwill approval was received from Dr Shaheda Omar, Clinical Director of TTBC.
- The semi-structured interview schedule was compiled and finalised.
- A research assistant was identified to assist with recruitment of participants.
- A confidentiality agreement was signed with the research assistant.
- Prospective participants were identified.
- The researcher obtained informed written consent from the participants.
- Contact was made with participants to identify available dates for the interviews to be conducted.
- Semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted.
- The data that had been collected was transcribed, analysed, and categorised according to themes.
- The researcher wrote up the findings in a manuscript which was submitted to the supervisor for approval.
- Feedback was given and corrections were made, after which the manuscript was again submitted to the supervisor for approval.
- Final corrections were made before the manuscript was submitted to the North-West University for examination purposes.

Ethical Aspects

Ethical Approval for the study was obtained from the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus' Health Research Ethics Committee with project number **NWU-00138-18-A1**, see Addendum D. The following ethical considerations were considered.

Experience of participants

Participants who were able to participate in the study were social workers with a social work degree, registered with the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP). Participants had to have experience in forensic social work, specifically CSA cases in the criminal courts. Participants had to be working in the field of forensic social work at the time of the study.

Participants had to be employed by the TTBC or be forensic social workers in private practice affiliated to the clinic, at the time of the study. Forensic social workers that did not give their consent were excluded from this study. Two dog handlers from TOP Dogs were included in the study, due to the fact that they work directly with CSA victims and the emotional-support dogs, and the researcher and her supervisor deemed their knowledge and insight valuable for the purpose of this study.

The possible loss of confidentiality was identified as the only possible risk that the research study contained for the participants; no confidentiality loss was experienced during the study. The participants had no personal gain from the participation in the research study but contributed to available social work literature by participating in the study. The researcher is of the opinion that the participants did not experience discomfort or inconvenience during the research study.

Risk and benefits

The first ethical consideration was to do no harm and ensure the safety of the participants and the researcher (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009). Seeing as the study did not explicitly focus on sensitive or personal information, the researcher is of the opinion that no harm was done by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. The research study was classified as a low-risk study, seeing as the study did not personally influence any of the participants. Debriefing or counselling was made available to any participant, but it was not requested by any participant. It should be noted that the risk of loss of confidentiality is always a possibility; this was limited by strictly following the correct storing procedures for all personal information gathered from participants. The researcher made use of a coding system to minimise the risk of exposing the participants' identities. No loss of confidentiality occurred during the research study.

Vulnerable participants

The research study did not include any vulnerable persons.

Incentive or reimbursement

Participants did not receive any incentive for participating in the study. The interviews were conducted during the working hours of the participants and the participants were not expected to sacrifice any of their personal time to participate in the study. The researcher attempted to minimise any inconveniences that the participants might encounter by scheduling the interviews at convenient times. The participants did not have any expenses while participating in the research study. The travel costs for interviews conducted at an alternative venue were covered by the researcher. Many of the interviews

were done telephonically, which led to there being no cost implications for the participants.

Process of sample recruitment

The researcher contacted the facilitator at TTBC, Dr Shaheda Omar, who is also the director of TTBC, via email to obtain goodwill permission. The researcher sent Dr Omar all the necessary information regarding the proposed study and obtained written consent from Dr Omar for the research to take place at the TTBC. The researcher requested that Dr Omar act as facilitator between the researcher and the social workers who were possible internal participants, as identified by her. Accordingly, a message was sent out to each proposed participant explaining the proposed research topic and sending out the invitation, as well as the informed consent form. One week's time was allowed before making telephonic contact with the participants again, to ensure that each proposed participant had had enough time to come to an informed decision. The researcher was available to answer any questions prospective participants might have had regarding the project. An appointment was scheduled with each participant who had verbally consented.

Only participants who had given informed written consent and who were voluntarily participating were included in the study (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009; Thyer, 2010). Participants were made aware that they were allowed to withdraw as participants during any time of the study with no repercussions, and that aftercare would be made available to them should they experience any stress or discomfort during the research process (De Vos et al., 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009; Thyer, 2010).

Legal authorisation, goodwill permission and consent

The researcher contacted the facilitator at TTBC Dr Omar, who is the director of the clinic via email to obtain goodwill permission. The researcher sent the clinic director all the necessary information regarding the proposed study and obtained permission from her for the research to take place at the TTBC.

Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy

All information was kept safe on a password-protected computer, no biographical information of the participants was made available in the research paper. The researcher is of the opinion that this study does not expose any sensitive information from the participants and no personal information was elicited during the interview. All information gathered was treated with strict confidentiality. The participants signed the informed consent before the interview commenced. No interview took place before the consent of the participant had been obtained. The researcher ensured confidentiality by keeping strictly confidential all biographical information given by participants and using numbers to identify each participant.

All hard-copy data such as biographical information, informed consent forms, field notes, etcetera, were kept in a fire-proof locked cabinet for the duration of the study. After the mini- dissertation was completed, all electronic and hard-copy data was handed in to the North-West University, where it will be stored in a locked cabinet for five years before being properly destroyed.

Role players

Dr Shaheda Omar, the director of TTBC acted as the facilitator for the proposed study at TTBC, since the social workers were either based at the TTBC or forensic

social workers in private practice affiliated with the clinic. Janette Nel assisted by being the independent person that assisted in this research study. Forensic social workers that took part were the participants of the study. Many of the interviews were done telephonically with social workers who are employed by the TTBC.

Expertise of researchers

The researcher, with the guidance and support of her study leader, has the necessary competencies and expertise to be able to conduct the research. The researcher has completed the Module 1, Module 2.1, Module 3.1 and the South African Ethics Quiz ethics training presented by TRREE (Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation). The research supervisor for the study, Prof. T. M. Robinson, is an Associate Professor Extraordinaire at the North-West University.

Facilities

Some interviews were held at the premises of the TTBC in Johannesburg and Krugersdorp, in a room that provided enough privacy to ensure confidentiality. The other interviews were held telephonically. A “Do not disturb” sign was placed on the outside of the office door to ensure that the interviews were not interrupted, and that privacy was not compromised. Should the participants have felt uncomfortable to do the interviews at the TTBC, the researcher would have been willing to arrange an alternative setting, without any expense to the participant. There was no need to arrange an alternative setting, as none of the participants experienced a discomfort with the location of the interviews.

Risk level of the study

The research can be described as a low-risk study according to the risk descriptors. At most, the study caused minor inconvenience to the participants, because time

had to be set aside for the semi-structured interviews. The research topic is not of a controversial nature and did not require any personal information from the participants. All the participants had the competence to give informed consent to participate in the study.

Dissemination of results

The researcher ensured that the findings and interpretations were accurate by having an in-depth understanding of the data that was gathered and also by re-checking participants' answers to ensure that the data was understood correctly. The results of the study were communicated to each participant in a summary note, and the research paper will be made available to them, should they wish to receive it.

Storage and archiving of data

The data that was gathered was kept on the researcher's password-protected computer until such a time that the data was given to COMPRES, which stored all the data in a securely locked cabinet. As soon as the data was given to COMPRES to store, all data was removed from the researcher's computer. Notes were made electronically on a laptop. This was used as field notes. All raw data gathered during interviews were transcribed. The written data was safely kept in a locked cabinet and electronic data was password protected on the researcher's computer. Only the researcher, her study leader and research assistant had access to the information and they also signed a confidentiality agreement. All information was handled with the highest care to ensure that no identifying information was disclosed. The only documents that were printed into a hard copy were those that needed to be submitted with the mini dissertation; these documents will be kept safe by the North-West University, for five years by COMPRES before being destroyed.

Trustworthiness of the research study

The researcher made use of a self-designed interview schedule. The interview schedule consisted of six questions that were specifically designed to assist in answering the research question and to collect appropriate and sufficient data. The researcher focused on four aspects – namely credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability – to ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

Credibility entails confidence that the findings are based on the experience and perception of the participants. If individuals from the population recognise the description of the findings, it could be viewed as an accurate portrayal of the data. Certain methodological strategies – such as frequent debriefing sessions, member checking, and continuous reflection by the researcher – ensured strong credibility (Tracey, 2010).

Dependability indicates how consistent the findings are and also that the results could be repeated. A qualitative researcher considers the range of experiences and includes even the outlying experiences to describe the phenomenon under study (Heppner *et al.*, 2008; Tracy, 2010).

Neutrality was ensured through conformability. The study leader went through the analysis and interpretation of the data to support conformability.

Lastly, a thorough description of the data collected from the participants ensured *transferability*. Transferability allows the collected data to be compared across different contexts (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

Due to a lack of interest from participants who met the original inclusion criteria, the researcher included two dog handlers from TOP Dogs, as participants. The researcher is of the opinion that this contributed to the transferability of the data that was gathered,

seeing as the data gathered remained constant even when taken from different perspectives, and therefore contributes to the trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilised a thematic-analysis process which includes identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researcher made use of the six-step-framework as set out by Clarke and Braun (as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step is to become familiar with the data; this required the researcher to read and re-read the transcripts to ensure that she became extremely familiar with the content (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The second step was to generate initial codes; this phase was utilised to organise the collected data in a systematic and meaningful way (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Step three of the process was the search for themes, Maguire and Delahunt (2017) define a theme as a “pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question” (p. 3355). The researcher searched through the coded data to identify all the emerging themes. Step 4 involved the reviewing of the identified themes; this was done to modify, review and develop the themes identified in the previous phase (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Step 5 refers to defining the themes; this was the final ‘fine tuning’ of the themes and is described as identifying the essence of what the themes are about (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Step 6, the final step of the process, was to write up the findings in the form of a mini-dissertation (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The data was analysed by using coding. The researcher highlighted themes that emerged during the interviews, question by the question, grouping the different emerging themes. The researcher divided the identified themes into more prominent categories to allow the data to be more manageable. The different categories were coded

further to test the new understanding and identify possible alternatives. Once this was done, the researcher interpreted and developed typologies to finally prepare the data to be presented.

During the interview, the interviewer repeated each answer back to the participant, to ensure that the interviewer correctly understood the answer. The data was then ready to be presented in the form of a mini dissertation.

The researcher made use of an open coding method, which is defined by De Vos *et al.* (2011) as “the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data” (p. 412). The researcher also made use of the available literature to compare the findings of the proposed study.

The research was guided by a study leader who was assigned to the research study by the North-West University.

Limitations of The Study

The researcher experienced the following limitations during the implementation of the research study:

- The researcher had to adapt most of the personal interviews to telephonic interviews due to the high caseloads of the participants; this complicated the data-capturing methods.
- Due to currently limited use of emotional-support dogs by forensic social workers in South Africa, the potential participant population was extremely limited. The researcher would have preferred to include a larger population group.
- The researcher had to include participants who did not meet the original inclusion criteria due to the lack of willing participants who met the original inclusion criteria.

Structure of The Report

The selection of structure for the report is in line with Rule 4.2.3.3 as per yearbook of the Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (2017). The researcher utilised the article format and considered the *South African Journal of Psychology* as the publisher. The South African Journal of Psychology publishes empirical, theoretical, and review articles on all aspects of psychology. Articles may focus on South African, African, or international issues.

To meet the criteria of the *South African Journal of Psychology*, the article must be written in English. The introductory review section does not require a heading. Thereafter the following headings should be used: method; data analysis, results, discussion, conclusion, references.

The final article has to meet the following criteria:

- An abstract of not more than 250 words.
- The article must be 5 500 words, or not more than 20 pages.
- The manuscript should be submitted as a Microsoft Word document only.
- Text should be double-spaced with a minimum of 3 cm for left- and right-hand margins and 5 cm at head and foot.
- Text should be standard 12 point.
- The publication guidelines of The American Psychological Association 7th edition (APA 7th) must be followed.

The findings of the research will be discussed in the article, with a conclusion and recommendations included. Annexures can be included in the article, such as the semi-structured interview schedule used. References are listed in alphabetical order.

The dissertation was edited for language correctness. (See Addendum E)

The research report will consist of the following sections:

Section 1: Orientation to the study

Section 2: Literature study

Section 3: The manuscript

Section 4: Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

Section 5: References

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Section 2: Literature Study

The researcher conducted a literature study to be able to place the chosen topic within a larger body of knowledge (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The researcher did a literature study to obtain thorough understanding of the main themes that appear in the research. The researcher chose to focus on *the child witness, protective measures, and emotional support dogs* as the main topics during the literature study. The literature study aimed to provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of the identified research problem and the nature thereof (De Vos *et al.*, 2011).

Child Witnesses

A review of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases in the South African court system reveals that the conviction rate is extremely low, while the occurrence of CSA is very common (Artz *et al.*, 2018). According to a study done by Artz, *et al.* (2018), which included 9 717 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 years, one in three adolescents reported that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime. According to the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust there were 50 108 reported sexual-offence cases in the 2017/2018 year, of which only 6 878 cases were decided on by courts, this means only 13.7% of all cases reported were resolved (Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, 2019). With the high rate of sexual offences in South Africa, the researcher is of the opinion that it should be of paramount importance that the most vulnerable victims, namely children, should receive as much assistance and support as possible to prevent secondary traumatising during the criminal justice process.

There have been many debates and numerous research studies have been done on whether or not a child can be seen as a credible witness (Welder, 2000; Lyon &

Dente, 2012; Brown & Lamb, 2015; Fansher & Carmen, 2016). Since the CSA victim is often the only witness, systems have been put in place to ensure that the child is seen as a credible witness. Due to the vulnerability of the CSA victim and importance of the CSA victim's testimony, numerous procedures have been put in place to guard against the child experiencing secondary trauma. Regrettably, these protective measures have many logistical challenges and more effective protective measures are scarce. In recent years, numerous changes have been made in order to make the South African court system more sensitive towards child witnesses; despite these changes children still have to submit to cross-examination and explain themselves, which has been identified as the most stressful and difficult part of the testimony (Szojka *et al.*, 2017).

The procedure of testifying in court can cause secondary trauma for the child witness (Lee *et al.*, 2019); in cases of CSA this might be increased due to the high anxiety, fear and intimidation often related to cases of this nature (Lee *et al.*, 2019). The child witness could be subjected to numerous interviews during the pre-trial stage, then be subject to questioning by the prosecutor, and will have to face questions from the legal defence team that are specifically aimed at discrediting the CSA victim's testimony. This could have an extremely traumatizing effect on the CSA victim (Landwirth, 1987). With the low conviction rate in South Africa, CSA victims often face the disappointment of a dismissed case after having gone through the criminal-justice process.

Lyon and Dente (2012) make an interesting argument with regard to the child witness, by not only looking at the credibility of the child witness, but also taking into account the dynamics of CSA and how these dynamics influence the vulnerability of the CSA victim's testimony or willingness to testify. These CSA dynamics specifically look at how the CSA victim's filial dependency, lack of maturity, and vulnerability are

exploited in an attempt to prevent the CSA victim from being able or willing to testify (Lyon & Dente, 2012). When dealing with a child witness, it is extremely important that the child should be viewed holistically within the broader systems in which the child is found, these systems should be taken into account when children are required to testify. The dynamics of CSA and the trauma of the criminal justice procedures should be considered when a child witness is prepared to testify.

Article 8 of the United Nations' *Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime: Model Law and Related Commentary* makes specific mention of the training that professionals who work with child victims and witnesses should undergo (UNICEF, 2009). The training guidelines set out in this article are quite specific and outline the ultimate training that would result in competent and educated professionals. Unfortunately countries with a weak economy or developing institutions often do not have the resources to properly train professionals working with child victims or witnesses (Matthias & Zaal, 2011; Coughlan & Jarman, 2002). South Africa's Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007 Part 2 (Criminal Law, 2007) makes specific reference to concepts of CSA dynamics, such as grooming and exploitation. Professionals without proper training and knowledge of these concepts – such as the child witness's emotional, social and cognitive development and the systems wherein the child functions - will not be able to assist the child witness efficiently in the criminal justice system. This leaves a void wherein child witnesses need support in ways that the support person (or animal) does not hamper the criminal justice process while at the same time causing as little harm as possible to the child witness.

Protective Measures

The use of an intermediary has been the primary protective measure implemented in the South African court system since 1993 (Matthias & Zaal, 2011). Intermediaries can be defined as people who have been trained to assist children to communicate during court hearings (Matthias & Zaal, 2011). Usually these intermediaries are in a separate room with the testifying child while the process is relayed to court through live CCTV footage – or the room is visible to the court through a two-way mirror. The Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977 Section 170A makes provision for the use of intermediaries in South African courts but unfortunately the decision on whether this is necessary is at the discretion of the Magistrate assigned to the case.

The biggest hurdle for the successful use of intermediaries in South African court systems is said to be the lack of resources, specifically in courts in rural areas (Matthias & Zaal, 2011). It was said in 2011 that only 17% of child witnesses were able to testify through the use of an intermediary due to the lack of the necessary equipment and properly trained professionals (Matthias & Zaal, 2011). Although numerous attempts have been made since 2011 to increase the availability of these services, many CSA victims do not have access to protective measures during their testimony (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2013).

It is crucial, in the South African context, to identify protective measures that are easily obtainable and do not require additional equipment or expenditure, since resources and finances are so scarce. Crimes against women and children in South Africa have drastically increased over recent years and has led to numerous organizations standing together to combat these crimes. The researcher is of the opinion that the situation is desperate and the need for assistance in these cases is dire. Due to the extreme sensitivity of

these crimes and the fact that victims are often related to the perpetrators – taken together with other CSA dynamics (Lyon & Dente, 2012) – it becomes crucial that effective protective measures be found and implemented to ensure that the interests of both the victim and the alleged perpetrator are served by the justice system. The researcher is of the opinion that the use of emotional-support dogs could potentially be one of these protective measures.

Emotional-Support Dogs

Grimm (2013) points out the strengths of emotional-support animals, i.e., “therapy dogs interpret human emotion and actively work to help people relax, reduce their level of stress, and feel more comfortable in their environment” (p. 266). The use of emotional-support animals is not a new phenomenon and has been in use for many years (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Kamioka *et al.*, 2014; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; O’Haire *et al.*, 2015). Kamioka *et al.* (2014) claim that “modalities that use animals as tools to improve physical, mental and social functions, and educational and welfare aspects of humans, are called animal-assisted interventions” (p. 372).

The use of dogs has proven to be successful in numerous different areas of human well-being. Studies have found that the use of dogs improves self-esteem, anxiety and stress levels, social interaction, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and feelings of fear (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Kamioka *et al.*, 2014; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; O’Haire *et al.* 2015). A small-scale study was done by Dietz *et al.* (2012) comparing support groups for CSA victims, where one group made use of emotional-support dogs (Dietz *et al.*, 2012). The research found that the CSA victims in the group with emotional-support dogs showed a significant decrease in trauma symptoms such as depression, anxiety and dissasociation (Dietz *et al.*, 2012). From the above literature it becomes

evident that the positive effects of emotional-support animals on traumatised, ill, and disabled humans are undeniable.

According to Signal *et al.* (2017) dogs provide a clear and consistent reaction to the child's behaviour. This allows the child an opportunity to practise the adaptive behaviour patterns associated with therapy. This could be beneficial to CSA victims testifying in criminal courts, where they are required to adapt to difficult and traumatic circumstances without the direct assistance of a therapist. According to Kruger *et al.* (as cited in Signal *et al.*, 2017), when emotional-support dogs are used during therapy, children are able to talk to the dog instead of the therapist and that could potentially help alleviate the stress often associated with sensitive or shameful disclosures.

This could be beneficial during the testimony of the CSA victim, seeing as the child's attention can be directed on the emotional-support dog, instead of the intimidating court room and its officials. Numerous studies have shown the effectiveness of using emotional-support dogs in the reduction of physiological factors such as blood pressure and in the release of stress-related hormones as well as in the improvement of cognitive function, reducing the feeling of loneliness, improving communication and social interaction, and alleviating trauma symptoms in children and adolescents (Dietz *et al.*, 2012; Lange *et al.*, 2007; Morrison, 2007; Protham *et al.*, as cited in Signal *et al.*, 2017).

The Court Room Dog

More than 10 years ago, a judge in King County, Washington, permitted a service dog to accompany two young CSA victims during their testimony in open court (Dellinger, 2009). According to Dellinger (2009), the CSA victims were anxious to such a point that they refused to testify in court, which led to the prosecutor requesting that the

therapy dog be used. During the CSA victims' testimony, the Golden Retriever would react to the victims' rising emotions by merely placing his head on their laps, which allowed them to calm down and give reliable testimony.

Since the first 'court room dog' was introduced by King County, Washington, the use of therapy dogs for vulnerable witnesses has become extremely popular, especially in the United States (Cowan, 2013; Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Grimm, 2013; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; Robinson, 2015; Taylor *et al.*, 2016). According to the Courthouse Dogs Foundation (2020), as of 19 June 2020 there are 244 courthouse dogs in 40 states in the United States. The Courthouse Dogs Foundation's (2020) Website also indicate that there are 49 courthouse dogs in Canada, as well as courthouse dogs being used in Chile, Belgium, England, France and Italy. It has been proven that the presence of the emotional-support animal allows for the victim to feel more calm and secure, which in turn allows for a better and possibly more reliable testimony (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Burd & McQuiston, 2019).

There has also been negative reactions towards the increased use of emotional-support dogs during court proceedings. The primary argument against the use of emotional-support dogs is that the dog might make the witness appear more vulnerable, which could in turn result in prejudice from the jury (in American courts). It could result in the accused not receiving a fair trial (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Grimm, 2013). Ensminger (2016) and Dellinger (2009) explain that the court goes out of its way to ensure that the emotional-support dog is not seen entering or exiting the courtroom and that the emotional-support dog cannot be seen during the witness's testimony. A research study conducted by Burd and McQuiston (2019) indicated that the use of emotional-support dogs did not have any influence on the verdict, verdict confidence, or sentencing. One could

compare the study by Burd and McQuiston (2019) on possible prejudice caused by the use of courthouse facility dogs during CSA victims' testimony, with a similar study done by McAuliff *et al.* (2015) that studied possible prejudice with the use of a support person. McAuliff *et al.* (McAuliff *et al.*, 2015) found that children were perceived as less trustworthy and accurate when having a support person present during the testimony. Comparing these studies indicate that when the CSA victim has a support person, the child is perceived as less trustworthy, whereas the presence of an emotional-support dog appeared to have no influence on the trustworthiness of the CSA victim.

Grimm (2013) raises the argument that, since emotional-support dogs are not registered as 'service dogs,' they should not be allowed to enter the courtroom. Ensminger (2016) and Taylor *et al.* (2016) both point out that these emotional-support dogs receive training and that some courts require that a specific type of training should be undergone before the dog can be used in the courtroom. Ensuring that these dogs are professionally trained and maintained would limit any possible risk that could be associated with the use of emotional-support dogs. The Courthouse Dog Foundation aims to ensure that all court room dogs receive the same standard of training regardless of which country they are working in and has teamed up with numerous organizations in numerous countries to implement this under the guidance of Assistance Dogs International, which has set the industry standard since 1987 (Courthouse Dog Foundation, 2020). There appears to be an agreement that these emotional-support dogs should be trained and cared for under the Minimum Standards and Ethics as set out by the Assistance Dogs International in 2018 ([as retrieved from Courthouse Dog Foundation](#), 2020). In South Africa, due consideration will have to be given to the fear of dogs in South African societies. This will have to be researched, specifically in the South African context.

Taylor *et al.* (2016) express a concern that the emotional-support dogs can be used as tools, to assist children to feel calmer during testimony, without regard for the animals' well-being and that there is no ethical-treatment guideline in any of the ethics codes provided to social-service professions. This concern is understandable since those commonly referred to as *working dogs*, are not always considered to need the same time, attention and care as dogs who are kept as pets. In the use of emotional-support dogs it would be crucial to ensure that the physical and emotional needs of the dogs are being sufficiently met to ensure that they are able to provide the services they are being used for, without being harmed themselves. The Minimum Standards and Ethics as set out by the Assistance Dogs International (as retrieved from Courthouse Dogs Foundation , 2020) should be merged into the ethical guidelines of organisations who wish to make use of emotional-support dogs for court purposes. The use of emotional-support animals has also been used as a reason for the defendants to appeal the sentence imposed on them. According to the cases recorded by Ensminger (2016), the prosecutor applied for the use of the emotional-support dog before the hearing commenced and gave the defendant the opportunity to object to the use of the emotional-support dog.

In South Africa, all the parties in the court system would probably have to be considered, not just the accused. Due to the common fear of dogs found in South Africa, it would be crucial to ensure that all court officials are informed of the presence of the emotional-support dogs, or the dog should enter the court before the rest of the officials to ensure that it is not seen. In the South African context, it would be extremely important to ensure that the CSA victim has been introduced to the emotional-support dog before the court proceedings and that the CSA victim is comfortable with the presence of the

emotional-support dog. If the emotional-support dog is making the CSA victim scared or uncomfortable it would defeat the purpose.

Summary

From the literature study it becomes evident that the South African criminal justice system needs to identify a protective measure for CSA victims and witnesses – one which is easy to implement and mobile, so that it can be moved to different courts around the country. The use of emotional-support dogs is a growing phenomenon across numerous countries and has proven to be quite successful in different court systems. The positive physical-health effects created by contact with the emotional-support dog is a great advantage for the CSA victim and allows for more reliable testimony, which is a great advantage for the criminal justice system.

The researcher is of the opinion that the use of emotional-support dogs could be a suitable solution for South Africa, which could be low cost, easily implemented and mobile. With proper systems in place and proper training being provided, the use of emotional-support dogs would do away with the expensive equipment required for intermediaries, and the emotional-support dog and its handler would be able to easily travel to different courts in both urban and rural areas.

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Section 3: The Manuscript

Social workers' perspective on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in South African criminal courts.

Chrisna Schmidt (BA Social Work)

COMPRES, North-West University, Potchefstroom

E-mail: chrisnaschmidt@gmail.com

Prof Tanya Marie Robinson

COMPRES, North-West University, Potchefstroom

E-mail: admin@drtmrobinson.co.za

Abstract

Child sexual-abuse (CSA) victims are some of the most vulnerable and traumatized witnesses within the criminal justice system. These CSA victims are then expected to participate effectively in the criminal justice process, often without any support or protective measures to assist them. This article focuses on the use of emotional-support dogs as a potential protective measure for CSA victims in South African criminal courts.

The article explores this by focusing on the perspectives of social workers on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of CSA victims in South African criminal courts. Ten participants participated in this qualitative study, and data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. The study found that the participants had a generally

positive perspective with regards to the use of emotional-support dogs and most participants perceived the identified challenges, of using emotional-support dogs, as surmountable.

Key Words: Child Sexual Abuse; Child Testimony; Emotional-support Dog; Forensic Social Work; Forensic Social Worker; Protective Measures.

Introduction and Background

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global crisis. According to a study done by Hillis *et al.* (2016), a minimum of 1.4 billion children between the ages of two and 17 years experienced some form of physical, emotional or sexual violence in 2013. Children are part of the most vulnerable population groups and often fall victim to sexual abuse. It is clear in literature that children who are required to give testimony are some of the most vulnerable witnesses that appear in the judicial system (Cowan, 2013; Fansher & Carmen, 2016; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016) and seeing as the CSA victim is often the only witness, their testimony is crucial. The CSA victim often suffers secondary trauma during the criminal court proceedings, which has resulted in the child being unable to testify or in the case being dismissed (Lee *et al.*, 2019). The accuracy and reliability of the CSA victim's testimony is not only essential for the conviction of the alleged perpetrator, but it is also necessary to ensure that the alleged perpetrator has not been wrongfully accused (Cowan, 2013; Fansher & Carmen, 2016; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012).

This vulnerability of the CSA victim, together with the sensitivity of these cases, has resulted in numerous protective factors being introduced in criminal courts globally (Cowan, 2013; Fouché & Le Roux, 2014; Klemfuss & Ceci, 2012; Stevens & Lubaale, 2016). These protective measures are put in place to ensure that vulnerable

witnesses do not undergo undue mental stress or trauma during court proceedings, with the expectation that the testimony would be more reliable under less-stressful circumstances.

At the time of this study, the use of an intermediary was found to be the primary protective measure implemented in the South African criminal court system. Article 170A (1) of the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977 makes provision for the use of an intermediary in cases where it appears that the court proceedings would expose a witness under the age of 18 years to undue mental stress or suffering. The use of intermediaries is a privilege that few CSA victims in South Africa are able to make use of due to the lack of trained personnel or appropriate technology and infrastructure, especially in rural areas, where a great number of these cases are presented to the court (Matthias & Zaal, 2011).

In recent years, there has been a rise in a new protective measure, entailing the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims during criminal court proceedings. The use of emotional-support dogs in CSA proceedings originated in King County, Washington, USA, when a judge allowed two CSA victims to be accompanied by a service dog during their testimony in open court, more than 10 years ago (Dellinger, 2009). The dog was able to pick up on the emotional cues of the CSA victims and responded by placing his head on their laps, allowing them to feel calm (Dellinger, 2009). The two CSA victims in King County had initially felt unable to testify, but the support dog enabled them to testify clearly and calmly, which led to the successful prosecution of the offender (Dellinger, 2009).

According to research, petting a dog not only has an influence on a person's emotional state but it also affects a person's physical state. The interaction with an emotional-support dog minimizes the release of stress hormones and lowers blood pressure

and heart rate, which allows the CSA victim to physically feel calmer and more relaxed (Dietz *et al.*, 2012; Lange *et al.*, 2017; Morrison, 2007; Prothman *et al.*, as cited in Signal *et al.*, 2017). The emotional-support dog also allows the CSA victim to feel less lonely, while reducing feelings of depression and anxiety and preventing disassociation (Lange *et al.*, 2007; Morrison, 2007; Dietz *et al.*, 2012; Signal *et al.*, 2017).

In South Africa, the use of emotional-support dogs is becoming more common. Touch Our Pets Therapy Dogs (TOP Dogs), an organization which utilises well-trained dogs to support vulnerable or sick people in different settings, has partnered with The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (TTBC) to assist CSA victims. TTBC in Johannesburg has a court-preparation programme focusing on preparing children to testify in the South African court system. For the past few years, TOP Dogs has joined in TTBC's programme by bringing the therapy dogs into a mock trial situation. The therapy dogs dress up according to the different role-players in the court system; each dog has a child assigned to it, who reads a role-play mimicking a real court situation. After the mock court, the children are allowed to groom and pet the therapy dogs. This programme has been seen as a great success and has caught the attention of television programmes such as *Carte Blanche* in an episode which aired on 20 October 2019 (Carte Blanche, 2019).

Little research is available in South Africa on the use of emotional-support dogs as support for the CSA victim. Emotional-support dogs are often researched in a therapy context (Dietz *et al.*, 2012; Kamioka *et al.*, 2014; Mims & Waddell, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2016; Signal *et al.*, 2017; Dravnsnik *et al.*, 2018) and the benefits for the war against CSA is often overlooked. Research shows that CSA victims who are accompanied by emotional-support dogs experience lower levels of stress and anxiety, which in turn results in more reliable testimony (Dellinger, 2009). This has led to the researcher studying the

perspectives of social workers in South Africa on the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims testifying in criminal courts.

Method

The aim of the study was to explore from a forensic social work perspective, the benefits and the challenges of using emotional-support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings. The study followed a qualitative research method. A qualitative research method allows a researcher to obtain information in an explorative way on a specific subject (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Thyer, 2010). Thyer (2010) states that a qualitative research method works primarily from an inductive perspective; this results in a study evolving from existing knowledge which then proceeds logically from a “general point of view to a specific conclusion, set of questions, hypothesis or grounded theory” (p. 343). The researcher made use of an exploratory study to gain insight into phenomena or situations. The need for such a study arose because of a lack of information and literature on the area of interest (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Thyer, 2010).

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were the most suitable data-collection method for this study because of the explorative nature of the study. The semi-structured interview schedule allowed for a more natural flow, which allowed for more in-depth data collection from the participants. The questions contained in the semi-structured interview schedule were structured to answer the research question in the most efficient way, as this was the primary purpose (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009). Interviews were conducted until data-saturation was reached, which transpired after 10 interviews. The demanding schedules of TTBC's social workers did not allow for face-to-face

interviews; accordingly, telephonic interviews were conducted. The telephonic interviews allowed for the social workers to provide sufficient and insightful information that was beneficial for the research.

Participants

Participants were selected by means of a non-probability, purposive sampling method (De Vos *et al.*, 2011; Rubin & Babbie, 2013; Smith, 2009; Thyer, 2010).

According to Rubin and Babbie (2013), this sampling method entailed that the researcher selected her sample based on judgment and the purpose of the study. The researcher also made use of the key informant's approach to obtain perspectives from presumed experts who have special knowledge with regard to the problems, needs and gaps in current service delivery that a certain population might be experiencing (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Participants were selected from TTBC in Johannesburg and social workers in private practice associated with TTBC. Two dog handlers from TOP Dogs were included as participants, due to their knowledge of the research topic. The research assistant acted as mediator.

Participants were included in the study if they were, at the time of the study, social workers working in the forensic social work field, employed, or associated with TTBC in Johannesburg. The inclusion criteria called for social workers with more than two years' experience; this measure was relaxed due to the lack of willing participants available. Two participants who are dog handlers at TOP Dogs did not meet the original inclusion criteria but were included because of the relevant and valuable insight they could contribute to the topic of the study.

Procedure

The initial recruitment of participants started with the research obtaining permission from the Board of Directors of the Teddy Bear Clinic. The prospective participants were sent email invitations to participate in the study, the email communication contained an introduction to the researcher, an introduction to the study and the informed consent form. In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted during 2019, with all participants who provided written consent to participate in the research study. Three interviews were done face to face, while seven interviews were done telephonically due to availability of the participants. Participation was completely voluntary with no compensation given.

Ethical considerations

Ethical Approval for the study was obtained from the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus' Health Research Ethics Committee with project number **NWU-00138-18-A1**. Participation was voluntary and written consent was given by each participant. Participants were identified through numbers to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the study. Transcriptions will be kept for 7 years before being permanently deleted.

Data Analysis

Seven participants were interviewed telephonically, while three participants were interviewed face-to-face, with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The conversations were noted down word for word to ensure sufficient notes were being made, and that the data gathered was reliable. A thematic analysis process was followed to

analyse the data, which entails identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The researcher followed the six-step-framework set out by Clarke and Braun (as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), which included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the identified themes, defining the themes and writing up the findings. The findings are discussed below.

Discussion of Results

Profile of participants

The profile of the participants of the study is set out in Table 1 below.

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentege
Gender	Male	2	20
	Female	8	80
Race	African	5	50
	Coloured	1	10
	Indian	1	10
	White	3	30
Years Experience	0-5 years	6	60
	6-10 years	1	10
	10 years +	3	30
Organization	TTBC	8	80
	Top Dogs	2	20

Table 1: Profile of Participants

The following statements reveal the overall perspective of the participants regarding the use of the emotional support dogs:

“For the kids this will be a great support. The dogs help them relax and would be a huge, huge help.” (Participant 8, 11 November 2019).

“I think it’s fantastic.” (Participant 9, 14 August 2019).

“I think it’s very good. It helps to make the children be more calm and to have more confidence.” (Participant 2, 6 November 2019).

“The dogs are doing wonders for the court. The children’s confidence and emotional level has increased.” (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

The findings will be presented under four main themes, namely: the perceived benefits of using emotional-support dogs; the perceived challenges of using the emotional support dogs; the cultural aspects that need to be taken into account and the perceived openness of the South African court system to the introduction of the emotional-support dogs.

Theme 1: The perceived benefits of using emotional-support dogs as support for the CSA victim in the criminal court.

The overall perception of the participants was that the children who came into contact with the emotional-support dogs were calmer and more confident. Ninety percent of the participants mentioned the calming effect of the emotional-support dogs as a benefit of using these dogs as support. This is directly in line with the feedback given by the Dan Satterberg interim county prosecutor in King County, who stated, “The dogs help us break down the barriers of fear, distrust and anxiety, so we can get the truth.” (Dellinger, 2009, p. 179). The following quotes were drawn from the interviews done with the participants in the study:

“It makes the children calm and they trust the dogs.” (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

“There’s a calming effect on them (the children).” (Participant 7, 25 July 2019).

“It lowers stress, and also it’s very comforting and soothing.” (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

The perception of the participants was that because the children felt comfortable and calm, they became more confident. This perception is reflected in the statements below, which are taken from the interviews conducted with the participants:

“The kids become more comfortable with the dogs and you can see their confidence coming in.” (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

“It makes the children comfortable with the court process.” (Participant 2, 6 November 2019).

“It makes them stress less and be more confident.” (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

This is in line with the findings of numerous research studies which have found that petting an animal releases oxytocin, endorphins and dopamine, while reducing the effects of cortisol and norepinephrine. The increase and decrease of the above-mentioned hormones allow the child to be more relaxed and minimises the effects of stress and anxiety (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016; Grimm, 2013; Kamioka *et al.*, 2014; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; O’Haire *et al.*, 2015; Wood *et al.*, 2018).

One participant highlighted the case where a CSA victim, who had gone through the court-preparation programme with the emotional-support dogs, had to testify

at the Randburg Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg. "*The Magistrate came back and asked what we are doing differently, because the child did so well.*" (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

According to research, it has been proven that the presence of the emotional-support animal allows for the victim to feel more calm and secure, which in turn allows for a better and possibly more reliable testimony (Dellinger, 2009; Ensminger, 2016). A participant stated that, "*the children are calmer during the court preparation, this makes them more reliable witnesses.*" (Participant 5, 12 November 2019). According to Wood *et al.* (2018), a child who feels supported and comfortable when cross-examined will more likely produce a reliable and honest testimony.

One participant stated that, "*this (the use of emotional-support dogs) is really something great and it should really be considered. It should be optional, so largely available that it could just be another option.*" (Participant 3, 8 November 2019). From the data that has been collected, it is evident that there is an overwhelming positivity towards the use of emotional-support dogs.

Theme 2: The perceived challenges of using emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims in the criminal court.

When participants were asked what disadvantages, they thought the use of the emotional-support dogs could have, 60% of the participants stated that they could not see any disadvantages. However, when the data was analysed, consistent themes emerged which, even though they were not perceived as disadvantages, would create possible challenges when making use of emotional-support dogs in the criminal court.

Five possible challenges when using emotional-support dogs in the criminal court were identified by the participants. For this article, the following perceived

challenges will be discussed: Fear of the dogs, generalization, respect for the court, influence on the dog handler and misconceptions surrounding the use of the emotional-support dogs.

The fear of dogs was mentioned by 90% of the participants during the data collection. The following statements are some of the statements made by the participants regarding the fear of dogs:

Participant 7 stated that, "*The children are scared at first, but they become calm.*" (Participant 7, 25 July 2019).

Participant 3 and Participant 4 mentioned children who might not be exposed to the dogs before testifying by saying, "*Looking at children who have not attended the court prep...It might be a fear and disruption in testifying.*" (Participant 3, 8 November 2019) and "*For a child who hasn't attended the court preparation programme it could be scary.*" (Participant 4, 18 November 2019).

When the topic of fear was further explored, 60% of the participants stated that the fear could be overcome by moving slowly and preparing the children. The participants also placed emphasis on the fact that the children should never be forced to interact with the emotional-support dogs if they did not want to. The fear of animals, such as dogs, has been found to be more prevalent in African cultures but less common in other cultures in South Africa (Muris *et al.*, 2008). The following statements are taken from the data gathered from the participants during the study, who highlighted the need for slow and optional introduction of the emotional-support dogs:

"*You have to prepare the children first and you can't force the process.*" (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

"I think you just have to take it slow and you shouldn't force the children to interact with the dogs if they don't want to." (Participant 7, 25 July 2019).

"If a child is terrified, it should be optional." (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

The fear of dogs is perceived by the participants to be closely related to cultural beliefs and might be fuelled by misconceptions related to dogs. A few of the participants were of the opinion that these misconceptions were born out of the trauma in South Africa's history (Participant 2, 6 November 2019; Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

Participants mentioned that dogs were used by the South African police to scare people and to threaten people; this might have created the perception that dogs should be feared. The participants also pointed out that a stigma might have been created, suggesting that all dogs are aggressive and that all dogs will bite. The participants gave coherent information on the fact that different cultures perceive dogs differently and that cultural sensitivity would be paramount in the implementation of an emotional-support dog programme (Participant 1, 10 December 2019; Participant 2, 6 November 2019; Participant 3, 8 November 2019; Participant 4, 18 November 2019; Participant 6, 25 July 2019; Participant 7, 25 July 2019; Participant 8, 11 November 2019; Participant 9, 14 August 2019; Participant 10, 6 November 2019).

One participant mentioned that the biggest challenge to be overcome was the lack of knowledge that South Africans have regarding dogs (Participant 5, 12 November 2019). These misconceptions have been passed on from generation to generation (Muris *et al.*, 2008). The researcher is of the opinion that the fear of dogs can be overcome by educating people on the true nature of dogs and by more research being done to provide empirical evidence on the positive effects of using emotional-support

dogs. One participant stated, *"I don't like dogs. We are taken out of our comfort zones (by having to work with the dogs). Everyone's mind-sets are being changed (becoming more positive about the dogs). We are very excited (about the dogs)."* (Participant 6, 25 July 2019), this is indicative of how a person's perception of the use of emotional-support dogs might change once they gain more knowledge and experience on the use of these dogs. Wood *et al.* (2018) state that it is imperative that the introduction of emotional-support dogs into the court system should be accompanied by informed policy development and public education.

Participants mentioned that a possible challenge could be that the children might generalize and transfer the comfort that they received from the emotional-support dogs to all dogs, which in turn creates a possible danger. *"The dogs help to bridge the fear, but it must still be seen in context, not all dogs are always trustable."* (Participant 9, 14 August 2019). Participant 8 stated that, *"the use of the emotional-support dogs is always started with an orientation regarding dog safety and bite prevention"* (Participant 8, 11 November 2019). During this orientation, the children are made aware that not all dogs are as friendly as the emotional-support dogs and that they should not approach dogs they do not know.

Another possible challenge, mentioned by three of the participants, was the fact that the court is a respected place and that the use of the dogs might be "play". One participant stated that, *"it (the court) is not a concert"* (Participant 9, 14 August 2019). The researcher is of the opinion that this can be categorized with the challenge of misconceptions. Emotional-support dogs should be seen as working dogs whose only role is to support the children. These dogs should undergo strict training and can be compared to guide dogs for the blind. The use of emotional-support dogs should be under strict

supervision and it should be clarified that these dogs are not pets but are there to serve the purpose of supporting the CSA victim. Just as intermediaries are expected to undergo specific training and have specific regulations to follow, the emotional-support dogs will also have to undergo specific training and meet specific requirements before being allowed to be in contact with a CSA victim. It would be of utmost importance that the emotional-support dogs are calm and have undergone obedience training to ensure that the process can be conducted in a professional manner.

One participant mentioned the negative impact that the criminal court proceedings could have on the dog handler that accompanies the dog, seeing as he would have to witness the details of the CSA victim's testimony (Participant 5, 12 November 2019). Further research should be done to find safe and effective ways to introduce emotional-support dogs. One possibility could be that intermediaries be trained to make use of the emotional-support dogs, seeing as they would as a matter of course be exposed to the testimony of the CSA victims.

Theme 3: The perceived cultural considerations.

During the study, 70% of the participants believed that people raised in traditional African cultures do not like dogs and are often very scared of them. This was ascribed to the South African police's use of dogs to scare or threaten people. The participants were of the opinion that this fear could also be ascribed to the belief that it is not the norm in African cultures to have dogs as pets and therefore they do not perceive dogs as companion animals.

These perceptions are reflected in the following statements made by participants:

“Culturally, dogs are there to bite and we curse at them.” (Participant 6, 25 July 2019).

“Every culture learns different things and people are afraid of things that they don't know.” (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

“I think, given our history, some children might be taught to be afraid of dogs.” (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

In South Africa, the majority of the population is African and therefore the African culture should get due consideration when introducing a new tool into the criminal justice system. The researcher is of the opinion that the African culture's perception of dogs should be respected. The use of emotional-support dogs in the criminal court, as support for CSA victims, has been a great success in the USA and Australia (Dellinger, 2009; Wood *et al*, 2018), both seen as first world countries, this emphasises the need for more in-depth researcher within the context of South Africa, seeing as South Africa presents such a diverse culture with unique dynamics.

Another group that was specified by participants is the Muslim population: *“Let's take for example the Muslim community. Dogs are not allowed to enter the house for religious purposes.”* (Participant 2, 6 November 2019). Studies on the application of emotional-support dogs to different cultural and religious backgrounds are not numerous, and since South Africa is one of the most diverse countries in the world, this would be one of the most important considerations to take into account. The researcher is of the opinion that this leaves a great void in the body of literature, which creates the opportunity for future research studies to contribute to existing literature. Research studies specifically focussing on the perceived cultural challenges that can be experienced when making use of emotional-support dogs, would be necessary to accurately determine what the perceptions,

experiences and implications would be for each of the unique cultures and races within South African.

Theme 4: The perceived openness of the South African court system for the introduction of the emotional-support dogs.

It is not unusual that new practices are met with critique and caution. The use of emotional-support dogs has gained a lot of attention in other countries where it has been implemented. In recent years, the use of emotional-support dogs has made headlines in South Africa due to TTBC and TOP Dogs partnership; their court-preparation programme has been featured in newspapers and television shows such as *Carte Blanche* (*Carte Blanche*, 2019). The court-preparation programme has been met with great interest from the public. Many of the participants were positive about the openness of the South African court system to the introduction of emotional-support dogs. Forty percent of the participants stated that they believed that the South African justice system would be open to the use of emotional-support dogs if there was more research to confirm the effectiveness of the use of these dogs. The participants gave their perceptions on the readiness of South African courts to introduce emotional-support dogs, with the following statements:

“I think that they might be open, for such reasons, such as there’s not extensive research on K9 therapy in the court structure, but there is an increase in research. It’s not just something that’s plucked from nowhere.” (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

“I find South Africa to be a country that is really open to new developments and if it’s clear that this is effective, if there are studies to prove that it is successful, then I think the court would consider it.” (Participant 4, 18 November 2019).

“If they see that there is research that shows that it works, I think they will allow it.” (Participant 10, 6 November 2011).

Three participants mentioned that introducing the emotional-support dogs into the court system would have to take into consideration every single person working in that particular courtroom. The researcher is of the opinion that this is a challenge that could be resolved by more comprehensive research on the practicalities around the introduction of these dogs into the criminal justice system, and the logistics relating to the introduction.

Conclusions

An overall positive perspective of the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims in the criminal courts was evident in the data gathered during the study. The participants show an overwhelming excitement regarding the use of emotional-support dogs. An emphasis was placed on the lack of knowledge, understanding and empirical research available when it comes to the use of emotional-support dogs in the South African context. It is clear from the research that the use of the emotional-support dogs will have to be accompanied by a properly developed programme as well as an informative and educational campaign (Wood *et al.*, 2018; Courthouse Dogs Foundation, 2020).

The positive effects that the use of emotional-support dogs is perceived to have had on the CSA victims who have thus far been exposed to the dogs is of such significance that it cannot be ignored. This study has found that the most emphasized benefit of the use of emotional-support dogs in the criminal courts as support for the CSA victim, was the calming effect that it had on the children. This has been confirmed by numerous research studies (Dellinger, 2009; Dietz *et al.*, 2012; Ensminger, 2016; Kamioka

et al., 2014; McDonald & Rooney, 2014; O'Haire *et al.* 2015:2). The researcher is of the opinion that this study is a small but significant start to the much-needed research on the use of emotional-support dogs in South African criminal courts.

The most prevalent challenges identified during the study were the fear of dogs; the misconceptions around dogs; the danger that children might generalize the friendliness of the emotional-support dog to all dogs; and the negative impact that the testimony could have on the dog handler. Most of the identified challenges are related, and the identification of these challenges opens opportunity for future research studies. The researcher is of the opinion that the perceived fear of dogs and the misconceptions related to the dogs are to a degree unique to South Africa and would therefore need to be researched further in a South African context. The literature reveals that the use of emotional-support dogs has also been met with wide-spread criticism, even in countries where it is now widely available (Dellinger, 2009; Wood *et al.*, 2018). One participant stated that, "*people are scared of what they don't know*" (Participant 3, 8 November 2019).

In a recent study by Artz *et al.* (2018), it was reported that one in three adolescents in South Africa have experienced some form of sexual abuse. With this alarming statistic, it is of utmost importance that the South African court system implements protective factors that would effectively assist the CSA victim during the court proceedings and in turn produce more reliable witnesses. The benefits of using emotional-support dogs far outweigh the perceived challenges and it should therefore be pursued with great determination, starting with the education of people regarding dogs.

More in-depth studies should be done on the different themes identified in the findings of this study, specifically taking into account the cultural diversity in South

Africa. It is recommended that practical studies should be conducted with focus groups comparing the use of emotional-support dogs as support for the CSA victim to a control group testifying without the use of an emotional-support dog. Proper legislation and protocol should also be researched and implemented to ensure the safety of all parties involved in the use of emotional-support dogs, including the dog.

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Section 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the study was to explore from a forensic social work perspective, the benefits and challenges when using emotional-support dogs when child sexual-abuse (CSA) victims testify in criminal court proceedings. The aim of the study was met, as the researcher was able to explore the perspectives of forensic social workers on the benefits and challenges of using emotional- support dogs when CSA victims testify in criminal court proceedings, and the researcher was able to obtain meaningful and insightful information. The researcher was able to gain a better understanding of the topic of the study and can contribute this new knowledge as well as an insight into the existing available literature in South Africa.

The objectives of the research study were met as the researcher was able to acquire knowledge and insight by means of a literature study into the chosen topic, which focused on the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims testifying in criminal courts. The researcher was also able to gain an understanding of the perspectives of forensic social workers regarding the benefits and challenges of using emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims who testify in a criminal court. The researcher was also able to obtain an understanding of and insight into the perspectives of two dog handlers who are involved with the use of emotional-support dogs.

Literature study

The literature study was done to establish a foundation on which to pursue the study and to ascertain what information and literature is available on the topic of this study. The literature study allowed the researcher to identify areas for theoretical sampling and to be able to compare and confirm the findings of this study (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The

literature study served as an introduction to the topic of the study and allowed for a better understanding and foundation of the selected topic.

Empirical study

Method.

The study followed a qualitative approach, as this was identified as the most appropriate approach for the purposes of this study. The qualitative approach allowed for more in-depth data to be collected and allowed the researcher to gain insight into the perspectives of the participants. The study could have gained more insight into the perspectives of social workers if a larger sample group could have been identified. The researcher was provided with a list of 13 social workers employed at The Teddy Bear Clinic (TTBC), of which eight agreed to participate in the study. The researcher interviewed two dog handlers from the TOP Dogs organization, which is affiliated with TTBC, to achieve the set minimum of 10 participants. A larger sample group would have allowed for more generalized findings.

Participants.

Social workers employed by TTBC in Johannesburg were included as participants in the study. The social workers at TTBC were specifically chosen since they have experience in the use of emotional-support dogs. The researcher included two dog handlers from the TOP Dogs organization. The rationale for the inclusion of the dog handlers was that they would be able to provide valuable information for the study.

Ethical Aspects.

The researcher considered all ethical considerations with due care (De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher ensured that all ethical considerations were upheld throughout the

research process. The researcher obtained ethical approval from the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, with project number **NWU-00138-18-A1**, see **Addendum D**. The risk level of the study was rated as minimal. No participant experienced any inconvenience or negative emotions because of their participation in the research study.

Data Collection and Analysis.

Data collection was done using a semi-structured interview schedule containing six questions (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The questions were designed to ensure that the primary aim of the research study was met. The researcher made use of a thematic analysis process to analyse all data collected during the study. The researcher was able to use the thematic analysis process to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Following the six-step framework set out by Clarke and Braun (as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) enabled the researcher to organize all the collected data into themes and write up the findings.

Procedure.

Stage 1: Problem Identification

Child sexual abuse victims are some of the most vulnerable witnesses in the criminal justice system. The CSA victims are often subject to secondary traumatisation during this process. In South Africa, the use of intermediaries is implemented as a protective measure to protect these CSA victims from undue mental stress and harm. Recently, countries around the world have been implanting the use of emotional-support dogs as a protective measure for CSA victims who are testifying in court proceedings. The use of emotional-support dogs has seen great success in other countries, which inspired the researcher's curiosity into the perspectives of forensic social workers in South Africa with

regard to the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims testifying in criminal court proceedings.

Stage 2: Conducting Literature Search

The researcher made use of numerous sources, which included local and international literature. The researcher followed the proposal approach set by the Social Work Department of the North-West University. The researcher made use of articles, textbooks, legislation and online articles that were available through the Library Services of the North-West University. Resources were primarily sourced from the North-West University Library Services and searched for online.

Stage 3: Data Collection

Data collection was done using a semi-structured interview schedule containing six questions (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The questions were designed to ensure that the primary aim of the research study was met.

Stage 4: Data Analysis

The researcher made use of a thematic analysis process to analyse all data collected during the study. The researcher was able to use the thematic analysis process to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Following the six-step framework set out by Clarke and Braun (as cited in Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) enabled the researcher to organize all the collected data into themes and write up the findings.

Stage 5: Ethical Considerations

The researcher considered all ethical considerations with due care (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The researcher ensured that all ethical considerations were upheld throughout

the research process. The researcher obtained ethical approval from the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, with project number **NWU-00138-18-A1**, see **Addendum D**. The risk level of the study was rated as minimal. No participant experienced any inconvenience or negative emotions as a result of their participation in the research study.

Findings

The findings indicated an overall positive perspective on the use of emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims in criminal courts. The majority of participants stated that they could not identify any challenges with regard to the use the emotional-support dogs. During the analysis of the data it became clear that four main challenges were identified regarding the use of emotional-support dogs. The most significant benefits of using emotional-support dogs as support for CSA victims in a criminal court were:

- The calming and relaxing effect that the dogs have on the children;
- The confidence that the children gain when working with the dogs; and
- The fact that calmer and more confident children make more reliable witnesses.

The most significant challenges of using the emotional-support dogs as support for the CSA victims in a criminal court were:

- Fear of the dogs;
- Generalization that all dogs are approachable;
- Respect for the court;
- The emotional influence of the court cases on the dog handler; and
- Misconceptions surrounding the use of the emotional-support dogs.

Limitations of the study

Although 13 social workers who met the inclusion criteria of the research study were identified, only eight were willing to participate in the research study. The specifications of the study are narrow and social workers with exposure to the use of emotional-support dogs are extremely rare. The researcher had to include participants who did not fit the original inclusion criteria. The researcher included two dog handlers from Top Dogs and is of the opinion that they added valuable information to the study and added value by giving information which comes from a different perspective, than that given by the social work participants. South African literature available on the research topic is limited. The researcher was able to obtain a few usable resources from other countries, but the applicability of the literature is hampered by the vast differences in court systems and demographics. The researcher experienced some scepticism and criticism due to unfamiliarity of the use of emotional-support dogs in South Africa. At the time of this research study, the use of emotional-support dogs had never been implemented in any court hearing in South Africa. Therefore, the findings have been limited to the perspectives and insights of the professional participants.

Personal reflections

Social workers are optimistic regarding the use of emotional-support dogs. Currently the use of an intermediary is the protective factor implemented most widely for CSA victims testifying in the criminal courts. When looking at CSA cases in the South African court system, it is evident that the conviction rate is extremely low while the occurrence of CSA is very high (Artz *et al.*, 2018) The researcher is of the opinion that it should be a priority to improve on the existing system in order to improve the reliability of the CSA victim's testimony, which would in turn lead to a higher conviction rate.

The feedback received from participants revealed that the use of emotional-support dogs in a court-preparation programme has led to great success and excitement at the TTBC. The researcher is of the opinion that the perceived benefits identified by the participants during the study correlate with the benefits that are mentioned in existing literature. The researcher is of the opinion that the perceived challenges identified by the participants create opportunities for much-needed research to be done in a South African context. The researcher is positive and optimistic about the use of emotional-support dogs in the South African system. The researcher is of the opinion that there is a great need for public education generally on the nature of dogs and specifically on their use as emotional-support animals. Much more research should be done to allow for the development of an informed and ethical plan of action with regard to the use of emotional-support dogs in South African criminal courts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the literature study, the researcher could make the following recommendations:

- The aim of the research was to explore the perspectives of forensic social workers regarding the benefits and challenges of using emotional-support dogs when child sexual-abuse victims testify in criminal court proceedings. The literature available on this topic is limited, especially in the South African context. This results in a gap in the theory and a need for further research to be done.
- The benefits associated with the use of emotional-support dogs are emphasized in the findings of this study and in existing literature. With the high CSA rates in South Africa, any beneficial and effective protective measure for victims

should be considered and explored to ensure more effective and reliable testimony, which would result in higher conviction rates.

- Due to the diversity of South Africa, research studies should be done to focus specifically on the effectiveness of the use of emotional-support dogs in different cultures, and religions, and for both genders. These research studies should also consider the different application methods that would need to be considered for each group.

- Educational programmes should be developed and implemented to ensure the education of the public, social workers, and professionals involved in CSA cases.

- Policies and frameworks need to be developed that ensure the ethical and humane treatment of emotional-support dogs in addition to the proper training of the emotional-support dogs and the person handling the dog.

- The efficiency of the use of emotional-support dogs should be measured against the efficiency of the use of intermediaries in terms of cost effectiveness, ease of application and effectiveness in assisting the CSA victim

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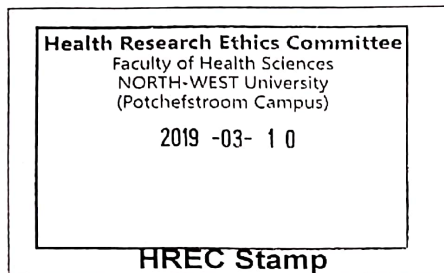
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Section 5: Addendums

A – Informed Written Consent/ Participant Information Leaflet



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: +2718 299-1111/2222
Fax: +2718 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON SOCIAL WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOGS DURING THE TESTIMONY OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURTS.

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY: Social workers' perspective on the use of emotional support dogs during the testimony of child sexual abuse victims in South African Criminal Courts.

ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBERS: NWU-00138-18-S1

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Prof. T. M. Robinson
Associate Professor Extraordinaire
North West University

POST GRADUATE STUDENT:
Chrisna Schmidt

ADDRESS:
1842 Cnr. Valon Place & Tarascon Drive
Dainfern Valley
Sandton, Johannesburg
South Africa

CONTACT NUMBER:
011 469 3866 / 082 682 6686

You are being invited to take part in a **research study** that forms part of my MSW in Forensic Practice study requirements. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to say no to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU-00138-18-S1)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures (DoH, 2015) and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or other relevant people to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted at the Teddy Bear Clinic in Johannesburg, should you not be comfortable with the chosen venue, an alternative venue can be made available. The study will involve semi-structured interviews with experienced health researchers trained in social work, participants will be included in this study.*
- *We plan to explore the perspectives of 10-15 forensic social workers in South Africa, regarding the use of emotional support dogs during the testimony of child sexual abuse victims in Criminal Courts*

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited to be part of this research because you are an experienced forensic social worker.*
- *You also fit the research because you have a valid social work degree, that is recognised by the SACSSP.*
- *You have at least two years' experience in Forensic Social Work, specifically child sexual abuse cases.*
- *You are currently employed by or affiliated with the Teddy Bear Clinic.*
- *You will not be able to take part in this research if you are not currently working as a forensic social worker.*

What will be expected of you?

- *You will be expected to attend one semi-structured interview, which will have a duration of between 20 and 40 minutes.*
- *You will be expected to attend a follow-up interview, which will have a duration of 15 to 20 minutes to ensure that the information gathered from you has been interpreted accurately.*

Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?

- *There will be no personal gain for you as a participant in this study.*

- *You will however contribute to the literature available in South Africa regarding the use of emotional support dogs in forensic social work.*

Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?

- *The risks to you in this study are the loss of confidentiality due to a leak of data collected, this will be prevented by ensuring that personal information is stored in a locked cabinet and by making use of a coding system to identify all participants.*

How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your findings?

- *Anonymity of your findings will be protected by storing all information in a locked cabinet, 5 years after the completion of the study all data will be destroyed in an ethically approved manner. Your privacy will be respected by the researcher using a coding system to identify all participants, therefore no identifying details will be used. Your results will be kept confidential by referring to you as participants in the mini-dissertation, no identifying details will be used in any part of the study. Only the researchers and research assistance will be able to look at your findings. Findings will be kept safe by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and for electronic data it will be stored on a password protected computer. Data will be stored for 5 years.*

What will happen with the findings or samples?

- *The findings of this study will only be used for this study and the data will be destroyed after 5 years. The researcher will apply to have the findings published in the Social Work Journal.*

How will you know about the results of this research?

- *We will give you the results of this research once the research has been completed, should you wish to receive the results. The results of the research will be forwarded via email by Chrisna Schmidt.*

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs for you?

You will not be paid to take part in the study because the study is a small scale study which is done to fulfil the requirements of a MSW in Forensic Practice and you are requested to voluntarily take part in the study without receiving any reimbursement. We are of the opinion that the research will not intrude on your personal time and we will go out of our way to ensure that participants experience minimal to no inconvenience during the process.

The interviewer will travel to the participants, and therefore no travelling expense will be involved for the participants.

There will be no costs involved for you, if you do take part in this study.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- *You can contact Chrisna Schmidt at chrisna.dreyer4@gmail.com or Prof. T. M. Robinson at admin@drtmrobinson.co.za if you have any further questions or have any problems.*

- You can also contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 1206 or carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns that were not answered about the research or if you have complaints about the research.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in the research study titled: *Social workers' perspective on the use of emotional support dogs during the testimony of child sexual abuse victims in South African Criminal Courts.*

I declare that.

- I have read this information/it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- The research was clearly explained to me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I clearly and in detail explained the information in this document to
.....
- I did/did not use an interpreter.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I gave him/her time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to or I had it explained by who I trained for this purpose.
- I did/did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them
or I was available should he/she want to ask any further questions.
- The informed consent was obtained by an independent person.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that he/she had time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of researcher

Current details: (24151629). This PC My Documents. Research Forms Informed Consent. 18 November 2018.
25 April 2018

File reference: Informed Consent.

B – Letter of Goodwill:

DR. SHAHEDA OMAR
Director of Clinical Services
The Teddy Bear Clinic
Johannesburg
2193

RE: Application to conduct a research study

I am currently studying for the Master's Degree in Social Work: Forensic Practice, with the North West University, and I am expected to conduct a research study as required for the degree.

The topic of my research is "***Social workers' perspective on the use of emotional support dogs during the testimony of child sexual abuse victims in South African Criminal Courts***" and it will be conducted under the supervision of Prof Tanya Robinson, Professor Extraordinaire at the University of the North West.

The target population is forensic social workers, and I would like to request your permission to perform data collection at the Teddy Bear Clinic. The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews.

Please feel free to contact me at chrisna.dreyer4@gmail.com, should you require any more information regarding the research study.

Thanking you in anticipation,
Kind regards,



Chrisna Schmidt
Social worker

C – Interview Schedule

Proposed Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Additional information:

Male Female

Age: _____

Years' experience as a forensic social worker: _____

Organisation / Practice: _____

Qualitative interview schedule:

Length: 20 – 40 minutes

Goal: To understand from a forensic social work perspective, the benefits and the challenges when using emotional support dogs when child sexual abuse victims testify in criminal court proceedings.

Written consent:

Complete written consent form in the interview.

Let the interviewee tell their story and use the questions below:

1. Tell me about your perspectives on the use of emotional support dogs in Criminal Court proceedings?
2. What advantages (if any), do you think the use of these dogs, as support for the child sexual abuse victim, might have in Criminal Court proceedings?
3. What disadvantages or impediments (if any), do you think the use of these dogs, as support for the child sexual abuse victim, might have in Criminal Court proceedings?
4. Tell me more about your perspective regarding the Criminal Court system in South Africa being open to the introduction of emotional support dogs in Courts?
5. Tell me about your perspective regarding some children being scared of dogs and how must this be considered in this study?
6. Tell me about your perspective regarding any cultural aspects relating to dogs and how this should be considered in this study?

D – NWU Ethical Approval



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Research Ethics Regulatory Committee
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.machine@nwu.ac.za

10 March 2019

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North West University Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HREC) on 10/03/2019, the NWU Health Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Social workers' perspective on the use of emotional support dogs during the testimony of child sexual abuse victims in South African Criminal Courts.																															
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof TM Robinson																															
Student: C Schmidt																															
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>8</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="5">Study Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="5">Status</td></tr></table> <p>Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation</p>	N	W	U	-	0	0	1	3	8	-	1	8	-	A	1	Institution			Study Number					Year		Status				
N	W	U	-	0	0	1	3	8	-	1	8	-	A	1																	
Institution			Study Number					Year		Status																					
Application Type: Single Study	Risk: <table border="1"><tr><td>Minimal</td></tr></table>	Minimal																													
Minimal																															
Commencement date: 10/03/2019																															
Expiry date: 29/02/2020																															
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of an annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																															

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-HREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the NWU-HREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-RERC and NWU-HREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:

- *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
 - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-HREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
 - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
 - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- NWU-HREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via Ethics-HRECApplied@nwu.ac.za or 018 299 1206.

The NWU-HREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-HREC or the NWU-RERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof Wayne Towers
Chairperson NWU Health Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.1 HREC Ethical Approval Letter.docm
3 December 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

E– Declaration of Language Editing

CERTIFICATION

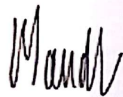
This serves to confirm that I, *Vivien van der Sandt*, took care of the language editing of the article:

Social workers' perspectives on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in South African criminal courts.

By

C Schmidt

Student number: 24151629



VIVIEN VAN DER SANDT

MEMBER OF THE PROFESSIONAL EDITORS' GUILD

VIVIEN SANDT FREELANCE SERVICES

viviensandtFS@gmail.com

CELL: 061 246 9069

13 AUGUST 2020

F – Solemn Declaration and Permission to Submit



NWU Higher Degrees Administration

SOLEMN DECLARATION AND PERMISSION TO SUBMIT

1. Solemn declaration by student

I, Christna Schmidt

declare herewith that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article entitled (**exactly as registered/approved title**),

Social Workers' perspectives on the use of emotional-support dogs during the testimony of child sexual-abuse victims in South African criminal courts

which I herewith submit to the North-West University is in compliance/partial compliance with the requirements set for the degree:

Master of Social Work Forensic Practice

is my own work, has been text-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not already been submitted to any other university.

LATE SUBMISSION: If a thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article of a student is submitted after the deadline for submission, the period available for examination is limited. No guarantee can therefore be given that (should the examiner reports be positive) the degree will be conferred at the next applicable graduation ceremony. It may also imply that the student would have to re-register for the following academic year.

Ethics number: 00138-18-A1 ORCID: 0 0 0 0 - 0 0 0 3 - 4 7 3 8 - 5 2 7 0

Signature of Student *Christna Schmidt* University Number 2 4 1 5 1 6 2 9

Signed on this 11th day of August of 2020

2. Permission to submit and solemn declaration by supervisor/promoter

The undersigned declares that the thesis/dissertation/mini-dissertation/article:

- complies with the A-rules and the technical requirements provided for in the Manual for Master's and Doctoral studies and in faculty rules;
- has been checked by me for plagiarism (by making use of TurnItIn software for example) and a satisfactory report has been obtained;
- and that the work was language edited before submission for examination.

Faculty specific requirements as per A-rules: 1.3.2, 4.33, 4.2.4, 4.10.4, 5.3.2

- complies with regards to faculty rules on submission or acceptance by an accredited scientific journal;
- complies with regards to faculty rules on peer reviewed conference proceedings;
- the student is hereby granted permission to submit his/her article/mini-dissertation/ dissertation/thesis for examination.

Signatures of supervisor(s) and Promoter(s): (only compulsory in cases where there are co- or assistant- supervisor(s/promoters)

Supervisor/Promoter <u><i>Christna Schmidt</i></u>	Co-Supervisor/Co-Promoter	Assistant -Supervisor Assistant-Promoter
-------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------------------------

Original details: Mariejé Ackermann(10512187) M/SD/NHDA-HQA/HDA Toolbox/Forms/13.SOLEMN DECLARATION AND PERMISSION TO SUBMIT.docx 1 Oct 2019.
File reference: 7.1.11.3.2/3