

**The knowledge of parents in the military regarding child  
sexual abuse**

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## OPSOMMING

**TITEL:** Ouers in die weermag se kennis rakende seksuele mishandeling van kinders.

**SLEUTELTERME:** Kind, ouer, seksuele mishandeling, weermag, gesinsverbrokkeling

Die voorkoms van seksuele mishandeling van kinders is onrusbarend hoog in Suid-Afrika. Die taak van kinderbeskermingsowerhede word bemoeilik deur die feit dat die meeste voorvalle van seksuele mishandeling van kinders nooit aangemeld word nie vanweë die stigma wat daaraan kleef.

Hierdie artikel verduidelik die weerlose posisie waarin die kinders van militêre personeel in uniform hulle bevind vanweë die feit dat een van of beide hulle ouers dikwels deur die gefragmenteerde militêre lewenstyl fisies nie naby hul gesin is nie.

Twee hoofredes is verantwoordelik vir genoemde gefragmenteerdheid van die gesin. Die eerste rede wat gemeld kan word, is dat die soldaat self besluit om die gesin nie na die dorp/stad te laat verhuis waar hy/sy werksaam is nie. Dikwels speel kulturele oortuiging, behuisingsnood of praktiese struikelblokke 'n rol by die ouer se besluit om sy/haar gesin nie te laat verhuis nie.

Die tweede rede vir die gefragmenteerdheid is die feit dat soldate dikwels militêre kursusse moet bywoon of dat hulle ontplooi moet word as deel van 'n vredesoperasie op die Afrika-vasteland. Hierdie militêre verpligtinge bring 'n fisiese en emosionele afwesigheid van die moeder- of vaderfiguur mee, wat die kind moontlik weerloos kan laat sodat hy/sy moontlik seksuele mishandeling ten prooi kan val. Dit het nie alleen 'n negatiewe uitwerking op die ouer-kindverhouding nie, maar ook op die veiligheid van die kind. So 'n ouer wat weens militêre opdragte van die huis afwesig is, het dikwels geen ander keuse nie as om die kind in die sorg van iemand anders te laat wat die kind dan leed aandoen.

Hierdie ondersoek is onderneem met die **doel** om vas te stel wat ouers wat by die weermag werksaam is, se kennis rakende seksuele mishandeling van kinders is ter beskerming van hul kinders daarteen om seksuele misbruik ten prooi te val. Hierdie inligting is ingesamel met die oog daarop om toekomstige programme saam te stel om

ouers te bemagtig in 'n poging om die seksuele misbruik van kinders te probeer bekamp.

Die **doelwitte** van hierdie studie was:

- Om die ouers in die weermag se basiese kennis rakende die seksuele misbruik van kinders te ondersoek ter beskerming van hul kinders daarteen dat hulle seksuele oortreders ten prooi val.
- Om riglyne aan die weermag-ouers te verskaf rakende die voorkoming en herkenning van seksuele misbruik van kinders.

Data-insameling het deur middel van onderhoude met tien lede van die Suid Afrikaanse Nasionale Verdedigingsmag geskied. 'n Selfsaamgestelde onderhoudskedule is gebruik om ouers se kennis rakende seksuele misbruik van kinders te bepaal.

Uit die bevindinge is dit duidelik dat ouers in die weermag se kennis rakende seksuele misbruik van kinders beperk is. Seksualiteit as onderwerp is deur talle ouers as 'n taboe-onderwerp beskou. Sommige het 'n ingesteldheid weerspieël wat te kenne gee dat iemand anders verantwoordelik is vir die seksuele opvoeding van hul kind. Nietemin het ouers laat blyk dat hulle hul kommunikasie met hul kinders wil verbeter om hulle sodoende te kan bemagtig en teen seksuele oortreders te kan beskerm.

## SUMMARY

**TITLE:** The knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse.

**KEY TERMS:** Child, military, parent, sexual abuse, family fragmentation

The prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa is alarmingly high. Child protection officials' task is challenging due to the fact that most cases of child sexual abuse are never reported as a result of the stigma attached to child sexual abuse.

This article explains the vulnerable position of the children of uniform members of the military due to the fact that one or both parents are absent from the family due to fragmentation.

Two main reasons are causing fragmentation. The first reason that can be mentioned is the fact that the soldier him-/herself has decided not to relocate the family to his/her workplace. Cultural beliefs, housing crisis or other practical challenges might play a role in the parent's decision.

The second reason for fragmentation is the fact that soldiers are obliged to attend military courses or to represent their country during a peace operation on the African continent. These military obligations cause physical and emotional absence of the parental figure, which might leave the child in a vulnerable position to fall victim to child sexual abuse. Fragmentation impacts negatively on the parental relationship as well as on the safety of the child. The deployed parent often is left with no choice but to unwittingly leave the child with a harmful caretaker.

The **aim** of the study was to establish the knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse.

The **objectives** of the study were:

- To investigate parents in the military's basic knowledge of child sexual abuse in preventing their children from falling victim to sexual perpetrators.

- To provide guidelines to military parents for preventing and recognising child sexual abuse.

Data collection took place by means of interviews with ten South African National Defence Force members. A self-developed interview schedule was used to establish the parent's knowledge regarding child sexual abuse.

The results indicated the limited knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse. Many parents viewed sexuality as a taboo topic. Some parents presented with an attitude that someone else is responsible for their child's sexual education. Still, the parents indicated that they would like to improve their communication with their children in order to empower and protect the child against sexual perpetrators.



## **FOREWORD**

The article format has been chosen in accordance with Regulations A.7.2.3 as stipulated in the yearbook of the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus, 2008 for the degree MA Social Work: Forensic Practice. The article will comply with the requirements of one of the journals in social work, titled Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk.

This article comprises 60 credits out of a total of 188 credits of the MA Social Work in Forensic Practice course.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AUTHORS

## **SOCIAL WORK/MAATSKAPLIKE WERK**

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

# **The knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse**

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## **1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Child sexual abuse has become a war in our country in which the most innocent and most vulnerable of our citizens, our children, are directly at risk and under attack. The secrecy surrounding the social challenge is placing child protection officials in a difficult position and makes it almost impossible to protect children. Child sexual abuse is taboo behaviour, usually shrouded in secrecy. At times in history the shroud has been lifted and sexual abuse has been recognized only to be re-enshrouded because sexual abuse of children is too disturbing and disruptive to the social order (Goodenough, 2003:1).

The prevalence of child abuse in South Africa is alarmingly high and is a cause of concern for child protection officials. Van Niekerk (2004:266) found a 400% increase in the number of cases presenting over the past nine years. Unfortunately the precise incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse will remain unknown due to the stigma attached to sexual abuse survivors and their fear to disclose.

Tabocloan (2010:1) found that children often fail to report the abuse because of fear of losing a loved one, fear of being harmed, fear of being blamed and not believed, and fear of being shamed. Child sexual abuse survivors will not only need to deal with the shame, the fear and the victimization, but might struggle with almost every area of their functioning. According to Myers et al. (2002:59) and Segal et al. (2007:169), children who endure sexual abuse develop a wide range of social and psychological problems that may affect them well into adulthood.

To highlight the seriousness of child sexual abuse in South Africa, Windows Internet Explorer (2010) stated that five out of seven South African children are abused by their parental figures. Wass (2009:2) mentioned that one in four girls and one in six boys will be victims of some type of sexual abuse/assault by the time they reach age eighteen.

Taking into account the huge crisis South African children are faced with, parents need to come aboard to fight for their children. Mathoma (2006) focused on the importance of educating parents regarding child sexual abuse in order to prevent this tragedy. Many parents lack knowledge and skills with regard to discussing sexuality with their children. Park (2009) found that more than 40% of adolescents had had intercourse before talking to their parents about safe sex, birth control or sexually transmitted diseases.

The family structure within the South African Defence Force is unique and in most cases compromised by the fragmented military lifestyle of the soldiers. Reinkober-Drummet et al. (2003:286) found that military families endure circumstances and demands that are unique. The fragmentation of the family system is one of the aspects that form part of the uniqueness of the military family. Fragmentation of the military family is a growing phenomenon experienced by Military Social Work Officers. Soldiers will often utilize the single living quarters of the military base, working even a 1 000 km away from their spouses and children. Contact with their families is limited to once or twice a year. Regular courses and deployments are also part of the soldier's life and might weaken the family system (Herbst, 1995:24).

According to Reinkober-Drummet et al. (2003:279), "...military families deal with issues common to all families, including child care, elder care, education, parenting concerns, and career choices. However, military families also are subjected to unique stressors, such as repeated relocations that often include international sites, frequent separations of service members from families, and subsequent reorganizations of family life during reunions. Furthermore, military families cope with these stressors in a structured environment that pressures families to behave in a certain way". Here the authors suggest that the family needs to have a "separation plan" ready to assist with normal functioning of the family system.

Within the crisis of the military family, individual authors said the following

regarding the parental relationship. McGregor (2010:1) interviewed deployed soldier fathers. The one father said the following: “Just because I’m halfway around the world doesn’t mean that parenting stops.” McGregor (2010:1) explained the physical absence of the parent in the following way: “How do you stay connected in a meaningful way when you’re not driving your kids to school in the morning or tucking them in at night?” The author thus agrees that the fragmentation of the family system will impact negatively on the parental relationship. Stadelmann (2010:1) stated that parental separation is rated by parents as well as children as one of the most stressful life events. Herbst (1995:24) agreed that the absence of a parent is viewed by the child as abnormal and will always require adaptation.

Herbst (1995:1) focused on the uniqueness of the military child’s development by mentioning the following: “As a member of a special category around which a socio-cultural lore has developed, the child in a military family must master both unique and common tasks in establishing a sense of self.” The fragmentation of the military family can cause these children to become more vulnerable to sexual abuse. In many cases the child stays with one parent or with a care provider. The parent who stays behind might be so preoccupied managing the household without the spouse that warning signs of sexual abuse might be ignored (Reinkober-Drummet et al., 2003:281).

Reasons for fragmentation of the military family within the South African context vary, but can be categorized under cultural/religious reasons (staying with the graves of the ancestors), practical reasons (lack of suitable accommodation to care for a family) or the soldier as single parent (experiencing challenges regarding child care and thus needs to leave the child with a care provider).

The Department of Defence (SA, 2000:2) stated the following on military family fragmentation: “Separations in the family due to military operations, missions, exercises, etc. place great stress on a family system. Separations such as these threaten the entire family system and can cause complete fragmentation of the sense of family.” This instruction of the Department of Defence made it clear that the threatening of the family system is not only localized in one aspect. Childcare safety aspects are also under threat. According to Succov (2009), Family fragmentation can be explained as “alienation of relatives, disruption in the usual point of contact and

loss of communication lines”. This fragmentation of the parental system often allows the soldier no choice but to trust their children’s care in the hands of a family member or other care provider.

Reinkober-Drummet et al. (2003:284) also focused on the non-parental caregiver as substitute for parental care: “Non-parental caregivers may be unfamiliar with military programs, unprepared for the increased physical demands of children, and unaware of the additional emotional needs the children may have.” Gillham (1991:67) mentioned that babysitters commit a significant proportion of offenses. He also focused on risk-categories and explained the following: “Children in well-known risk categories for example, girls not living with their natural father, could be given an extra element of surveillance.” Here the focus was placed on the definite risk for children separated from their biological parents, as applicable in the case of a high number of SANDF members. All these aspects might place the military child in a vulnerable position to fall victim to a child abuser, because the fragmentation of the military family as discussed by Herbst (1995:1) can cause these children to become more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Finkelhor (2002:2) also mentioned that some characteristics are associated with greater risks for child sexual abuse, like living without a natural parent as in the case of military children. Greenfield (2008:1) mentioned that military families have special needs due to the extra burden of fitting into the military culture and the changing roles of family members during and after deployment. A military parent might be so preoccupied with the role changes on a frequent basis, that important information for example grooming behaviour of a care provider might go unreported. Rentz and Martin (2006:2) mentioned the following regarding abuse in the military family: “Abuse may be more common in the military population compared to the civilian population because of higher overall stress levels associated with the military lifestyle for example frequent separations, long work hours and dangerous work environments.”

With this backdrop to child sexual abuse, the role of the parents regarding child sexual abuse in the South African National Defence force (SANDF) is the main focus of this research and the goal of this research was to establish military parents’ knowledge of child sexual abuse. Parental empowerment programs as a preventative measure against child sexual abuse can only take place once the level of knowledge of the

parents has been established. Sinclair (2010:6) said the following regarding the parent's knowledge of child sexual abuse: "The parents' knowledge of child sexual abuse is of utmost importance. Parents have the responsibility to make sure their child is appropriately informed."

**The questions answered by the research study are as follows:**

- What is the level of knowledge regarding child sexual abuse of parents in the military?
- What knowledge does parents in the military need regarding prevention and recognition of child sexual abuse?

## **2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Aim**

To establish the knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse.

### **Objectives**

- To investigate military parents in the military's basic knowledge of child sexual abuse in preventing their children from falling victim to sexual perpetrators.
- To provide guidelines for a programme to parents in the military on the prevention and recognition of child sexual abuse.

## **3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT**

Empowering military parents with knowledge regarding child sexual abuse will prevent sexual abuse in these families.

## **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To be able to follow the correct steps regarding research, methodology cannot be overemphasized. May (1997:1) comments that research methods form a central part of social science and provide a means through which the intellectual development is enhanced. Pretorius (2001:26) explained that research methodology can consist of reporting, description, explanation or prediction.

According to Experiment Resources (2010), "[t]he selection of the research method is crucial for what conclusions you can make about a phenomenon, it is also important

to choose a research method which is within the limits of what the researcher can do. Time, money, feasibility, ethics and availability to measure the phenomenon correctly are examples of issues constraining the research". The system of collecting data for research projects is known as research methodology (Open Text Corporation, 2010).

Fouché and Delport (2005:71) point out that the research methodology includes a description of the specific techniques to be employed, the specific measuring instruments to be utilized and the specific series of activities to be conducted in making the measurements.

This research will consist of a literature review as well as an empirical research.

#### **4.1 Literature review**

The literature review consisted of sources of the Internet, journals, books and research studies. O' Leary (2004:66) states: "I not only use all the brains I have, but all that I can borrow." It was important to make use of the expertise of other professionals, obtained from the above-mentioned sources.

The researcher focused on aspects regarding child sexual abuse and the unique military setting. The researcher made use of the following databases:

Google; Google Scholar; Pro Quest; Yahoo; Science Direct; Ebsco Host.

#### **4.2 Empirical Research**

- **The Pilot Study**

A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study conducted prior to the main research in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research (Wikipedia, 2010). Strydom (2005c:205) focused on the importance of the pilot study with the aim of increasing the precision of the study.

The researcher made use of a pilot study by conducting two preliminary face-to-face interviews with uniformed members of the South African National Defence Force to ensure that the self-developed interview schedule would be understood by the participants. The pilot study was successful and the interview schedules served as probe to motivate the participants to share their experiences and information with the researcher.



- **Research design**

A research design is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study from the conceptualization of the problem through to the dissemination of the findings (Experiment Resources, 2009:1). Mouton (2001:55) and Yegidis and Weinbach (1996:89) explain that a research design refers to a plan or blueprint of the way a researcher intends to conduct the research. According to May (1997:11), the “...word empirical refers to the collection of data on the social world to test or generate the propositions of social science”. The author thus focuses on the fact that empirical research explains the actions that will be taken to collect data.

The descriptive and explorative research design was used during this research. Fouché and de Vos (2005:106) point out that the descriptive research design is flexible in nature and focuses on the “how” and “why”. The purpose of the exploratory design, according to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:154), is to explore a certain phenomenon with the primary aim of formulating more specific research questions relating to that phenomenon.

The researcher began with a well-defined subject and was aiming at describing the subject accurately.

- **Participants**

The researcher made use of purposive sampling as selection method. This type of sampling, as Strydom (2005a:202) puts it, is “ entirely based on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population”. The participants consisted of SANDF members, situated in Potchefstroom. The researcher used her caseload as well as her general work in the military environment to obtain research participants. The participants consisted of ten military parents of primary school children, who are working in Potchefstroom, with limited contact with their families (fragmented military families). Participants were under no obligation to participate in the research and received information regarding the goal and research methodology. It is normal procedure in social research to use the workplace as focus area, especially in the field of occupational social science. O’Leary (2004:103) advanced the following regarding this aspect: “Populations are commonly made up of individuals

but depending on the nature of the research question, the unit of analysis might be households, workplaces, or events.”

- **Method of data collection**

A face-to-face, semi-structured interview with the aid of an interview schedule was used to interview ten SANDF members. (**Annexure 1**). Fouché (2005:270) comments that the researcher will aim to understand and interpret the meaning subjects attach to their everyday lives, when making use of qualitative processes. With ten participants it will be possible to understand and interpret their view of their world because the group is small enough to do an in-depth research.

The reason why the researcher made use of a face-to-face interview is that this type of interviewing method is more accurate than a telephone survey or a self-completion questionnaire. May (1997:91) emphasized the following regarding a telephonic survey: “People may 'break off' an interview more frequently, than in a face-to-face situation.” The author concluded by saying that the non-verbal gestures of the respondent will also be registered by the researcher.

The researcher used a qualitative approach to obtain maximum research results. Qualitative research can be defined as the study of a small number of cases over a period of time. This type of research can also be explained as research through which the characteristics of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation (Henn et al., 2006:156; Henning, 2004:5; O'Leary, 2004:99).

Silverman (2004:179) mentioned the following regarding the process of discovery during qualitative research projects: “The fieldworker must remain open in order to discover the elements making up the markers and the tools that people mobilize in their interactions with others and more generally, with the world.”

During this study, the researcher made use of an interview schedule with open and close-ended questions. May (1997:95) elaborate on the freedom open-ended questions provide by saying the following: “Open questions give respondents a greater freedom to answer the question because they answer in a way that suits their interpretation”.

A Semi-structured face-to-face interview with an interview structure as tool was used and allowed the researcher to maximize the success of data gathering. May

(1997:111) gave the following explanation regarding the semi-structured interview: “Questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is more free to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would appear prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability.” The author concluded that these types of interviews would allow people to answer more on their own terms.

Another tool used to assist with the accurate exploration of participant's experiences was a recording device. All participants gave permission for the use of the device during the interviews. Greef (2005:289) focused on the importance of using a recording device during the interview and added the following: “Be alert. Even when the tape recorder is turned off, the interview is not necessarily over.”

- **Procedures**

- Permission was obtained from the Directorate Social Work, SANDF, as well as the Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University to continue with this study.
- Permission was also obtained from the participants in the study who were interviewed by the researcher herself in her office, using the schedules.
- A pilot study took place with two participants not included in the research.

- **Data analysis**

The researcher analysed each interview on an individual basis as part of qualitative research (Delpont, 2005:166). The data analysis consisted of classifying the data by taking the qualitative data apart and placing it into categories, themes or dimensions of information (Creswell, 2009:144). De Vos (2005:338) explained that “... classification involves identifying five or six general themes”. These themes were divided into subthemes.

- **Ethical issues**

According to Strydom (2005b:57), ethics “... is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behaviour expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.” May (1997:54) defined ethics as follows: “The word ‘ethics’

often suggests a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behavior – to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not.”

- The researcher obtained consent from the SANDF Directorate Social Work to do research within the military setting. Henning (2004:73) focused on obtaining consent from the organization where the research will be conducted as a first step of maintaining and obeying important ethics.
- Written permission **NWU-0027-09-51** was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University.
- The researcher only involved members who voluntarily took part in the project. The members also received information regarding the aim and purpose of the researcher to ensure informed consent (Creswell, 2003:64).
- Confidentiality enjoyed focus in order to protect the identity of those providing research data (O’Leary, 2004:54).
- The researcher ensured confidentiality by consulting with participants on an individual basis and protecting their identities by using a pseudonym.
- The researcher will share the findings of the research with the research community in an accurate and objective manner (Strydom, 2005b: 62).

## **5 SHORTCOMINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

The researcher experienced the following shortcomings:

### **5.1 Language challenges**

The researcher experienced challenges regarding the use of English during some interviews. Two of the respondents were not fluent in English due to the fact that their home language is Tswana, and the researcher had to explain questions to ensure the correct interpretation thereof.

### **5.2 Availability of members**

The researcher arranged appointments with members to assist with the research project. In some cases members did not adhere to appointments and the process took longer to finalize. The researcher also planned to utilize members with severe contact

limitations, for example members who can only have contact with their families four times or less than four times a year due to long distance. Due to the fact that members received transfers back to their home towns, the researcher had to utilize also members from the North-West Province and Gauteng with more regular contact with loved ones.

### **5.3 Sexuality as a taboo topic**

Some older participants found it difficult to discuss the topic of sexual abuse due to the fact that their culture directs them not to talk about sexuality issues. In some cases the researcher could overcome this challenge by portraying an attitude that it is acceptable to talk about this topic and communication probes were used to stimulate the communication between the researcher and participants.

## **6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMINOLOGY**

### **6.1 Child Sexual Abuse**

According to Draucker and Martself, (2006:4), “Definitions in the literature vary according to the types of activities considered to be sexual and the circumstances considered to constitute abuse” “Sexual abuse is the involvement of adults, older children in sexual activities with children who cannot give appropriate consent and who do not understand the significance of what is happening to them” (Philips, 2009:28).

Child sexual abuse is considered to involve any exploitative sexual activity whether or not it involves physical contact between a child and another person who by virtue of his or her power over the child due to age, strength and position or relationship uses the child to meet the person's sexual and emotional needs (Draucker, 1992:3).

According to Wikipedia (2010), child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation.

Researchers and clinicians agree that child sexual abuse includes both intra-familial and extra-familial abuse, as well as contact and non-contact activities. One can conclude with Spies’ (2006: 269) definition, namely that sexual abuse of a child is any contact or interaction between a child and an adult or someone in an authority position during which the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator.

Although involved, the child “is not developmentally mature enough to understand the meaning of the sexual abuse” and cannot give informed consent (Spies, 2006:269).

## 6.2 Military

“A military is an organization authorized by its country to use force, usually including use of weapons, in defending its country” (Wikipedia, 2010).

According to the above-mentioned source (2010) another definition of a military is “a large body of people organized and trained for warfare”.

## 6.3 Military Social Work

Monticuf (2010:5) defined military social work as follows: “This is a specialized field in social work which focuses on assisting the soldier and his family in managing the pressures of military life and post-war adjustments.”

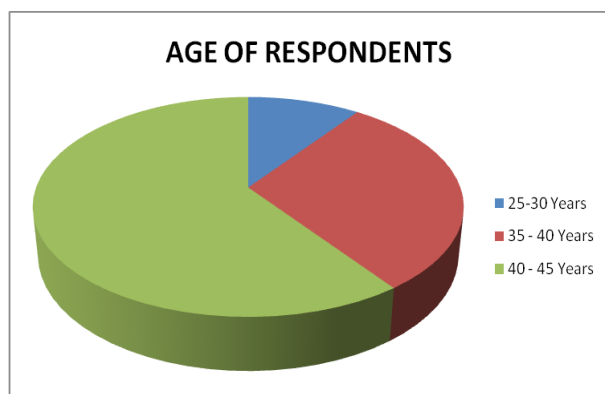
According to Army Social Worker Careers (2010), Military Social Work is a field with cutting-edge professionals and one of the fastest growing enlisted rates in the military. Long separations and intense stress can lead to strong emotional settings, and to situations in which a trained professional military social worker is very useful to help all parties involved.

## 7 FINDINGS

The researcher started the questionnaire with a question pertaining to the age of the respondents. The reason for this question was to form a picture of the average age group of the parents.

### 7.1 Age

**Diagram 1: Age of respondent**

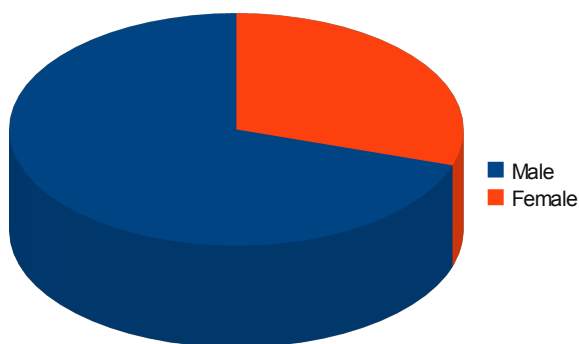


The study showed that six (60%) parents found themselves in the age group 40-45 years of age, 3 (30%) in the age group 35-40% and 1 (10%) in the age group 25-30 years. This was in line with the focus area of the research, namely pre-school children up to last-year-of-primary level. Most professional people plan their families in such a way that they have children in their early thirties after developing their careers as also reflected in the findings.

## 7.2 Gender

The second section of the questionnaire focused on the gender of participants. The reason for exploring this aspect was to explore whether the gender of the parent played a role in his/her openness with their child regarding sexuality as a topic. It was discovered that gender cannot be mentioned as an aspect influencing openness and honesty with the child, but the parent's background was an influencing aspect regarding open communication with the child.

**Diagram 2: Gender of respondents**



There were 3 (30%) female soldiers and 7 (70%) male soldiers. The percentage of female soldiers and male soldiers is a true reflection of the fact that still the highest number of soldiers is male due to the old view that females are not allowed to find themselves in combat and because the military environment is viewed as male orientated.

## 7.3 Particulars regarding dependent children

The respondents were requested to complete the information regarding their children,

as indicated in the table below:

**Table 1: Depended children**

| <i>Respondent number</i> | <b>Number of children</b> | <b>Age (In years)</b> | <b>Gender</b>            | <b>Care provider</b>  |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1 (Female)               | 2                         | 10, 5                 | Boy and Girl             | Maternal Grandmother.   |
| 2 (Male)                 | 3                         | 11,9, 0               | Two boys and one girl    | Children's Mother   |
| 3 (Male)                 | 5                         | 17,13, 11, 5, 4       | Three boys and two girls | Maternal Grandmother.   |
| 4 (Male)                 | 1                         | 3                     | Boy                      | Child's Mother  |
| 5 (Male)                 | 3                         | 13, 11, 4             | Two Boys and one girl    | Paternal Grandmother  |
| 6 (Male)                 | 1                         | 10                    | Girl                     | Paternal Grandmother  |
| 7 (Male)                 | 4                         | 18, 13, 3, 0          | Two Boys and Two girls   | Children's Mother   |
| 8 (Female)               | 4                         | 16, 5 twins of 7      | Three boys and a girl    | The eldest stay in the school hostel. The other children stay with the paternal family. |
| 9 (Female)               | 1                         | 12                    | Boy                      | Paternal aunt   |





## 8 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

### 8.1 Theme 1 – The physical location and living circumstances

This theme was explored by means of two open-ended questions. These types of questioning were used to invite and probe the respondents to part with more information.

Strydom (2005d: 295) mentioned that open-ended questions will allow respondents to finish what they are saying, and will allow respondents to proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking. He also mentioned that this type of questioning will increase the richness of the data being obtained.

**Question 4** focused on the residence of the respondent's family as presented in figure 1

**Table 2: Residence of family members**

| <b>Question 4</b>           | <b><i>Where does your family reside?</i></b>  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Aim of the question         | To form a clear picture of the severity of fragmentation and the correlation with a possible dangerous situation for the member's child.  |
| Examples of responses       | Four respondents indicated that they are from North-West Province, three respondents indicated that they are from Gauteng Province, One respondent was from Limpopo Province, one respondent from KwaZulu-Natal and one respondent indicated that he is from the Eastern Cape       |
| Themes emerging             | The location of the respondents serves as an indication of the seriousness of the fragmentation experienced by military members and their families. Members often have no choice but to leave their loved ones behind as discussed at the beginning of this study.                  |
| Correlation with literature | Many military wives present with symptoms such as lost sleep, digestive disorders, and irritability because they often assume more household responsibilities during their husband's absences. Separations also may place additional stress on the family by creating new roles and |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | responsibilities for family members left behind (Rentz & Martin, 2006:5). |
|--|---|

**Question 5** focused on the physical setting of the family’s living environment, and the following results were obtained:

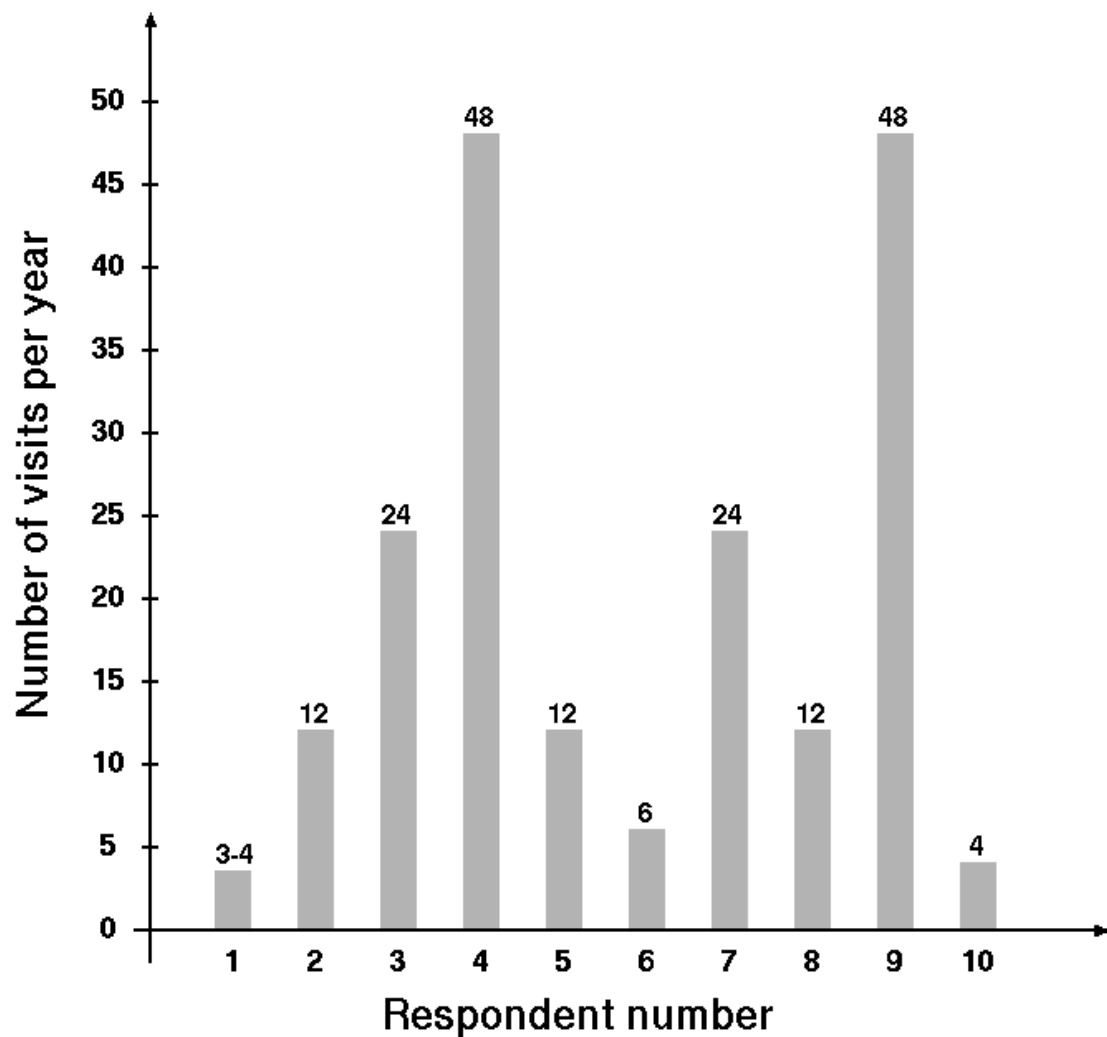
**Table 3: Physical setting of family members**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Question 5</b>     | <i>Please explain your family's living conditions (for example who stays in the house – formal or informal house?)</i>   |
| Aim of the question   | To form a picture on the living conditions of military families. The physical home environment can also cause a threat to children and make them more vulnerable to child sexual abuse – for example a baby girl having to share a room or bed with an adolescent cousin might hold a possible threat. |
| Examples of responses | Nine respondents indicated that their home consists of three to seven rooms and that bricks were used as building material. One respondent indicated that his family stays in a four-bedroom informal house made of zinc as building material (“Makuku”).  |
| Themes emerging       | A low percentage of military family members are staying in informal homes due to the fact that soldiers obtain a strong and fixed monthly income which enables them to provide proper homes for their families.  |

## 8.2 Theme 2 – Regularity of family contact

Fragmentation of the family system involves the limited contact with loved ones which in turn will affect the family bond and quality of relationships. The respondents' contact with their family members are a direct reflection on the person's psychosocial circumstances like financial stability, infrastructure and quality of the family relationships.

**Figure 1: Residence of respondents**



**Question 6** focused on the frequency of the respondent's contact with their family and 4 have frequent contacts with their families. The respondents are all experiencing fragmentation on their family system, but due to the difference in location, frequency of family contacts differ.

Kelley (1994:107) referred to the data compiled from 61 mothers of school age children examined before, during and after military deployment/separation that these families presented with temporary disruptions and also reported the inability to maintain supportive relationships. It is clear from Kelley's research that the fewer contact with one or both parents, the more disruption the child will experience.

### **8.3 Theme 3 – Reasons for the fragmentation of the family**

Fragmentation impacts negatively on the marital, parental, financial and psychosocial well-being of a family system. The request of **question 7** was: “Please indicate the reasons for not relocating your family to where you are working.” The aim of this request was to identify reasons for fragmentation and to form a picture of the nature and degree of fragmentation as a phenomenon. Subthemes follow to identify and discuss the different circumstances causing fragmentation.

#### **Subtheme 1 - Single parenthood**

Respondent 1 explained that as single mother, she had to leave her children with her mother due to the fact that military obligations would have made it impossible for her to care for her children on her own. Hetherington (1999:75) stated that biological fathers in this setting are less likely to share their income with their child or the child's mother, which will cause the decline in the standard of living of the single-parent family. “Single parents and their children often have to face stigma, violence and social problems based on myths, stereotypes, half truths and prejudice.”

#### **Subtheme 2 – A lack of military housing**

All the respondents, except respondent 1, verbalized that the military housing crisis in Potchefstroom is the main reason for not relocating their families to their place of work.

#### **Subtheme 3 – Language and cultural aspects**

Respondent 6 stated that his daughter is Venda speaking and to relocate her to a Tswana-speaking community will be traumatic for his daughter and might impact negatively on her school performance.

According to Applewhite et al. (1996), military children are not only at risk of being victims of child sexual abuse, but often manifest somatic complaints, sleep

disturbance and feelings of insecurity. It was also reported that fragmented military children's school performance was not up to standard. Respondent 6 refused to relocate his child to where he is residing with the aim not to traumatize her and for the sake of her school performance, but research has proven that children perform better academically and emotionally if not separated from the parent.

#### 8.4 Theme 4 – Supervision of child(ren)

**Question 8** was: “*Who is normally supervising your children?*” The aim of the question was to determine whether the substitute parent would be a friend or family member and which family member would be the most popular choice. The table below will indicate the care providers, as communicated by the respondents:

**Table 4: Care providers**

| <b>Biological mother as care provider</b> | <b>Maternal grandmother as care provider</b> | <b>Paternal grandmother as care provider</b> | <b>Paternal aunt as care provider</b> | <b>No care provider</b> |
|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Respondents 2,4, and 7                    | Respondents 1 and 3                          | Respondents 5, 6 and 8                       | Respondent 9                          | Respondent 10           |

The answers indicated that soldiers use their mother or the other parent’s mother to supervise and care for their children if the other parent is not available. Some authors are of the opinion that this arrangement must only be temporary in nature. Painter (2009) holds that this arrangement can only exist in the wake of some kind of family tragedy or collapse and that this care cannot be a long-term solution, due to the generation gap between the child and the care provider.

Only one child was left unsupervised, which places this child in a tremendous amount of danger and causes vulnerability to falling victim to child sexual abuse. Ayieko (1997:26) mentioned that children finding themselves in a child-headed household might easily fall victim to child sexual abuse, also because they are forced to emotionally mature faster than their peers, and the void of a parental figure might cause these children to seek the company of older people – which in turn might lead to child sexual abuse.

#### 8.5 Theme 5 – Definition of child sexual abuse (knowledge test)

The researcher formulated a question pertaining to the knowledge of parents in the

military regarding child sexual abuse. **Question 9** was: “*What do you understand by ‘child sexual abuse’?*” The reason for asking this question was to determine the level of knowledge of the parents to establish whether future programs would be needed to empower the parents.

**Table 5: Definition of child sexual abuse**

| <b>Knowledgeable</b>  | <b>Experienced difficulty in formulating a definition</b>  | <b>Avoidance of the question</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents could provide a definition regarding child sexual abuse. | Twenty percent (20%) of the respondents found it difficult to provide a definition for child sexual abuse. | Twenty percent (20%) avoided the question by making excuses such as: “I don't know how to say it in English” or the respondent provided an obviously incorrect definition to sidestep the question. “It is when the father of the house is getting home drunk, talking rude to the children”. |

The study showed that 6 (60%) of the respondents were sufficiently knowledgeable and comfortable to provide a definition for child sexual abuse. The remaining 4 (40%) presented mixed reactions. It was clear that some of the respondents felt extremely uncomfortable with sexuality as a topic (especially the older respondents), and either pretended they did not know the answer or applied sidestepping techniques and excuses not to answer the question.

Some respondents had limited knowledge of this topic and could not provide an answer. According to Paton (2009:1), one in seven parents never talk to their children about puberty, with many saying they find it a difficult subject to discuss. Directgov (2010) suggested that parents start discussions on sexuality when the child is young, since waiting until one’s child reaches puberty can make it awkward. The author also suggests that the use of everyday media can assist in opening the conversation. Talking to other parents about how they answer difficult questions can alleviate this “taboo topic”.

## 8.6 Theme 6 – Signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse (Knowledge test)

The table below is indicative of the results of the knowledge test on the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. **Question 10** was: “*What are the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse?*”

**Table 6: Knowledge on child sexual abuse**

| <b>Signs and symptoms</b>                     | <b>F</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|----------|
| 1. Poor school performance (True)             | 6        | 60%      |
| 2. Excessive masturbation (True)              | 4        | 40%      |
| 3. Heavy breathing (False)                    | 3        | 30%      |
| 4. Dry skin (False)                           | 1        | 10%      |
| 5. Painful genitals (True)                    | 8        | 80%      |
| 6. Playing hide and seek (False)              | 1        | 10%      |
| 7. Eating disturbances (False)                | 1        | 10%      |
| 8. Accosting of older people (True)           | 2        | 20%      |
| 9. Sexual play with other children (True)     | 5        | 50%      |
| 10. Low sexual morals in teenage years (True) | 2        | 20%      |

The results of this knowledge test indicated that parents will be unable to identify warning signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse and that empowerment through training will need to take place to sensitize parents to the warning signs of child sexual abuse. According to the “Stop it Now” (2010) website, the presence of one warning sign does not mean a child has been sexually abused, but the presence of several suggests that you begin to ask questions and consider seeking help. The article suggests that you start looking out for these following warning signs and behavioural changes:

- Unexplained nightmares and sleep disturbances.
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times.
- Has a sudden change in eating habits or finds it difficult to swallow.
- Sudden mood swings that consist of rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal.
- Leaves “clues” that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues.
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images.
- Develops a new or unusual fear of certain people and places.
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child.



- Has a negative body image and thinks of self as being repulsive, dirty or bad.
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviour

### 8.7 Theme 7 – Openness and honesty regarding sexuality topics

**Question 11** focused on the openness and honesty of the parent’s discussion regarding sexuality. When asked the question “*Do you have open discussions with your children regarding sexual matters? If ‘yes’, explain how you normally start discussions on this topic*”, the respondents answered as follows:

**Table 7: Discussion regarding sexual abuse**

| <b>Respondent</b> | <b>Answer</b>  |
|-------------------|--|
| 1                 | “Not that much. Normally discussion in that line will take place when it is the child's bath time.”  |
| 2                 | “I talk with my children about sex. I also talk to them about HIV. My wife gets upset when I discuss this but it is important that children have information.” Wass (2009:1) said that sex education make children more resilient in the prevalence of child sexual abuse. |
| 3                 | “No, I haven't discussed sexual matters with my children yet.”   |
| 4                 | “My child starts to show curiosity. If he starts asking questions I will answer him in an honest way.”   |
| 5                 | “Yes, now I have open discussions with my children. I call a spade a spade. As younger children, they never asked questions about sexuality but now we have regular discussions during weekends, when watching TV or talking about stuff.”                                 |
| 6                 | “She hasn't yet asked me sexual related questions.”  |
| 7                 | “I don't talk to my children regarding sexual matters. I only see my children twice a month. They ask my wife when they are in need of answers.”   |
| 8                 | “No, not yet. I think my teenage son will rather talk with his aunt when visiting her on weekends.”  |

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 9  | “Yes, I have open discussions with my children and I answer their questions honestly. During some conversations the topic will come up in a natural way.”   |
| 10 | “Yes, I have open discussions with the child. I believe you should tell your child the truth. Normally I have open discussions regarding sexual matters when the child reaches the age of eighteen years.” According to Weber (2010:5). the trust issue must be present within the parental relationship: “Teach your child to trust you with their problems and their pain. The safest child is the child who knows he can bring his problems and concerns to parents and adult caregivers without reproach or retaliation.” The importance of parents having open discussions with their children regarding sexual matters cannot be stressed enough. A sentenced child molester said the following regarding this matter (as quoted by Weber, 2010:4) “Parents are partly to blame if they don't tell their children about sexual matters - I used it to my advantage by teaching the child myself.” |

Six (60%) of the respondents did not yet talk to their children about sexual matter. The importance of parents having open discussions with their children regarding sexual matters cannot be stressed enough. A sentenced child molester said the following regarding this matter (as quoted by Weber, 2010:4) “Parents are partly to blame if they don't tell their children about sexual matters - I used it to my advantage by teaching the child myself.”

### **8.8 Theme 8 – Sexual abuse history of respondent or family members**

**Question 12** asked: “*Did you or your family experience child sexual abuse in the past? If ‘yes’, please discuss your experience.*” The aim of the question was to establish the frequency and nature of child sexual abuse as experienced by the respondents. The respondents answered as follows: Respondents 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 10 answered negatively saying that child sexual abuse never happened to them or someone in the family system. The other respondents shared their experiences, as set out below:

**Respondent 4:** *“My wife was nearly raped and it still has an effect on her life. It happened when she was a little girl. It was a close family friend. I am not sure what happened that day. She seldom talks about it.”* Kenneth and Kendler (2000:955) found the following regarding the long-term effects of child sexual abuse: “Many women and men who have been subjected to severe physical or sexual abuse during childhood suffer from long-term disturbances of the psyche. They may be invaded by nightmares and flashbacks much like survivors of war.” Wisdom (1995: 270) mentioned the changes in the brain make-up (hippocampus) due to flooding of hormones during and after the traumatic episode of sexual abuse. Holmes (1998:2) mentioned the risk of the “abused” becoming the “abuser”.

**Respondent 5:** *“My grandparents’ neighbours experienced a situation where the parents trusted a family friend and the friend abused their two young daughters over a long period of time. They only found out about the rape after their 14-year old fell pregnant.”*

**Respondent 8:** *“My cousin was raped by her uncle from a very young age. It went on for years. He would always buy her sweets and gifts and take her on outings. She later fell pregnant with her uncle's child, but he kept quiet. She got married later with her boyfriend, but their marriage was under threat due to her. She is now a woman of 43 years of age but is a total alcoholic. Whenever she is under the influence, she will talk about that incidence.”*

Faller (2003:70) said the following regarding children's reports of child sexual abuse: “When children report to anyone they are being or have been sexually abused, there is a high probability they are telling the truth. False allegations by children present between 1% and 5% of reports.” It is thus reality that in most cases the child's story is diminished as lies, while the child's disclosure reflects the truth.

## **8.9 Theme 9 – Child protection aspects**

**Question 13** was: *“How can a parent protect his/her child against a sexual perpetrator?”* The aim of the question was to test the parents’ resilience and to test whether they can generate child protection ideas. The respondents formulated the following strategies to prevent child sexual abuse:

**Table 8: Strategies in preventing child sexual abuse**

| <b>Open communication</b> | <b>Building a strong relationship</b> | <b>Proper supervision</b> | <b>Being informed regarding child's routine</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Respondents 1-10          | Respondents 1-10                      | Respondents 1, 2 and 4    | Respondent 6                                    |

The respondents generated different ideas but all agreed that you need to communicate openly with your child and that parents need to create a strong relationship with the child in which the child will feel safe to disclose information regarding sensitive matters such as child sexual abuse. Respondent 5 added the following regarding the importance of open communication: *“Love your kids enough to talk about sex.”*

According to the United States of America Department of Justice (1999), children will be safer and more resilient when parents teach them how sexual abuse can be identified, how to stand up for their individual rights, to know they have the right to protect their bodies, and when parents teach their children where to find help if in an abusive situation. It was also mentioned that children must know that the abuse is not their fault.

## 8.10 Theme 10 – Fear regarding child’s safety

**Question 9** was: “Are you afraid that your child might be a victim of child sexual abuse? If ‘yes’, why are you afraid?” The aim of the question was to establish parents’ views on safety aspects. The respondents’ views were:

**Table 9: Fear regarding children’s safety**

| <b>Not concerned – trust care providers</b>  | <b>Concerned due to absence</b>   | <b>Concerned due to high-crime area</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Forty percent (40%) indicated that they trust the care providers of their children and do not feel concerned regarding safety aspects. | Fifty percent (50%) indicated that they feel concerned about their children's safety due to the fact that they cannot be there to protect them. | Ten percent (10%) indicated that they feel concerned because the family is situated within a high-crime area. Gastrow (1999) mentioned the rise of crime in South-Africa. |

Most of the parents indicated that their concerns for their child are based on the fact that they as parents are absent and not in control of the child's supervision and safety.

## 9 RESEARCHER'S OBSERVATION

### 9.1 Sexuality as a taboo topic

During the research it became apparent that sexuality remains a taboo topic for many people. Culture and age might play a significant role regarding this aspect. Paton (2009:1) agreed that sex is still a taboo topic for many parents: “A poll of more than a thousand mothers and fathers established that more than a third experience difficulty regarding this topic.” Paton's research found that mothers experience more comfort in discussing sexuality with their daughters, compared to when they were young, discussing sexuality with their parents.

Cofelt (2008:4) emphasized the following regarding the reluctant attitude of some parents: “Some parents are reluctant to discuss sex with their children because of the embarrassment it might cause their children, the challenges in determining the right time and place and the difficulty in explaining ideas clearly.” The author explained that adolescents also avoid discussing sexual matters with their parents in an effort to

protect their privacy boundaries.

## **9.2 Denial as a reality?**

Four participants shared a child sexual abuse experience of a family member. The question remains: “Is it possible that some of the other participants had also experienced child sexual abuse but prefer to live in denial (dissociation) because it makes it easier to ‘cope’ with their childhood?”

Hall and Lloyd (1993:27) point out that sexual abuse survivors might find it difficult to disclose due to the following reasons:

- The victim has a sense of loyalty and/or love for the abuser that makes it impossible for the child to speak out against someone who is supposed to be protective and caring towards the child.
- Some survivors disclose but find the responses from other people unhelpful.
- Another reason for not disclosing is the fact that the child believes the abuser when the abuser focuses on the fact that the sexual abuse is acceptable, especially with the younger child.
- In most cases, the abuser will use threats and bribes to keep the victim silent. A child who is subjected to regular threats and bribes will find disclosing impossible because of fear or because he/she enjoys the gifts or outings (bribes).
- Guilt or shame might also prevent the victim from disclosing.
- Some children will never disclose out of fear of breaking up the family or out of fear of being blamed for the abuse. This aspect is also applicable to adults as childhood sexual abuse survivors.

Bryant-Jefferies (2003:45) said the following regarding repressed memories and the positive impact of therapy: “For the client for whom the experience of child sexual abuse has become a repressed memory, it is highly likely that this need to emerge into consciousness is part of the therapeutic process. But this process may also result in some degree of relief from the symptoms of post traumatic effects.”

## **9.3 Parents as easy targets for “groomers”**

During the research the researcher also observed that parents are easy targets for

“groomers”. The participants who knew a family member who was a victim of child sexual abuse, all verbalized that the perpetrator was either a trusted family friend or family member. The person was not a stranger to the child victim, but someone he/she trusted.

If parents can be made aware of the behaviour of the “groomer” they can be sensitized regarding the way these perpetrators are operating. “A predator will identify and engage his victim. He will gain the child’s trust, break down his defences and manipulate him into performing or permitting the desired sex act. If necessary, the predator will gain access to the child by employing the same techniques as the child's parents or the child's adult caretaker.” (Weber, 2010:2). The author also stressed that this process is called “grooming” and that this behaviour increases the predator's access to his victim and decreases the likelihood of discovery.

Thomas (2010) explained “grooming” as follows: “Grooming is the term used to describe behaviours employed by the sex offender to target and prepare children for sexual abuse.” Childcare professionals also agree that grooming warning signs are often very discreet and difficult to recognize.

#### **9.4 Most parents cannot tell what signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse are**

The respondents found it difficult to complete the sexual abuse knowledge test. This is proof that parents have no defence against child sexual abuse. Their child's behaviour can indicate that a crisis exists for the child, but most parents will be unaware of the warning signs and would easily dismiss the problem.

Faller (2003:56) focused on the different signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse. She explained that genital findings play an important role in establishing child sexual abuse. Genital findings might include semen in the vagina of the child, torn or missing hymen, vaginal injury or the vaginal area larger than 5 mm, also injury on the penis or scrotal area. She explained that sexual indicators (sexual play, accosting of older people, excessive masturbation, and promiscuity during adolescent years) must also be taken into consideration. The author focused on other non-sexual indicators, such as eating and sleep disturbances, enuresis, encopresis, fear, depression, self-destructive behaviour and isolation.

## **10 GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERING PARENTS IN THE MILITARY REGARDING THE PREVENTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Group work as a social work method could be used successfully within the empowering of parents in the military with more knowledge regarding the prevention of child sexual abuse. According to Toseland and Rivas (2009:3), group work entails the deliberate use of intervention strategies and group processes to accomplish individual, group, and community goals using the value base and ethical practice principles of the social work profession. Corey and Corey (2002:7) define group work as a social work method in which the group process and techniques are used for therapeutic or preventative intervention.

Other authors focused more on the experience of the individual within a specific group. According to Smith (2008:2), group work can be defined as a method of social work which helps individuals to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences, and to cope more effectively with their personal, group or community problems.

Zastrow (2001:4) defined a group as two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction, each aware of positive interdependence as they strive to achieve mutual goals, each aware of his or her membership in the group, and each aware of the others who belong to the group. Jeanty (2009:1) gave the following definition for social group work: "Social group work is a form of social work in which the principles of one-on-one casework and community organizing are combined. Through a group-centred process, facilitators work to meet the social dilemmas faced by the group, as well as tend to the psychological issues surrounding the conflict." The author also stressed that any situation in which one-on-one casework is applicable, is also a context in which social group work can be administered.

### **10.1 The reason for recommending group work as desired method**

The purpose of the parental group will be to empower parents by imparting important knowledge as preventative measure. The group cohesion and group dynamics will be a powerful tool through which to reach these goals.

Group work will thus be the desired method to use. Schwartz (2005:4) explained the effectiveness of group work: "People are a help in their own milieu, surrounded by



their peers and working in an atmosphere of mutual aid. The group members can help each other act together on common problems.”

Human beings are created to function optimally within groups. Group work as therapeutic and preventative tool could be applied successfully, using the natural capability of human beings to learn and manage stress better amongst other people. Kelly (2008:1) mentioned the following regarding the importance of groups: “Although many people are not aware of it, social groups permeate society. They define roles and rules, and they give people a sense of belonging.”

When discussing group work as the desired method, the explanation of Corey and Corey (2002:7) can be mentioned: “From our perspective, groups are the treatment of choice, not a second-rate approach to helping people change. Groups are being desired for all kinds of settings today and for many different client groups. Most of these groups are not unstructured personal-growth groups but are short-term groups for specific client populations. These groups are designed to remediate specific problems or to prevent problems.”

## **10.2 Type of group**

The type of group that will be applicable to the parental empowerment sessions will be the educational group. According to Toseland and Rivas (2009:23), the purpose of educational groups is: “to help members learn new information and skills”. Corey and Corey (2002:12) provide the following criteria for the Psycho-Educational Group: “The psycho-Educational group specialist works with group members who are relatively well-functioning individuals but who may have an information deficit in a certain area.” With a group work programme, social workers in the military can empower parents in the military with more knowledge on sexual abuse of children and with such a programme prevent the sexual abuse of these parent’s children.

## **10.3 Size of the group**

When deciding on the size of a group, the group leader must bear in mind that the size of the group affects members’ satisfactions, interactions, and the amount of output per member. While members in larger groups experience more stress and greater communication difficulties, they usually bring a greater number of problem-solving skills and resources to the group as a whole (Zastrow, 2001:13). The author also

suggested the following: “A group should be large enough to allow members to speak freely without being inhibited and small enough to permit a moderate level of intimacy and involvement.” Taking into account all of these aspects, it will be advisable that the group consist of eight to ten members. This number will ensure that the members can speak freely, but the level of intimacy will still enjoy attention.

#### **10.4 Selection of the members**

The military environment has a strict rank structure and will influence the selection of group members. In order to experience successful group sessions, the group arrangement is of utmost importance. The military social work officer may group Officers and Warrant Officers together, but cannot place Officers and Non Commissioned officers in the same grouping. The rank difference will inhibit free discussion and will ruin the group flow and dynamics. Zastrow (2001:15) stated that age, sex and level of education (or rank) are descriptive factors that may create homogeneity or foster diversity within the group.

#### **10.5 The duration and frequency of the group**

One to two-hour sessions is advisable, according to Zastrow (2001:14). This time prescription allows sufficient time for optimum productivity, ensuring that the group members remain focused. Within the military setting, military obligations will not allow members to meet more than once a week. The group sessions of this specific program are designed to make use of ninety minutes to two hours. It is thus prescribed that military social work officers manage the ninety minutes to two hour parental group session once a week.

#### **10.6 Group work program**

The group work program will consist of six sessions. Due to the fact that the group work sessions will take place within the occupational social work setting, the workplace managers will also need to give permission and the social workers program will need to be flexible in order not to hinder the work routine of the unit. Social workers must ensure that confidentiality is adhered to at all times, for example – discussing group members’ circumstances with the unit management will not be permitted. The occupational social worker must strive to create a safe environment for the worker within the group, maintaining confidentiality and allowing them to

express their thoughts and feelings. The tables below will explain the program, the content and duration.

**Table 10: Session 1**

| <b>Activity</b>                            | <b>Aim</b>  | <b>Min</b>                                     |
|--|---|--|
| Introduction.                              | To afford the group leader the opportunity to introduce him/herself, and the group members to introduce themselves to one another.  | 15 Min.  |
| Ice-breaker.                               | To help members to relax, and to energize the group.  | 10 Min.  |
| The purpose of the group.                  | To explain to members how group sessions can add value to their lives.  | 10 Min.  |
| Establishing Group rules.                  | To afford the group members an opportunity to establish important group rules that will create a safe environment for the group members.  | 10 Min.  |
| Share time                                 | To give the group members the opportunity to share with each other how they experience family fragmentation.  | 30 Min.  |
| Summary                                    | To refresh members' memories on what was discussed and to summarize the content of the session.   | 5 Min.   |
| Detail regarding next session and closure. | To ensure that members know the date and time of the next session and to inform members about the planning for the next session. This will also be an opportunity to allow a final word or question from group members. | 10 Min.<br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN. = 90<br/>MIN.</b> |

**Table 11: Session 2**

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Aim</b>  | <b>Min.</b>                                 |
|---|---|---|
| Ice-breaker   | To help members to relax and to focus on today's program.   | 10 Min.                                     |
| Introduction  | To give the group leader the opportunity to explain to members the topic of today, namely the link between family fragmentation and child sexual abuse vulnerability. | 10 Min.                                     |
| Group discussion:<br>The link between family fragmentation and the vulnerability to child sexual abuse. | To make use of a round robin technique to probe members to share their views regarding family fragmentation and child sexual abuse.                                   | 30 Min.                                     |
| Summary.  | To summarize the main points of today's session to ensure that members will leave the group session without feeling confused and to root the session.                 | 10 Min.                                     |
| Next session and closure.   | To ensure that all group members plan for the next session and to allow final comments or questions.  | 5 Min.<br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN.=65<br/>MIN.</b> |

**Table 12: Session 3**

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>Min.</b>                                 |
|---|--|---|
| Ice breaker.  | To assist with relaxation and focus.   | 10 Min.                                     |
| Introduction.   | To introduce the group members to the topic of today.  | 10 Min.                                     |
| Warning signs of child sexual abuse.                              | This part of the session will focus on a group discussion during which the group will pair off and will give time to brainstorm together on what they view as warning signs. | 20 Min.                                     |
| More information on warning signs of possible child sexual abuse. | To empower the group members with information regarding the warning signs of possible child sexual abuse.  | 30 Min.                                     |
| Summary   | Refresh the members' memories on discussed topics of the session and to root the session.  | 5 Min.                                      |
| Next session and closure  | What will the group discuss during the next session? This time of the session will also allow members last comments or questions.  | 5 Min.<br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN. 80<br/>MIN.</b> |

**Table 13: Session 4**

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>Min.</b>                                 |
|---|--|---|
| Ice-breaker   | To energize the group.   | 10 Min.                                     |
| Group activity – round robin Share something about your family                                  | To assist members in trusting and building relationships with one another.   | 10 Min.                                     |
| Refresh my memory.  | To remind the group of the discussion of the previous session regarding the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse.  | 10 Min.                                     |
| Group discussion – What to do If you suspect that your child is a victim of child sexual abuse. | To probe the group members to brainstorm and to assist one another to generate ideas in dealing with child sexual abuse.   | 30 Min.                                     |
| More info regarding the legal process and therapy for the child.                                | To impart knowledge and empower the group members on this topic.   | 20 Min.                                     |
| Summary.  | To ensure that members remember the most important discussion points.  | 5 Min.                                      |
| Next session and closure.   | To give information on the next session. Start preparing members for the termination of the group sessions in two weeks' time. This part of the session can also allow group members to ask a final question or to make a final comment. | 10 Min.<br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN.=95<br/>MIN</b> |

**Table 14: Session 5**

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>Min.</b>                                     |
|---|--|---|
| Introduction  | To explain what the program of today will entail and to remind group members that today's session will be the second last session.   | 5 Min.  |
| Ice-breaker   | To assist with a relaxing atmosphere.  | 10 Min.   |
| Group share time  | Allow members to share what they have gained from the sessions.  | 10 Min.   |
| Group discussion –<br>The link between open parent child communication and child sexual abuse prevention. | To motivate the group to brainstorm the importance of open communication and how this can assist in child sexual abuse prevention. This part of the session can be managed by pairing off the group members or as a round robin. | 20 Min.   |
| Group discussion –<br>Ideas on how to improve your relationship and communication with your child.        | To motivate members to share with one another ideas on improving the parental relationship and communication skills with the child.  | 30 Min.   |
| Summary   | To highlight the most important discussed aspects of today's session   | 5 Min.  |
| Closure   | Allow group members to share their feelings, ask questions or comment on certain aspects.  | 5 Min.  |
| Next session  | Explain that next session will be the final one and that the session will consist on making a card with a special message for their children, and a picnic/party afterwards.   | 5 Min.<br><br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN.=90<br/>MIN.</b> |

**Table 15: Session 6**

| <b>Activity</b>                 | <b>Aim</b>   | <b>Min.</b>                                   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Introduction                    | To explain to members what today's session will entail.  | 5 Min.  |
| Ice-breaker                     | To have fun together and to energize the group.  | 10 Min.                                       |
| Group share time                | This part of the session will be used to motivate the group members to share with each other how they manage being away from their loved ones. The members can also share what they gained from the group sessions.                                    | 15 Min.                                       |
| Summary on the last 5 sessions. | To refresh the members' memories on the scope of the last five weeks.  | 15 Min.                                       |
| Group activity                  | To empower the group through creativity and to strengthen the parental relationships by motivating the parents to make a card for the child, which they will send on the child's birthday or just to tell the child how much the parent loves him/her. | 30 Min.<br><b>TOTAL<br/>MIN.= 75<br/>MIN.</b> |

Session six can be ended by enjoying a party or picnic with the group.

This program can be adjusted to suit the specific needs of the organization or group. The group facilitators can also use ice-breakers that will suit the content of the specific theme of the day.

## **11 CONCLUSIONS**

The researcher came to the conclusion that parents in the military do not have adequate knowledge on child sexual abuse. A definite need exist for parents in the military to be empowered regarding child sexual abuse prevention and recognition.

Taylor (1998:1) highlighted the following important aspects regarding child care officials and their work in the field of child sexual abuse prevention an therapy: “As social workers and caring members of our communities, we are committed to prevent child sexual abuse. When it occurs we face head on doing what we can to help survivors and their families to heal.” The author place emphasizes on the fact that a



lot of aspects regarding child sexual abuse should enjoy attention and that all child care officials must strive for a system that prevents and combat child sexual abuse.

The study found that military children are vulnerable to become victims of child sexual abuse due to the fragmentation within the family system as well as the lack of knowledge from parents. Fragmentation of the family system impacts negatively on the marital-and parental relationships, the financial security of the family system and the emotional well-being of the family members. The safety aspects of military children are lacking and needs urgent intervention. The first step in providing protection to military children, is to empower their parents. By empowering parents, sexually abused military children might obtain a voice in the silence of abuse.

Fragmentation of the family system impacts negatively on the marital and parental relationships, the financial security of the family system and the emotional well-being of the family members. The safety aspects of military children are lacking and call for urgent intervention. The first step in providing protection to military children by empowering their parents. By empowering parents, sexually abused military children might obtain a voice in the silence of abuse.

## **12 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Parents in the military have to be empowered with more knowledge on child sexual abuse to recognize and prevent child sexual abuse in their own families.
- Social workers in the Department of Defence need to implement group work programs to empower parents in the military with more knowledge on recognizing child sexual abuse and to prevent their children being victims of child sexual abuse.
- The group will assist will consist of not more than ten members to simplify successful facilitation.
- The unit management will need to support social work officers in identifying the group members and to allow these members to attend the group work sessions on a weekly basis.
- It is recommended that the program must be implemented not only in the North-West region but also the other provinces.

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## ANNEXURE 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### The knowledge of parents in the military regarding child sexual abuse

#### INTRODUCTION

- The social work officer, Capt Holm is launching a research project to establish the knowledge of military parents on child sexual abuse.
- This research project is of vital importance and will enable the social work team to establish the knowledge of military parents on child sexual abuse in order to streamline future projects to empower parents in the fight against child sexual abuse.
- The results obtained from this research project will also be used by Capt Holm to fulfill the requirements of the North West University (Potchefstroom Campus) to require the MA Social Work degree.
- Thank you for your friendly co-operation, inputs and time. Your opinions are valuable.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

##### 1. Age of respondent

Age in years:

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| 20-25 year         | 1 |
| 25-30 year         | 2 |
| 30-35 year         | 3 |
| 35-40 year         | 4 |
| 40-45 year         | 5 |
| 45-50 year         | 6 |
| 45-50 year         | 7 |
| 50 years and older | 8 |

##### 2. Gender

|      |  |        |  |
|------|--|--------|--|
| Male |  | Female |  |
|------|--|--------|--|

##### 3. Children

| Child | Age | Gender | Stay with? |
|-------|-----|--------|------------|
| 1.    |     |        |            |
| 2     |     |        |            |
| 3     |     |        |            |
| 4     |     |        |            |
| 5     |     |        |            |
| 6     |     |        |            |
| 7     |     |        |            |
| 8     |     |        |            |

**FAMILY SITUATION AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE KNOWLEDGE**

Please answer the questions honestly. There is no right or wrong answer.

**4. Where does your family reside?**

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**5. Please explain your family's living circumstances (for example formal or informal house?)**

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**6. How often do you visit your family?**

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**7. Please indicate the reasons for not relocating your family to where you are working?**

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**8. Who is normally supervising your children?**

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**9. What do you understand under child sexual abuse?**

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**10. What are the signs and symptoms of child sexual abuse?**

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**11. Do you have open discussions with your children regarding sexual matters? If yes, explain how you normally start discussions on this topic.**

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**12. Did you or your family experience child sexual abuse in the past? If “yes”, please discuss your experience.**

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**13. How can a parent protect his/her child against a sexual perpetrator?**

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**14. Are you afraid that your child can be a victim to child sexual abuse at this stage”**

|            |  |           |  |
|------------|--|-----------|--|
| <b>Yes</b> |  | <b>No</b> |  |
|            |  |           |  |

**15. If yes, why are you afraid?**

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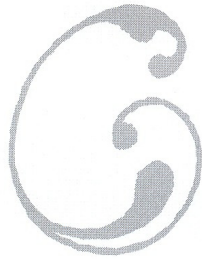
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## ANNEXURE 2: STATEMENT OF LANGUAGE EDITOR



16 November 2010

Hiermee verklaar ek, me Cecilia van der Walt, dat ek die taalversorging van die Verhandeling van me Henliëtte Holm, getitel *The Knowledge of Parents in the Military regarding Child Sexual Abuse*, behartig het.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Cecilia van der Walt'. The signature is written in a cursive style with some flourishes.

ME CECILIA VAN DER WALT

HOD, BA  
Plus Taalversorging en vertaling op Hons-vlak,  
Plus Akkreditering by SAVI vir Afrikaans  
Registrasienommer by SAVI: 1000228

Epos-adres: ceciliavdw@lantic.net

Selnommer: 072-616 4943 (S)  
Faksnommer: 086 578 1425

## **ANNEXURE 3: LETTER OF CONSENT**