

The experiences of social workers in the process of investigating child sexual abuse

Maria Jacoba Cussons

BA (MW)

**Manuscript submitted for partial fulfillment for the
requirements for the degree**

MAGISTER

in

SOCIAL WORK: FORENSIC PRACTICE

in the

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

at the

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Supervisor: Dr C Strydom

POTCHEFSTROOM

2011

DEDICATION

With love to God almighty with my whole heart, soul and all my strength.

To my husband, Bernard, without whose support, love and patience this would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bernard John, thank you for being my motivation.

My mother, I will always appreciate the opportunity you gave me to study and all the sacrifices you made for me.

Thank you to my family who supported me financially and who prayed for me.

My gratitude to the personnel of NG Welfare without whose cooperation this wouldn't have been possible.

My appreciation towards my supervisor, Dr Corinne Strydom and all the staff of the Department of Social Work at the Potchefstroom Campus for their guidance and support.

ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE PROCESS OF INVESTIGATING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Keywords: Child sexual abuse; Experience; Forensic social work; Non-government organizations.

Social workers who are employed by non-governmental organizations have unique experiences. Through training and education, social workers are taught skills on how to remain professional during service delivery, but subjective experiences and the influence remain part of human nature.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the experiences of social workers in non-governmental organizations during investigations of child sexual abuse as well as the influence of these experiences on service delivery.

The research followed a qualitative approach. Fifteen registered social workers from NG Welfare in the North West Province participated in this investigation where semi-structured interviews were conducted and notes were taken.

The interviews focused on the following themes:

- **Theme 1:** Personal experiences of social workers during child sexual abuse investigations.
- **Theme 2:** The experience of social workers with other professionals during investigations of child sexual abuse.
- **Theme 3:** Limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations.
- **Theme 4:** Social workers' experience of objectivity during child sexual abuse investigations.
- **Theme 5:** Social workers' knowledge and practice experience in child sexual abuse investigations.
- **Theme 6:** Suggestions by social workers to improve the quality of investigations of child sexual abuse cases.

The results of the data were divided into subthemes for detailed clarifications and discussions of the respondent's experiences in order to make useful recommendations.

According to the results all the respondents stated that their experiences with regard to child sexual abuse cases do influence their behavior, decision making and service delivery. Half of the respondents experience good cooperation from other professionals. Limited resources are the biggest limitation for social workers and all the respondents are of the opinion that social workers are unbiased and objective when confronted with child sexual abuse investigations. The majority of the respondents do not think social workers have enough knowledge and practice experience for conducting these investigations and made the following suggestions to improve the process.

These suggestions include the following:

- Establishing an assessment unit
- Employing a forensic social worker
- Having a place of safety and or a rehabilitation center available for children involved in child sexual abuse

OPSOMMING

DIE ONDERVINDINGE VAN MAATSKAPLIKE WERKERS IN DIE PROSES VAN ONDERSOEKE VAN SEKSUELE MISBRUIK VAN KINDERS.

Sleuteltermes: Seksuele misbruik van kinders; Ondervindinge; Forensiese maatskaplike werk; Nie-regerings-organisasies.

Maatskaplike werkers wat werksaam is by nie-regerings-organisasies het unieke ondervindinge. Deur middel van opleiding word maatskaplike werkers vaardighede geleer om professioneel te bly ten alle tye gedurende dienslewering, maar subjektiewe ondervindinge en die invloed daarvan bly menslike natuur.

Die doel van die navorsing was om die ondervindinge van maatskaplike werkers in nie-regerings-organisasies te ondersoek gedurende hulle ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders, asook die invloed wat hierdie ondervindinge het op dienslewering.

Die navorsing het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering gevolg. Vyftien geregistreerde maatskaplike werkers van NG Welsyn in die Noordwes Provinsie het deelgeneem aan die ondersoek waar semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gevoer en notas geneem is.

Die onderhoude het gefokus op die volgende temas:

- **Tema 1:** Persoonlike ondervindinge van maatskaplike werkers gedurende ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders.
- **Tema 2:** Die ondervindinge van maatskaplike werkers met ander professionele persone gedurende ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders.
- **Tema 3:** Beperkinge wat maatskaplike werkers beleef gedurende ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders.
- **Tema 4:** Maatskaplike werkers se ondervindinge van objektiwiteit gedurende ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders.
- **Tema 5:** Maatskaplike werkers se kennis en praktyk-ervaring gedurende ondersoek van seksuele misbruik van kinders.
- **Tema 6:** Voorstelle van maatskaplike werkers om die kwaliteit van ondersoek te verbeter ten opsigte van seksuele misbruik van kinders.

Die resultate van die data is verdeel in subtemas vir gedetailleerde klarifikasie en besprekings van die respondent se ondervindinge ten einde bruikbare aanbevelings te maak.

Die resultate staaf die stelling dat al die respondente hulle ondervindinge met betrekking tot seksuele misbruik van kinders hulle gedrag, besluitneming en dienslewering beïnvloed. Die helfte van die respondente ondervind goeie samewerking met ander professionele persone. Beperkte hulpbronne is die grootste beperking vir maatskaplike werkers en al die respondente is van die opinie dat maatskaplike werkers objektief is wanneer hulle gekonfronteer word met ondersoekes oor seksuele misbruik van kinders. Die meerderheid van die respondente dink nie maatskaplike werkers het genoeg kennis en praktyk ervaring om hierdie ondersoekes te doen nie en het die volgende voorstelle gemaak om hierdie ondersoekes te verbeter.

Hierdie voorstelle sluit die volgende in:

- Stigting van 'n assesserings-eenheid
- Aanstelling van 'n forensiese maatskaplike werker
- Om 'n plek van veiligheid of rehabilitasie sentrum beskikbaar te hê vir kinders betrokke in seksuele misbruik

CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
OPSOMMING	vi
CONTENTS	viii
FOREWORD	xi
EDITORIAL POLICY	xii
THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE PROCESS OF INVESTIGATING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	1
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. PROBLEM STATEMENT	1
3. AIM	3
4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT	3
5. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION	3
5.1 Analysis of literature	3
5.2 Empirical investigation	4
5.2.1 The design	4
5.2.2 Respondents	4
5.2.3 Measuring instruments	5
5.2.4 Procedures	5
5.2.5 Ethical aspects	6
5.2.6 Data Analysis	7
6. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH	7
7. DESCRIPTION OF KEYWORDS	7
7.1 Child sexual abuse	7
7.2 Experiences	8
7.3 Forensic social work	8
7.4 Non-governmental organizations	9
8. RESULTS	9
8.1 Profile of the respondents	9
8.2 Themes and subthemes of interviews	10
8.3 Discussion of findings	11
8.3.1 Theme 1: Personal experiences of social workers during child sexual abuse investigations	11
8.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: The influence of personal experiences on behaviour	12

8.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: The influence of personal experiences on Decision making	12
8.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: The influence of personal experiences on Service delivery	13
8.3.2 Theme 2: The experience of social workers with other professionals during investigations of child sexual abuse	13
8.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Professionals that social workers do receive cooperation from	14
8.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Professionals that social workers do not receive cooperation from	15
8.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: Professionals that social workers would like to receive more cooperation from	16
8.3.3 Theme 3: Limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations	17
8.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Types of limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations	17
8.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Suggestions to overcome limitations	19
8.3.4 Theme 4: Social workers' experience of objectivity during child sexual abuse investigations	19
8.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Social workers' experience regarding investigations of all hypotheses during child sexual abuse investigations	20
8.3.5 Theme 5: Social workers' knowledge and practice experience in child sexual abuse investigations	21
8.3.5.1 Subtheme 1: Social workers' knowledge of an expert witness	22
8.3.5.2 Subtheme 2: Social workers feelings about acting as an expert witness during child sexual abuse cases	22
8.3.6 Theme 6: Suggestions by social workers to improve the quality of investigations during child sexual abuse cases	23
8.3.6.1 Subtheme 1: Suggestions on how to improve the quality of investigations	23
8.3.6.2 Subtheme 2: Social workers' thoughts and feelings about utilizing forensic social workers during child sexual abuse cases	25
9. CONCLUSIONS	25
10. RECOMMENDATIONS	27
10.1 Recommendations to improve investigations of child sexual abuse	27
10.2 Recommendations for future research	28
11. REFERENCES	29
LIST OF TABLES	
Table 1: Themes and subthemes	10
Table 2: List of professionals	24

ADDENDUMS

ADDENDUM A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE32
ADDENDUM B: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION34
ADDENDUM C: LETTER OF AGREEMENT35
ADDENDUM D: SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS36
ADDENDUM E: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING39

FOREWARD

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, 2011). The article will comply with the requirements of one of the journals in social work, entitled Social Work -/Maatskaplike Werk.

This article counts 50% of the total program.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Journal publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 100 words. 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 or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Articles of fewer than 2,000 words are normally not considered for publication. Two copies of the manuscript as well as a diskette with the text, preferably in MS Windows should be submitted. Manuscripts should be typed in 12 pt Times Roman double-spaced on one side of A4 paper only. If possible the manuscript should be sent electronically to hsu@sun.ac.za. 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) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12). More details about 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 Editor
Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk
Private Bag X 1
Matieland
7602
South Africa

THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE PROCESS OF INVESTIGATING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Me M J Cussons, a Masters degree student in Forensic Practice at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

Dr C Strydom, Lecturer in the field of social work, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

1. INTRODUCTION

Many social workers experience uncertainty and insecurity during child sexual abuse investigations, as well as during the court procedures. Some social workers acknowledge that they feel other professionals intrude in their field of expertise and feel threatened by other professionals during such investigations.

This article focuses on the experience of social workers in the non-government organizations during investigations of child sexual abuse, and subsequently provides suggestions on how social workers can improve the quality of these investigations in order to benefit the children, families and communities involved in child sexual abuse cases.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher undertook a study to determine how the practice experiences of social workers in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) influence service delivery regarding child sexual abuse investigations. Faller (2003:42-49) conducted a similar study amongst social workers in America and found that experiences of social workers influence the interviewer stances during the investigation of child sexual abuse. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1995:1356) describes a stance as a standpoint or attitude of mind, and is therefore relevant to investigate.

In conducting this study, the researcher obtained answers that enable researchers to better understand the experiences of social workers when dealing with child sexual abuse. The study determined whether the experiences of social workers influence their

behavior, decisions and intervention with regard to service delivery in child sexual abuse cases (Marlow, 2005:4; Monette, Sullivan and De Jong, 2005:20).

Approaches to and principles for dealing with cases of child abuse and neglect are set out in the South African draft guidelines on the notification of child abuse cases (2008/9:18), one such a guiding being that there should be a joint responsibility between professionals to combat child abuse. The South African Society on the Abuse of Children (SAPSAC) and other studies suggest an integrated approach when working in the field of child abuse (Conradie & Tanfa, 2005:3-18; Schiller & Spies, 2006:36-47). With all the guidelines in place, it is the experience of the researcher that social workers in the NGO sector don't utilize support from other professionals, and this phenomenon was therefore also explored during this investigation.

In a groundbreaking court case (*Holtzausen v Roodt supra*, in *van der Merwe* 2002:24-33) the court found that it does not have the capacity or expertise to conclude on the consequences of indecent assault and rape of child victims. In this case, the valuable contribution of social workers was acknowledged. However, one should look at the preconditions for a person being an expert on this matter. As described by Sevel, Cummins and Madrigal (1999:139), social workers must be able to provide competent services within certain boundaries. This study investigated boundaries and limitations of social workers in NGO's when confronted with child sexual abuse.

It is the experience of the researcher that the legal system finds ways to prove that social workers are biased and not objective when it comes to allegations of sexual abuse against children. Watson and West (2006:162-165) state that social workers' bias and concerns will influence decision-making and this could be detrimental to good practice. Meintjies-Van der Walt (2002:24) goes as far as mentioning that opposing parties use resources to show role-players the evidential weakness and 'junk' science (Royse 2004:6) perpetrated by the expert. They admit that the law continues to have an uneasy relationship with social science evidence. This study found reasons to believe that social workers are biased when confronted with child sexual abuse.

According to Bosman-Swanepoel and Wessels (1995:145) all social workers do not dispose of enough knowledge and experience with regard to child sexual abuse to let justice be done. Although there is enormous pressure on all professionals who interact with children to be well informed on topics related to child protection, legal professionals use the lack of specialized knowledge and skills in cases of sexual abuse offences to

minimize the importance of the information provided by social workers. This research attempted to answer some questions concerning the legal knowledge and skills of social workers in the NGO's regarding child sexual abuse.

When questions regarding the practice experience of social workers arise, limitations and concerns are expected to come to the forefront. As expected, questioning regarding the experiences of social workers in child sexual abuse cases led to more insight into these limitations and concerns, as well as how these influence service delivery. The researcher expected that the social workers employed by NGO's would have suggestions on ways to overcome these limitations and concerns, and this study gave the social workers a voice that can help management and leaders address these matters and at the end benefit the clients, namely the children being sexually abused.

The following research question originated:

What do social workers experience during the process of child sexual abuse investigations?

3. AIM

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of social workers in the process of child sexual abuse investigations.

4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The experiences of social workers in child sexual abuse investigations may influence the process of service delivery.

5. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

5.1 Analysis of literature

As described by Neuman (2000:446) the goals of a literature review is to demonstrate the researcher's familiarity with a body of knowledge in order to establish credibility, to show a path of prior knowledge, to integrate and summarize what is known in this area of research, and to learn from others while creating new ideas.

The theme investigated is the experiences of social workers during child sexual abuse cases, and how these experiences influence service delivery. The researcher made use

of literature to proof the relevance of this investigation during child sexual abuse investigations and how these experiences of social workers influence the practice of social work.

During the compilation of the research proposal, limited literature sources were found. The Ferdinand Postma Library of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) was utilized as main source for retrieving relevant researched based literature. A variety of databases were utilized namely EBSCO HOST WEB, Pro Quest, SA Publications, Social Work Abstracts, *Repertorium van Suid Afrikaanse tydskrif-artikels* and SABINET.

5.2 Empirical Investigation

5.2.1 The Design

The research design was exploratory, as explained in Rubin & Babbie (2005:123). This is a typical design when a researcher is examining a new interest and when the subject of study is relatively new and unstudied.

This research was qualitative in nature. According to Cresswell (2007:37) qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researchers, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem.

5.2.2 Respondents

Purposive sampling was used to recruit respondents (Alston & Bowles 2003:58-89) because the respondents were chosen for a particular purpose and gave insight into the particular issue related to the study area.

Respondents for this research study consisted of social workers from the NG Welfare (Dutch Reformed Welfare Organization) in the North-West Province of South Africa.

The researcher was employed by NG Welfare, and therefore the respondents were cooperative and the researcher had the support of the management and staff.

All eight offices of NG Welfare in the North-west province with a total of fifteen social workers were included.

5.2.3 Measuring instruments

The study used semi-structured interviews because the interviews were organized around areas of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth. The researcher conducted these interviews by using a schedule of predetermined questions to guide the data collection process (Greeff, 2005:296, Rubin & Babbie 2005:447-452).

Interviewing, according to Greeff (2005:287), is the predominant mode of data collection in qualitative research, and was therefore also the method used for this research. Because this method is costly and labor intensive (Grinnell, 2001:304; Monette, *et al.*, 2005:182), checklists ensured that the interviewer covered all the desired topics during the interviews.

The main task of interviewer was to record the responses of respondents (Monette, *et al.*, 2005:179). Rubin & Babbie (2005:457) feels that a tape recorder is a powerful tool because it allows the interviewers to keep their full attention focused on respondents. The researcher therefore combined both note taking and recording of the interviews, this led to accurate and unbiased reporting.

After completion of the interviews and data gathering, the researcher wanted more information not included in the initial interview. Feedback was requested from the respondents through the utilization of additional questions. This feedback focused on suggestions from the respondents.

5.2.4 Procedures

The following steps were followed to collect and interpret the data:

- Getting approval from the North-West University's ethical committee to conduct the study.
- Getting approval from the management of NG Welfare to conduct the study.
- Selecting the research respondents.
- Obtaining written and informed consent from the research respondents.
- Obtaining permission from the respondents to record the interviews.

- Developing an interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews.
- Appointments were made for conducting the interviews with the respondents.
- Conducting the interviews.
- Recording the interviews by using a video recorder.
- Making field notes during the interviews.
- Making verbatim notes from the video recording.
- Coding and comparing the data.
- Generating categories; themes and patterns from the data.
- Sending a summary of the findings and additional questions.
- Combining the research findings with the feedback from the respondents.
- Writing the final report.

5.2.5 Ethical aspects

Ethical permission was requested from the ethical committee of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) as well as from the welfare organization. Several ethical considerations were taken into account when implementing this research (Babbie, 2004:28; Strydom, 2005:58-67). These include the following:

- The research avoided both physical and emotional harm to the respondents and organizations.
- The researcher expected respondents to participate on a voluntary basis.
- The respondents were informed that they may withdraw from the research at any given time.
- Informed consent and approval from the organization and respondents were received.
- The respondents and organizations were clearly informed of the purpose of the research study without deception.
- Respondents were informed that the interviews were recorded and their written consent was requested before the interview.
- The importance of confidentiality was highly regarded because the findings of this research and input of the respondents could have an impact on the participating organization and individual social workers; therefore the details of all the participants remained anonymous. This prevented exploitation of the respondents and did not subject them to undue stress (Thyer, 2001:440).

- The actions and competence of the researcher were supervised and guided by the study leader appointed by the North-West University.
- Cooperation with all the respondents of NG Welfare in North-West was acquired before interviewing the participants.
- The respondents were debriefed by the researcher.
- Each respondent was given a shortened report of the results of the interviews.

5.2.6 Data-analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis according to De Vos (2005:334-339) was followed. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the coding techniques of Tesch (Creswell, 2003:152-155) to identify themes and sub themes. Truth; value; applicability; consistency and neutrality were used as criteria to assist the value of the findings.

6. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

- The researcher experienced that social workers were reluctant to discuss shortcomings in their service delivery when the information is documented. The respondents needed repeated reassurance of confidentiality with regard to disclosure of their identities.
- The large geographical area also led to high financial cost to implement the research.
- When feedback was requested during the follow-up session, respondents were extremely leisurely and regular follow-up requests were needed to get the information required.

7. DESCRIPTION OF KEYWORDS

7.1 Child sexual abuse

- 7.1.1 "... an activity, relating to the sex organs, engaged in for sexual gratification which takes advantage of, violates or deceives children or younger people." (Doyle, 1994:8).

- 7.1.2 “A child (anyone under 16 years) is sexually abused when another person, who is sexually mature, involves the child in any sexual activity which the other person expects to lead to their sexual arousal. This might involve intercourse, touching, exposure of the sexual organs, showing pornographic material or talking about sexual things in an erotic way.” (Baker & Duncan, 1985.)
- 7.1.3 “... encouraging, inducing or forcing a child to be used for the sexual gratification of another person, using a child in or deliberately exposing a child to sexual activities or pornography and procuring or allowing a child to be procured for commercial sexual exploitation or in any way participating or assisting in the commercial sexual exploitation of a child.”
- 7.1.4 “Any sexual exploitation of a child under the age of 16 for the sexual pleasure or gratification of an adult or significantly older person. This ranges from obscene telephone calls, indecent exposure and voyeurism such as spying on a child, undressing, to fondling, taking pornographic pictures, intercourse or attempted intercourse, rape, incest or child prostitution. It may be a single incident or events which occur over a number of years.” (Elliot, 1986).

7.2 Experiences

- 7.2.1 “Knowledge or practical wisdom gained from what one has observed, encountered or undergone.”
Dictionary.com. Date of access: 18 March 2011)
- 7.2.2 “To observe certain events; undergo a certain feeling or process; or perform certain actions that may alter one or contribute to ones knowledge; opinions or skills.” (Wikipedia. Date of access: 18 March 2011)

7.3 Forensic social work

- 7.3.1 “Forensic social work is the application of social work to questions and issues relating to law and legal systems... A broader definition includes social work practice which in any way is related to legal issues, involving separation, divorce, neglect, termination of parental rights, the implication of child and spouse abuse, juvenile and adult justice services, corrections, and mandated treatment all fall under this definition.”

(http://www.nofsw.org/html/forensic_social_work.html)

- 7.3.2 “Forensic social work is a field that is commonly associated with the mental evaluation of criminal defendants. Forensic social work, however, extends beyond the courtroom as well. A broad description of the field includes any social work activities related to the law or legal system.”
([http://www.ewhow.com/how_5891477_forensic social work degrees.html](http://www.ewhow.com/how_5891477_forensic_social_work_degrees.html))

7.4 Non-governmental organizations

- 7.4.1 “An international organization that is not part of any government. Abbreviated as NGO. (Wikipedia. Date of access: 18 March 2011)
- 7.4.2 “A non-governmental organization is an association which
- is based on the common interest of its members; individuals or Institution
 - Has no governmental status or function and
 - Is not created by a government, nor is its agenda set or implemented by a government.” (LingualLinks Library. 1999)

8. RESULTS

The results of the study will be discussed according to the themes followed during the interview schedule. Six main themes with subthemes is distinguished and used to focus on the aim of the study, namely to explore the experiences of social workers in the process of child sexual abuse investigations. Results were compared to literature on the subject.

8.1 Profile of the respondents

Eight offices of NG Welfare in the North-West province of South Africa were involved in this study. The number of social workers (respondents) per office varied and can be reported as follows:

- Bloemhof (2 Social workers)
- Fochville (1 Social worker)
- Klerksdorp (5 Social workers)
- Lichtenburg (1 Social worker)
- Potchefstroom (2 Social workers)

- Schweizer Renecke (2 Social workers)
- Wolmaranstad (1 Social worker)
- Zeerust (1 Social workers)

All the respondents are registered with the Council for Social Work Professions in South Africa and therefore have either a four year degree or relevant diploma in Social Work. All the respondents are Afrikaans speaking women and they have an average of 16.4 years experience between them varying from a minimum of 5 years experience up to a maximum of 35 years experience.

8.2 Themes and subthemes of interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews with a schedule of predetermined questions to gather the data. After completion of these interviews, the researcher identified six main themes with subthemes that can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1 Personal experiences of social workers during child sexual abuse investigations	Subtheme 1.1 The influence of personal experiences on behaviour
	Subtheme 1.2 The influence of personal experiences on decision making
	Subtheme 1.3 The influence of personal experiences on service delivery
Theme 2 The experience of social workers with other professionals during investigations of child sexual abuse	Subtheme 2.1 Professionals that social workers do receive cooperation from
	Subtheme 2.2 Professionals that social workers do not receive cooperation from
	Subtheme 2.3 Professionals that social workers would like to receive more cooperation from
Theme 3 Limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations	Subtheme 3.1 Type of limitations that social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations
	Subtheme 3.2 Suggestions to overcome limitations

Theme 4 Social workers' experience of objectivity during child sexual abuse investigations	Subtheme 4.1 Social workers' experience regarding investigations of all possible hypotheses during child sexual abuse investigations
Theme 5 Social workers' knowledge and practice experience in child sexual abuse Investigations	Subtheme 5.1 Social workers' knowledge of an expert witness
	Subtheme 5.2 Social workers feelings about acting as an expert witness during child sexual abuse cases
Theme 6 Suggestions by social workers to improve the quality of child sexual abuse Investigations	Subtheme 6.1 Suggestions to improve the quality of investigations
	Subtheme 6.2 Social workers' thoughts and feelings about utilizing forensic social workers during child sexual abuse cases

8.3 Discussion of findings

8.3.1 Theme 1: Personal experiences of social workers during child sexual abuse investigations

The first theme focuses on how social workers personally experience child sexual abuse cases and how these experiences influence their behaviour, decision-making and service delivery. The criminal law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act, Act 32 of 2007:6-15) refers to sexual abuse of a child. According to this act, a child is a person under the age of 18 years old and sexual abuse includes the following:

- Statutory rape
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual grooming
- Child being exposed to or used for child pornography
- Compelling or causing a child to witness sexual offences, sexual acts or self-masturbation
- Causing of or exposure or display of genital organs

Most of the respondent's mentioned feelings of shock, being scared or uncertain, combined with a sense of urgency to complete the case. Responses included utterances like "*Ek skrik myself dood*". -[*"I am terrified"*], -and "*Ek moet so vinnig en*

deeglik as moontlik werk maak daarmee” [“I must attend to this as fast and accurately as I can”].

8.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: The influence of personal experiences on behaviour

All fifteen respondents acknowledged that their first experience of receiving a case of child sexual abuse does influence their behavior. It was interesting to note that some Social Workers didn't answer directly and others started their answer negatively. It seemed that some respondents didn't want to admit that their experiences influence their behavior. One respondent's remark was the following: *“Nee, ek dink dit is waar my opleiding 'n rol speel. As ek die saak voor my het, weet ek dat ek myself moet skool vir hierdie saak. Ek gaan nie toelaat dat my eie emosies 'n rol kan speel nie. As jy 'n aanmelding gekry het van moontlike seksuele molestering, gaan jy meer attend wees op die gedrag van die kind. Ook so dat jy jou ondersoek kan laat lei deur die gedrag van die kind. Ek dink jy werk harder aan so 'n saak, jy gaan meer tyd spandeer”*. [“No, I think this is where my training plays a role. If I have the case in front of me, I know that I should school myself for the case. I am not going to let my emotions play a role. If you get an intake notification of a case involving possible sexual abuse, you are going to be more aware of the behaviour of the child. Also so that you can let the behaviour of the child lead your investigation. I think you work harder on such cases, you spend more time.”]

8.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: The influence of personal experiences on decision making

Most respondents admitted that their experiences do influence their decision-making in child sexual abuse cases. Responses included words like: *“Nee, alhoewel ek moet erken ek baie meer doelgerig is”* [“No, although I must admit that I am much more goal focused”]. Another respondent said: *“Dit is nou waar objektiwiteit inkom, dat ons as professionele Maatskaplike Werkers het half geleer om objektief te wees. En ek dink net dat 'n mens altyd in die beste belang van die kind moet in gedagte hou en dit is die kruks van die saak waaroor dit moet gaan, dat dit altyd moet gaan oor die beste belang van die kind”*. [Now this is where objectivity comes in, that we as professional social workers half learned to be objective. And I think that one should always keep the best interest of the child in mind and I think that should be the essence of the matter, that it should always be about the best interest of the child.-”].

8.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: The influence of personal experiences on service delivery

Most of the respondents agreed that their experiences influence their service delivery. Some respondents explained reasons why their service delivery is different in these cases, for example: *“Ja, ek dink ‘n mens is ingesteld om te weet hierdie is ‘n abnormale trauma wat ‘n kind nie behoort te beleef nie. Wanneer kinders onder ander omstandighede, byvoorbeeld stokkiesdraai by skool, is dit vir my totaal anders as wanneer dit aan die kind se lyf gedoen word. En dit is ‘n baie emosionele groter impak. ‘n Mens is uit die aard van die saak is ‘n mens meer ingestel om hulp te verleen of ondersteuning of bystand of meer empaties te wil luister”* [“Yes, I think that people are suppose to know that this is abnormal trauma and that a child is not suppose to experience that. When children are in other circumstances, for example not attending school, for me it is totally different than when it is done to a child’s body. And it is a greater emotional impact. One is by the nature of the mater more inclined to assist or support or to listen more empathically”]. One respondent admitted that *“Mens wil nie graag onderskeid neem nie, maar as gevolg van die aard van die saak moet ‘n mens meer inligting insamel want daar is meer rolspelers betrokke.”* [“One wouldn’t want to draw distinctions, but as a result of the nature of the case, one must gather more information because more role-players are involved”]. Another respondent said *“Ja, ek dink mens weet dat so ding in die hof kan draai dan sorg jy dat jy self moet reg wees, al jou notas moet reg wees, die goed moet op datum wees. Jy doen meer moeite.”* [“Yes, I think one knows that something like this can end up in court so you ensure that you are prepared, all your notes must be correct, everything must be up to date”].

8.3.2 Theme 2: The experience of social workers with other professionals during investigations of child sexual abuse

The second identified theme was how social workers experience cooperation from other professionals. The words “disciplines” and “professionals” are used similarly and interchangeable. According to the Government Gazette No.33076 (2010:17) “disciplines” means different professionals working together to resolve a common problem or achieve a common goal through continuous intercommunication, re-examination and evaluation. The New Dictionary of Social Work (2005:35) describes an interprofessional team as a group comprising members trained in different professional

disciplines that work together to resolve a common problem or achieve a common goal through continuous intercommunication, re-examination and evaluation of individual efforts towards team objectives. Such a team takes group responsibility for the final outcome. As discussed by Lotter (2004:129) cooperation between different professions must be encouraged and facilitated. Unfortunately Schiller and Spies (2006:36-47) found in their research that a multidisciplinary team approach to sexual abuse cases fails in practice, because nobody takes the responsibility to co-ordinate these teams.

Respondents acknowledged the positive possibilities of working in a multi-professional team. However, in reality two very different opinions arise. Fifty percent of the respondents claim to have positive cooperation from other professionals. Some of the positive responses are as follows: *“Ek beleef nie ‘n probleem met die samewerking nie, ek beleef wel ‘n probleem met die kostes daaraan verbonde. Mense is gretig om jou te help maar die kostes is ‘n probleem.”* [“I do not experience any problem with the co-operation, I do however experience a problem with the costs involved. People are eager to help, but the cost is a problem”]. The other half of the respondents claims to have negative experiences or no cooperation from other professionals. Reasons for these negative responses are mostly related to geographical distance between the social workers and other professionals. *“In my area is daar nie mense nie. Daar is nie sielkundiges nie, daar is nie mense wat forensiese assesserings kan doen nie. Dokters is baie skepties om mediese ondersoeke te doen. Dit is nogals ‘draining’ want daar is nie rerig hulp nie.”* [In my area there aren’t people. There are no psychologists; there are no people who can do forensic assessments. Doctors are skeptical to do medicals. It is kind of draining because there is no real help.]. Another response was: *“Ons woon op die platteland so ons bronne van professionele mense is baie beperk”* [“We live in a rural area so our resources of professional people are limited.-”].

8.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Professionals social workers do get cooperation from

The first subtheme includes a list of professionals that social workers mentioned from which they do receive cooperation. The following responses can be quoted: *“Sielkundiges, maar hulle wil nie by hofsake betrokke raak nie. Dokters is ook bereid om te help, maar wil niks op skrif sit nie”.* [“Psychologists, but they don’t want to get involved in court cases. Doctors are also willing to help, but they don’t want to put anything in writing.-”]. For many of these professionals, finances are of concern:

“Wanneer die kliente self betaal vir privaat sielkundige dienste is die samewerking goed, ek kry ook goeie samewerking van die privaat mediese dokters indien die klient self daarvoor betaal of ‘n mediese fonds het”. [“When the client can pay for the services of a private psychologist the cooperation is good, I also get good cooperation from private medical doctors when the client pays or has medical aid”]. Several respondents mentioned better cooperation from professionals that are in other provinces.

8.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Professionals social workers do not receive cooperation from

The second subtheme includes a list that the respondents mentioned as professionals that they receive negative responses or no cooperation from. Lack of cooperation from the medical profession seems to be of great concern: *“Ek werk nie werklik met mediese personeel nie. Dokters is baie skepties”.* [“I do not work with medical personnel. Doctors are very skeptical”]. *“Privaat geneeshere is nie altyd bereid om in die hof te gaan getuig nie, wat ‘n mens kan verstaan as gevolg van hulle beperkte tyd. Die Distriksgeneesheer is nie altyd maklik om in die hande te kry nie”.* [Private medical doctors aren't always willing to testify in court, which one can understand this due to their limited time. The district surgeon cannot be easily reached”]. *“Privaat Maatskaplike werkers en kliniese sielkundiges is soms goedkoper. Hulle is baie besig en ons wag lank vir afspraak en hulle vat lank met verslae waarvoor selfs betaal word deur die NGO.”* [“Private social workers and clinical psychologists are sometimes cheaper. They are very busy and we wait long for appointments and they take long to complete reports that the NGO must pay for.”]

Some of the responses sorted into the two subthemes seem to contradict each other. During further investigations, the contradictions became clear. For example, 86,6% or thirteen of the respondents claimed to have cooperation from medical practitioners. In contrast, 66,6% or ten of the fifteen respondents claimed not to have cooperation from medical practitioners. The differences became evident in the explanation of the responses. Two respondents claimed to have positive cooperation from the District Surgeon while six respondents claimed not to have any cooperation from the District Surgeon. Nine of the fifteen respondents have cooperation from private practitioners while only three respondents say they don't have cooperation from private doctors. Molwedi (2004:5) mentioned that in practice, a huge communication gap exists between

the police, social workers and the medical staff during child sexual abuse cases, which can also impact the feelings of negative cooperation.

8.3.2.3 Subtheme 3: Professionals social workers would prefer to have more cooperation from.

According to the Government Gazette No. 33076 of April 2010, a person is suitable to conduct investigations into cases of alleged child abuse or neglect as contemplated in section 142(d) of the Children's Act if such a person –

- (a) is a registered social worker in terms of the Social Service Professions Act, 1978, and is employed –
 - (i) by the Department or a provincial department of social development; or
 - (ii) by a designated child protection organization;
- (b) has sufficient experience in the field of child protection or is working under the supervision of a person who has at least five years experience in child protection;
- (c.) has not been found unsuitable to work with children and has no previous convictions relating to child abuse;
- (d) upholds the rights of the child and children's best interest; and
- (e) is able to work in a multi-disciplinary team with the objective of securing the best protection plan based on a child's developmental needs.

Most respondents said that they would prefer to have more cooperation from other professionals than only registered social workers and mainly requested more cooperation from medical professionals, especially to testify in court. This correlates with the opinion of Van Buul (2008:4) who said that medical information must be received from the right medical personnel as soon as possible. Several of the social workers also emphasized that they would like more cooperation from professionals that could assist the child involved, including therapists, the SAP, a legal representative and a forensic social worker. Respondents in rural areas expressed their desire to have more professionals available for investigations of child sexual abuse and also to have more finances available to utilize resources.

8.3.3 Theme 3: Limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations

During the interviews with the respondents, the researcher tried to uncover the limitations social workers experience when they need to conduct investigations of child sexual abuse, the causes that the respondents would identify for these limitations, and how they feel these limitations could be overcome in order to improve their investigations.

8.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Types of limitations social workers experience during child sexual abuse investigations

Most of the respondents experience a lack of resources and poor availability of professionals as the main limitation. Many of the respondents explained they have geographical limitations because they are far from bigger towns with resources. *“Hier is nie beskikbare assesserders of terapeute beskikbaar nie.”* [“There are no available assessors or therapists here”]. *“Hulpbronne is ver”* [“Resources are far away”]. The lack of available professionals is linked to the second highest rated stumbling block, namely the cost of a forensic assessment. Respondent’s mentioned the high cost involved in taking children for forensic assessments and that the NG Welfare office must carry the cost in most of the cases. Other limitations closely related to the financial constraints that respondents experience are the distance, transport, time and cost involved in taking children to assessments. This includes the fuel, snacks and or lunch and drinks for the children. Research by Streak and Poggenpoel (2005:41) proved that NGO’s mentioned insufficient funds to be a large obstacle in the way of service delivery. The influence of insufficient funds on service delivery was confirmed by the Amendments Act on Criminal Justice (September 2007:98), as well as in the National Policy Framework for the Prevention and Treatment of Child abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (Department of Social Development, 2005:20).

During the interviews it became evident that most children taken for assessments come from families with limited financial resources and therefore most of these families do not have a vehicle or available transport to take these children to and from these assessments, therefore the responsibility remains that of the social worker. These assessments of a child during the statutory process became a specialized field

(Verster, 2005:145) and this specialized or trained human resource is scarce. Many of the respondents are employed in half-day positions. These half-day positions imply that some social workers are only employed five hours a day, which is not enough for transporting a child to and from an assessment. Social workers therefore have to utilize their own private time as well as money to buy snacks, lunch and drinks for the children because the NGO can't afford this. One respondent explained: *"Dit is verskriklik duur. Die kinders wat ek nou al vat kos R350 per uur net vir die assesserings. Ek moet hulle vat. Dit is petrol geld. As hulle daar kom, is dit ietsie om te eet. Ek wou dit nou nie gese het nie, maar ek het nou hierdie kinders by my en dit kom alles uit my sak uit. Dit kos my persoonlik ook. My supervisor kla ook al oor die tyd. Dit vat 'n dag van jou tyd. Ek voel so besorg oor die kinders, maar dan aan die ander kant, wie sal hulle nou vat. Ek besef ook dit is die hele tyd in my eie tyd. Kliente het nie altyd hulle eie vervoer nie."* ["It is very expensive. The children I am taking for assessments cost R350 per hour just for the assessment. I must take them. It is petrol money. When they arrive, it is something to eat. I didn't want to mention it, but I have the children with me and it all comes from my pocket. It cost me personally as well. My supervisor also complains about the time by now. It takes a whole day of ones time. Clients don't have their own transport."]

According to the respondents the causes for these limitations are closely related to the availability and costs of professional services. Rural areas and towns far away from major cities with available resources lack qualified professionals to assist in child sexual abuse cases. The respondents experience lack of professional support as a result of this geographical constraint between available resources and the children in need of these resources. The social worker has to take the child involved to and from forensic assessments because, as many respondents explained, the parents of the child involved don't have transport or the finances to pay for these professional services. Most of the responses from the respondents agreed with the following statements: *"Daar is nie hulpbronne beskikbaar soos sielkundiges of forensiese assesserders nie."* ["There aren't resources available like psychologists or forensic assessors"]. *"Klein gemeenskap, min hulpbronne tot hulle beskikking en min kennis en ondervinding met sulke sake"*. ["Small community, few resources to their disposal and little knowledge and experience with such cases"]. *"Beperkte geld en fondse. Min forensiese maatskaplike werkers en die wat beskikbaar is, is vol bespreek en maatskaplike werkers moet lank wag vir afsprake"*. ["Limited money and funds. Few forensic social workers

and those that are available are fully booked and social workers have to wait long for appointments.”]

8.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Suggestions to overcome limitations

A variety of suggestions were given that could help to overcome the limitations the respondents experience during an investigation of child sexual abuse. Most of these suggestions included that more funds should be made available. A respondent explained: *“Meer finansies moet beskikbaar gestel word om vir professionele dienste te kan betaal omdat die staat nie in sekere professionele dienste kan voorsien nie.”* [“More finances must be made available to pay for professional services because the government isn’t able to provide certain professional services”]. Some respondents suggested that an assessment unit or center within the North-West province would be of great support and resource for social workers. *“Ek wens hier kon ‘n sentrum wees waar daar ‘n opgeleide polisie persoon is wat die eerste onderhoud kan voer met hierdie kind. Waar daar ‘n opgeleide mediese beampte is wat hierdie kind kan ondersoek en waar daar onmiddelik professionele persone is wat onmiddelik die ergste trauma kan hanteer.”* [“I wish there could be a center here where a trained police officer can do the first interview with this child. Where a trained medical official can examine the child and where a professional person is immediately available to handle the worst trauma”]. *“Al die logistieke werke wat die maatskaplike werker moet doen kan oorbrug word deur ‘n asseseringseenheid.”* [“All the logistics that the social worker must handle can be overcome by an assessment unit”]. Many respondents also stressed the fact that professionals used in these cases should be informed and have knowledge about child sexual abuse investigations. This knowledge includes specialized training in how to conduct the interviews in a legally correct manner without harming either the child or corrupting the information. *“Sulke sake moet deur professionele mense hanteer word wat opgelei is in hierdie tipe ding”.* [“Such cases must be handled by professional people who are trained in this type of thing”].

8.3.4 Theme 4: Social workers’ experience of objectivity during child sexual abuse investigations.

All the respondents said that they as social workers are unbiased and objective when they are confronted with a case of child sexual abuse. As described by the Oxford

Advanced Learner's Dictionary, objectivity or being unbiased means not to be influenced by personal feelings or opinions and only to consider facts. Respondents confirmed their objectivity towards child sexual abuse with descriptions like the following: "*Ons is wel geleer en het die kennis om objektief op te tree.*" ["We are taught and have the knowledge to act objectively" and "*Ek probeer. Ons moet altyd daarna streef. Soms gebeur dit dat mens subjektief betrokke raak, veral as mens lank met 'n klient gewerk het. Danksy die opleiding wat ons ontvang het, weet ons hoe belangrik objektiwiteit is en ons altyd daarna moet streef.*" ["I try. We must always strive towards it. At times it does happen that one gets subjectively involved, especially if one has worked long with a client. Thanks to the training we received, we know the importance of objectivity and that we should always strive towards it"]. Another respondent replied by saying: "*Ek is 'n professionele maatskaplike werker. Ek hoop my optrede en diens is 'n speelbeeld daarvan.*" ["I am a professional social worker. I hope my actions and service reflects it"]. When the researcher asked if the respondents experience that other social workers were objective it became evident that most respondents do not think all social workers are objective in these cases. Most respondents acknowledged that they think social workers act in the best interest of the child and therefore don't consider other influences on what children say and how they behave. "*Ek dink maatskaplike werkers probeer nie om te wees nie, maar ons is soms subjektief. Maatskaplike werkers tree hoofsaaklik op in die beste belang van die kind en vat dus meeste van die tyd die kind se sy van die saak.*" ["I think social workers do not try to be, but we are at times subjective. Social workers mainly act in the best interest of the child and thus take the child's side most of the time"]. "*In die eerste plek waar kinders betrokke is, wil mense beskerm. Ek dink nie alle maatskaplike werkers neem in ag dat daar baie ander faktore is wat 'n rol speel tot 'n kind se gedrag nie.*" ["In the first place where children are involved, people want to protect. I don't think all social workers take into consideration that there are many factors that play a role in a child's behaviour."]

8.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Social workers' experience regarding investigations of all possible hypotheses during child sexual abuse investigations

The majority of respondents acknowledged that they don't experience social workers to truly investigate all possible hypotheses when a case of child sexual abuse is under investigation. A hypotheses is synonymous to a theory or speculation and can be described as an idea or explanation of something that is based on a few known facts

that have not yet been proved to be true or correct (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010). Respondents said the following about hypotheses investigations in child sexual abuse cases: *“Dit is menslik om sekere dinge te mis of nie in ag te neem nie. Ons is baie keer gedruk vir tyd en werk teen keerdadums wat ons werk ietwat bemoeilik. Daarom gebruik ons en moet ons staat maak op hulpbronne.”* [“It is human to miss things or not to consider something. Many a time we are pressured for time and work against deadlines that make our work kind of difficult. That is why we use and rely on resources”]. Another respondent explained that social workers mostly focus on children's court proceedings and therefore do not include information as needed for criminal investigations. Many of the social workers admitted that their main focus is on the interest of the child and on the immediate situation in of safeguarding the child. Consequently much additional information is not included or even investigated when a social worker handles such a case.

8.3.5 Theme 5: Social workers' knowledge and practice experience in child sexual abuse investigations

When the researcher asked the respondents if they think social workers have enough knowledge and practice experience to conduct child sexual abuse investigations, the majority of the respondents did not think so. Some respondents acknowledged their training but admitted that basic training is not enough for specialized investigations where criminal proceedings can be the result. *“Ons het basiese opleiding en nie voldoende spesiale opleiding nie, daarvoor het iemand 'n passie nodig. Ek dink vir hierdie ondersoek is spesialisering nodig. Ons het ook nie die kennis oor die terapie om dit te hanteer nie. Ook weet ons nie wat werklik tydens kruisverhoor moet gebeur en wat ons moet se nie en dus kan ons kennis en verdediging nie staan in die hof nie.”* [“We have basic training and not sufficient specialized training, for that someone needs to have a passion. I think this kind of investigation needs specialization. We also don't have the knowledge of the therapy to handle it. We also don't really know what should happen during cross-examinations and what we should say, and therefore our knowledge and defense don't stand in court.”]. *“Ek weet forensiese maatskaplike werk is iets anders as gewone maatskaplike werk. Ek dink net jy moet so versigtig wees om nie leidende vrae te stel die eerste ruk nie. Jy moet versigtig wees om nie die kind te beïnvloed nie, enige iets wat sy getuïenis later kan beïnvloed nie. So ek dink net die gewone maatskaplike werker met 'n vier jaar opleiding en B-graad agter die naam, nee,*

ek dink nie so nie.” [“I know that forensic social work is different than normal social work. I think you should be so careful not to ask leading questions in the beginning. You must be careful not to influence the child, anything that can influence his statement later. So I think the normal social worker with a four year training and B-degree behind their name, no, I don’t think so.”]

8.3.5.1 Subtheme 1: Social workers’ knowledge of an expert witness

Most of the respondents said that they do know what an expert witness is, therefore the researcher asked the respondents to give definitions of an expert witness. These informal definitions will be quoted: *“Dit is ‘n deskundige op jou vakgebied. Maatskaplike werkers is deskundiges oor huislike omstandighede, byvoorbeeld oor medies sal ‘n dokter wees, forensiese maatskaplike werkers oor die seksuele. Dit is een wat baie met so ‘n saak werk en fokus op ‘n spesifieke onderwerp.”* [“It is an expert in your field. Social workers are experts about home circumstances; for example, about medical conditions it will be a doctor and a forensic social worker about the sexual. It is one that often works with such cases and focuses on a specific topic”]. *“Iemand wat in ‘n saak feite kan voorle asook resultate en gevolge en dit met oortuiging kan oordra.”* [“Someone who can present the facts of a case as well as results, and who can persuasively convey it.”] According to the Wikipedia (2010), an expert witness is “a professional witness or judicial expert who by virtue of education, training, skill, or experience, is believed to have expertise and specialized knowledge in a particular subject beyond that of the average person, sufficient that others may officially and legally rely upon the witness’s specialized (scientific, technical or other) opinion about an evidence or fact issue within the scope of his expertise, referred to as an expert opinion, as an assistance to the fact finder”. Meintjies-Van der Walt (2002:24-33) mentions that the function of an expert witness should be to educate; inform and assist the court by way of objective unbiased opinion in relation to matters within his/her expertise. An expert witness is also not restricted to rely on his/her own perceptions or even his/her own reasoning. Experts may and must rely on the general body of knowledge that constitutes their field.

8.3.5.2 Subtheme 2: Social workers’ feelings about acting as an expert witness during child sexual abuse cases

During these interviews, most respondents acknowledged not feeling comfortable to act as expert witnesses during investigations and court proceedings of child sexual abuse. It became evident that social workers feel comfortable to act in the children's court in terms of the Children's act, but don't feel as self-assured about their knowledge and training during criminal proceedings and or investigations of criminal cases. These acknowledgements by the respondents confirm research done by Meintjies-Van der Walt (2002:3) where she suggested that simply the fact of being put in the role of an adversary witness, results in testimonies that are biased. Therefore expert witnesses may be honest, yet biased. *"Ek sal nie sê dat ek as 'n deskundige getuie sal kan optree in seksuele molestering sake nie, want ek voel dit is nou weer 'n intensiewe veld. Ek voel daar is mense wat baie beter opgelei is en wat dit kan doen. Op algemene maatskaplike vlak sou ek kan sê dat ek myself as 'n kenner sien, maar op 'n seksuele vlak nie. Ek het te min kennis van dit"* ["I will not say that I will be able to act as an expert witness during sexual abuse cases, because I feel it is an intensive field. I feel there are people who are much better trained who can do it. On general social work level I would say that I see myself as an expert, but not on a sexual level."] *"Dit sal afhang, as hulle my uitvra oor die kind se maatskaplike omstandighede glo ek, ek sal kan getuig. Maar as dit gaan oor die kind se molestering as sulks, nee ek sal nie getuig nie"* ["It will depend, if they ask me about the child's social circumstances I believe I will be able to testify. But if it is about the child and the sexual abuse, I don't think I will be able to testify."] "

8.3.6 Theme 6: Suggestions by social workers to improve the quality of investigations during child sexual abuse investigations

Several respondents had more than one suggestion on how to improve the quality of investigations during child sexual abuse. The researcher didn't lead the respondents in any way during the initial interviews, and during data processing it became evident that more information was needed. Many of the respondents made similar suggestions, and the researcher therefore asked the respondents to complete a questionnaire in order to clarify the results. A summary of the interview data was e-mailed to the respondents with the questions attached.

8.3.6.1 Subtheme 1: Suggestions on how to improve the quality of investigations

Most of the responses included the implementation of an assessment unit within the North-West province. This suggestion was also made in 1999 by the State President in his opening speech in Parliament where he indicated that there must be an establishment of One-Stop Centers for victims of child abuse. According to the Keynote Address delivered by Adv Majokweni (2000:3) the President also said that these One-Stop Centers must be multidisciplinary in nature and must include the police; social workers; medical doctors; forensic nurses; psychologists; psychiatrists; prosecutors; NGO's to provide support services and volunteers to act as counselors. Other respondents suggested having a forensic social worker employed by the organization. Another suggestion used by many of the respondents was to have a fixed multi-professional team or panel available for these investigations. Other suggestions included having a place of safety or rehabilitation center where children involved with child sexual abuse can receive specialized treatment.

Because so many respondents suggested an assessment unit, (also called a one-stop center or children's unit), the researcher included additional questions with the summary of the findings which she sent to the participants. The aim of the questions was to find out which professionals should be included in such an assessment unit. The following table gives a list of professionals that participants thought should be included.

Table 2: List of professionals

Professionals suggested	Amount of respondents confirming
Forensic social worker	11
Play therapist	11
Medical doctor	10
Child protection unit	10
Legal representatives	9
Clinical psychologist	9
Social workers	8
Teachers	7
Occupational therapist	7
Pediatrician	7
Clinic sister	4
Educational psychologist	4
South African Police	4
Headmasters of schools	4
Dieticians	1
Pastoral counselors	1
Ministers	1

According to the respondents, the professionals they would like to include most in an assessment unit are forensic social workers, play therapists, medical doctors, the child protection unit, legal representatives, clinical psychologists and social workers. Professionals that were suggested least include dieticians, pastoral counselors and ministers.

8.3.6.2 Subtheme 2: Social workers' thoughts and feelings about utilizing forensic social workers during child sexual abuse cases

Barker and Brandson (1995:140) said that forensic social work could be defined as a specialized field of social work practice that is characterized by the social worker's primary function of providing expert testimony in courts of law. The respondents agreed that the utilization of forensic social workers during child sexual abuse cases has a positive influence on the investigation as well as on the outcome of these court cases. Responses were extremely positive and included words like: "*Dit sal wonderlik wees om hulle by sulke sake te kan gebruik*" ["It will be wonderful to utilize them in such cases"]. "*Ek dink dit is regtig noodsaaklik*" ["I think it is really essential"] and "*Absoluut onafwendbaar, jy moet hulle gebruik. As jy so iets by elke saak beskikbaar het, sal dit wonderlik wees.*" ["Absolutely crucial, you must utilize them. If you have something like that available for every case, it would be wonderful"]. Only two of the respondents expressed negative thoughts about the utilization of forensic social workers, but included that they realize that the support of a forensic social worker during these investigations and especially the court proceedings is of great help. The role of a forensic social worker should be more clearly defined and explained to social workers in general. Smit (2007:18) found that social workers experience uncertainty about what the function of forensic social workers ought to be. Like one respondent admitted: "*Ek dink dit is baie nodig om meer ingelig te word oor wat is hulle rol en funksie, dan sal ek ook beter voel oor die verband*" ["I think it is necessary to be more informed about their role and function, then I will feel better in this regard"].

9. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of social workers in the process of child sexual abuse investigations. During the study it became evident that most

respondents initially experience emotional responses of shock; uncertainty; fear and an urgency to complete these investigations as soon as possible.

All the respondents stated that experiences with regard to child sexual abuse cases do influence their behavior, decision making and service delivery. Half of the respondents said they have positive cooperation, while the other half of the respondents' claim to have negative or no cooperation from other professionals. This negative cooperation can mostly be explained by geographical and financial limitations between the respondents and other professionals as well as unwillingness of other professionals to get involved in child sexual abuse cases.

The availability of resources within certain towns is the biggest limitation experienced by the respondents. Because of the lack of available and qualified human resources, the respondents need to travel far in order to bring the professional and child involved in contact with either therapy and/or assessments. The assessments are costly and the NGO needs to take responsibility for payment of these expert services. Many extensive investigations, including assessments, are done during the respondent's private time, and not only money, but also time is a limitation. Many social workers are of opinion that more funds should be made available for such investigations in order to help the child, family and community involved.

All the respondents are of the opinion that social workers are unbiased and objective when they are confronted with a case of child sexual abuse and agrees that social workers in general has time limitations and therefore do not always include all hypotheses as required for criminal investigations. The majority of the respondents say that they don't think general social workers have enough knowledge and practice experience for conducting child sexual abuse investigations and although they know what an expert witness is, most acknowledged not feeling comfortable to act as expert witnesses during child sexual abuse investigations and therefore feel positive about the utilization of forensic social workers during such investigations.

Suggestions from the respondents to improve the quality of investigations during child sexual abuse cases:

- An assessment unit to be established within NG Welfare.
- A forensic Social worker to be employed by the organization.

- Having a place of safety and or rehabilitation center available for the children involved where they can receive specialized treatment

The study proved that the experiences social workers have during investigations of child sexual abuse do influence their service delivery. The study found however that even though social workers admit that their personal experiences do influence their behavior, decision making and service delivery, the social worker's training and skills leads them to remain professional and unbiased during these investigations. None of the participants disagreed with the summary of the findings that was sent to them and no additional comments were received.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

When evaluating the data and concluding on the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

10.1 Recommendations to improve investigations of child sexual abuse

The researcher agrees with the respondents that an assessment unit or multi-professional team approach would be beneficial. A typical unit would therefore include a forensic social worker, play therapist, medical doctor, the child protection unit clinical psychologist; legal representative and social worker. The researcher does however want to refer to data in the study that proves that half of the social workers already experienced negative cooperation and attitudes towards other professionals and even feel threatened by them. The costs involved in paying for such a team or unit would be immensely high and it would be of great difficulty to get all these suggested professionals together to discuss cases.

Having a place of safety and or rehabilitation center for children involved with child sexual abuse is a great suggestion, but would not be viable within an NGO like NG Welfare. The financial implications and logistics around such a center would be immense and the researcher would advise to make such suggestions to the Department of Social Development in order for all NGO's to utilize such a facility.

The researcher therefore suggests that NGO's employ forensic social workers for the following reasons:

- To employ forensic social workers within an NGO would lead to a high quality of investigations in child sexual abuse cases.
- Because forensic social workers have extensive knowledge on the legal systems with regard to child sexual abuse and related matters, an appointed forensic social worker can advise and support other social workers in the NGO with regards to all cases involving legal matters.
- Because forensic social workers do assessments, forensic interviews, make recommendations and writes court reports, costs can be saved.
- The organization can employ one forensic social worker within the province.
- The social workers will experience fewer negative attitudes and feelings of anguish because of the support from the forensic social worker.

10.2 Recommendations for future research

- That the research project be replicated using a sample of every NGO within the North-West Province of South Africa.
- That the research project be replicated at all welfare organizations in South Africa, regardless of being governmental and or non-governmental welfare organizations.
- That the research project be undertaken to explore the utilization of forensic social workers within non-governmental organizations.
- That the research project be undertaken to identify the nature of support needed by social workers when confronted with child sexual abuse cases.

11. REFERENCES

ALSTON, M & BOWLES, W. 2003. Research for social workers: an introduction to methods. London: Routledge.

BABBIE, E. 2004. The practice of social research. London: Thomson Wadsworth.

BAKER, A.W. & DUNCAN, S.P. 1985. Child sexual abuse. Study of prevalence in Great Britain. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 9(4):457-468.

BARKER, R.L. & BRANDSON, D.M. 1995. Forensic social work: legal aspects of professional practice. New York: The Haworth Press.

BOSMAN-SWANEOEL, H.M & WESSELS, P.J. 1995. 'n Praktiese benadering tot die wet op kindersorg. *2de uitgawe*. Pretoria: Digma.

CONRADIE, H. & TANFA, D.Y. 2005. Adjudication of child victims of rape and indecent assault in Gauteng. *Child abuse research in South Africa*, 6(2):3-18.

CRESSWELL, J.W. 2003. Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches. London: Sage Publications.

CRESSWELL, J.W. 2007. Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches. London: Sage Publications.

CRIMINAL LAW (SEXUAL OFFENCES AND RELATED MATTERS). Amendment Act. No.32, 2007

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. 2005. National Policy Framework and Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Management of Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation. Pretoria.

DE VOS, A.S. 2005. Qualitative data and analysis and interpretation. (*In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. reds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. p. 333-349*)

DICTIONARY.COM. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/experience>. Date of access: 18 March 2011

DOYLE, C. 1994. Child sexual abuse: a guide for health professionals. London: Chapman & Hall.

ELLIOTT, M. 1986. Keeping safe: a practical guide to talking to children. London: Bedford Square Press.

FALLER, K.C. 2003. Understanding and Assessing Child Sexual maltreatment. Sage publications.

GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 1 APRIL 2010. P.17. No. 33076. GENERAL PROVISIONS. CHAPTER 1

GOVERNMENT GAZETTE, 1 April 2010. No. 33076. P 49. Vol. 538. Pretoria.

GREEFF, M. 2005. Information collection: interviewing. (*In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. p. 286-313*)

GRINNELL, R.M. 2001. Social work research and evaluation: quantitative and qualitative approaches. London: FE Peacock Publishers.

[http://www.who.com/how_5891477_forensic social work degrees.html](http://www.who.com/how_5891477_forensic_social_work_degrees.html) Date of access: 18 March 2011

[http://www.nofsw.org/html/forensic social work.html](http://www.nofsw.org/html/forensic_social_work.html). Date of access: 18 March 2011

LINGUAL LINKS LIBRARY. 1999. Version 4.0. "Literator". [CD]. Date of access: 18 March 2011.

LOTTER, S. 2004. Die verband tussen seksuele molestering en die intimiteitsverhouding binne die huwelik. Pretoria: Universiteit van Suid Afrika. (Skripsie – MA Mw) 129.

MAJOKWENI, T. 2000. Keynote address delivered by Adv Thoko Majokweni at the First National Conference of SAPSAC. *Carsa*, 1(2):1-4, October.

MARLOW, C.R. 2005. Research methods for generalist social work. London: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

MEINTJIES-VAN DER WALT. L. 2003. Child abuse research in South Africa: Ethics and the expert: Some suggestions for South Africa. *Carsa*, 4(2):42-54, October.

MOLWEDI, P. 2004. Police statistics on child abuse do not reflect reality, activists warn. *Sunday Independent*: 26, 5 Sept.

MONETTE, D.R., SULIVAN, T.J. & DE JONG, C.R. 2005. Applied social research: a tool for the human service. London: Brooks/Cole.

NEUMAN, W.L. 2000. Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Allyn and Bacon.

NEW DICTIONARY OF SOCIAL WORK. 1995. Cape Town: Government Printers. 35p.

ROYSE, D. 2004. Research methods in social work. London: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

RUBIN, A. & BABBIE, E.R. 2005. Research methods for social work. London: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

SCHILLER, U. & SPIES, G.M. 2006. Development of a training programme for state prosecutors to address revictimisation of the sexually abused child during forensic procedures. *Child abuse research in South Africa*, 7(2):36-47.

SEVEL, J., CUMMINS, L. & MADRIGAL, C. 1999. Social work skills: demonstrated. Illinois State University: Allyn & Bacon.

SMIT, S. 2007. Die forensiese maatskaplike werker as getuie in die hof. Potchefstroom: Noordwes Universiteit (Potchefstroomkampus). (Skripsie – MA MW (Forensies) 55.

SOUTH AFRICA. 2008/9. Department of Social Development. Draft guidelines on the notification of child abuse cases. Pretoria: Government Printer.

SOUTH AFRICA. 2007. Amendments Act on Criminal Justice (Sexual abuse and related matters). 3-98

SOUTH AFRICA. 2006. Children's Act. (Proclamation no. 38 of 2005). Government gazette, 28944:492, 19 June.

STREAK, J. & POGGENPOEL, S. 2005. Towards social welfare services for all vulnerable children in South Africa: a review of policy development, budgeting and service delivery. Children's Budget Unit, Budget Information Service, Idasa. 31 March 2005.

STRYDOM, H. 2005. Ethical aspects of research in the social sciences and human service professions. (*In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. reds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. p. 56-69*)

THE AMMENDMENTS ACT ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE SEE SOUTH AFRICA

THE CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY. 1995. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1356 p.

THYER, B.A. 2001. The handbook of social work research methods. London: Sage Publications.

VAN BUUL, S. 2008. Meisie (4) moet in openbaar vertel van dade. Beeld: 19 Jun. 4.

VAN DER MERWE, A. 2002. Guidelines on sentencing in child sexual abuse cases. *Carsa*, 3(2):24-33, Oct.

VERSTER, B. 2005. Assesering van die kind in die statutere proses: 'n Gestaltbenadering. Pretoria: Universiteit van Suid Afrika. (Verhandeling – M.Diac. Spelterapie) 145p.

WATSON, D. & WEST, J. 2006. Social work process and practice: approaches, knowledge and skills. China: Palgrave Macmillan.

OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNERS DICTIONARY.

<http://www.oxfordadvancedlearnersdictionary.com/dictionary/objectivity#objective>.

Date of access: 28 September 2010.

WIKIPEDIA. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expert_witness. Date of access: 28 September 2010.

WIKIPEDIA. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expert_witness. Date of access: 18 March 2011.

ADDENDUM A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Question 1: What is your personal experience when you receive a case of child sexual abuse?

Question 1.2: Does your experience influence your behaviour?

Question 1.3: Does your experience influence your decision making and-/or recommendations in the case?

Question 1.4: Does your experience influence your service delivery?

Question 2: How do you experience cooperation from other professionals?

Question 2.1: From which professions do you receive cooperation?

Question 2.2: From which professions do you not receive any cooperation?

Question 2.3: From which professions would you prefer to have more cooperation?

Question 2.4: Any comments regarding the multi-professional team approach towards investigations of child sexual abuse?

Question 3: What boundaries and or limitations do you experience during child sexual abuse investigations?

Question 3.1: Name and explain the boundaries and or limitations.

Question 3.2: What do you think is the cause of these boundaries and or limitations?

Question 3.3: How can social workers, working in NGO's overcome these boundaries and/or limitations?

Question 4: Do you think social workers are unbiased when confronted with child sexual abuse investigations?

Question 4.1: Do you experience that social workers are objective when confronted with child sexual abuse investigations?

Question 5: Do you think social workers have enough knowledge and practice experience for conducting child sexual abuse investigations?

Question 5.1: Do you know what an expert witness is?

Question 5.2 Do you feel comfortable to act as an expert witness in child abuse cases?

Question 6: Do you have any suggestions that could improve the quality of child sexual abuse investigations?

Question 6.1: What are your thoughts and feelings about utilizing forensic social workers during child sexual abuse investigations?

ADDENDUM B

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear: _____

RESEARCH: MA (SOCIAL WORK) FORENSIC PRACTICE

The undersigned social worker is completing her MA (Social Work) degree in Forensic practice at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

For completion of this degree, the undersigned is doing qualitative research regarding the experience of social workers in the process of investigating child sexual abuse.

In order to compare theoretical and other existing information with practical experiences of social workers in NGO's, the undersigned is requesting your participation in this research.

Your participation will include an hour-long interview with the undersigned. The interview will be recorded on a video camera for transcript reasons only and will remain confidential. You will receive the questions (interview schedule) before the interview and the result of the research will be given to you for further comments.

The undersigned has received approval from NG Welfare North-West and the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) for this research.

Your participation and cooperation in this regard will be highly valued.

For more information, please contact the undersigned social worker.

M J CUSSONS (MRS)
REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKER
RESEARCHER
0716259611

ADDENDUM C

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

Letter of agreement between the respondent and the researcher

I, M J Cussons (Researcher) hereby declare that all information received during this research will remain confidential. The video recordings will remain the sole property of the researcher and will only be utilized to subtract the information needed to conclude this investigation.

None of the respondent's personal information will be included in the evaluation of this research. This research does not imply any physical or emotional harm to the participants and its only focus is to be beneficial for the profession of social work.

The involvement of the participants is voluntary and does not attempt to deceive respondents. The participants will be informed of the findings after the research is completed and their comments will be included in the evaluation of the findings.

The researcher's actions and competence will be supervised and guided by Dr. C Strydom from the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The results of the research will be published in a manuscript as accurately and objectively as possible.

I, _____ (Respondent) hereby declare voluntary participation in the mentioned research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

ADDENDUM D

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Dear Respondent

I am including a summary of the findings of my investigation as promised. Please read through the summary and indicate whether you would like to add or amend any statements.

Then please complete the additional questions regarding the list of professionals you would like to include in an assessment unit to support social workers during investigations of child sexual abuse investigations. Make a cross next to the professionals that you would like to include.

Yours sincerely,

M J CUSSONS (MRS)
REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKER
RESEARCHER
0716259611

Summary:

Most respondents initially experienced emotional responses of shock; uncertainty; being scared and an urgency to complete investigations when they are confronted with child sexual abuse. All the respondents stated that experiences with regard to child sexual abuse cases does influence their behavior, decision making and service delivery.

Half of the respondents said they have positive cooperation, while the other half of the respondents claimed to have negative or no cooperation from other professionals. This negativity can mostly be explained due to geographical and financial limitations between the respondents and other professionals as well as unwillingness of other professionals to get involved in child sexual abuse cases.

The availability of resources within certain towns is the biggest limitation experienced by the respondents. Because of the lack of available and qualified human resources, the respondents need to travel far to bring the professional and child involved with possible child sexual abuse in contact either for therapy and or assessments.

The assessments are costly and the NGO needs to takes responsibility for payment of these expert services. Many extensive investigations including assessments are done during the respondent's private time and not only money but also time is a limitation. Many social workers were of opinion that more funds should be made available for such investigations in order to help the child, family and community involved.

All the respondents were of the opinion that social workers are unbiased and objective when they are confronted with a case of child sexual abuse and agrees that social workers in general have time limitations and therefore do not include all hypotheses as required for criminal investigations.

The majority of the respondents said that they didn't think general social workers have enough knowledge and practice experience for conducting child sexual abuse investigations and although they knew what an expert witness is, most acknowledged not feeling comfortable to act as expert witnesses during child sexual abuse investigations and therefore felt positive about the utilization of forensic social workers during such investigations.

Suggestions to improve the quality of investigations during child sexual abuse cases included:

- An assessment unit consisting of the following professionals:
 - Forensic social worker
 - Play therapist
 - Medical doctor
 - Child protection unit
 - Legal representative
 - Clinical psychologist
 - Social worker
- A forensic Social worker employed by the organization

Questions

1. Would you like to add or amend any statements?-----

2. Please complete the table below

Professionals	Please mark with an 'x'
Medical doctor	
Clinic sister	
Pediatrician	
Forensic social worker	
Play therapists	
Clinical psychologist	
Educational psychologist	
Social workers	
Occupational therapist	
Legal representative	
South African Police	
Child protection unit	
Headmaster	
Teachers	
Dieticians	
Other	

ADDENDUM E

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

CHRISTIEN TERBLANCHE LANGUAGE SERVICES

BA (Pol Sc), BA Hons (Eng), MA (Eng), TEFL

Villa Louanne 65
Baillie Park
2526

Tel 082 821 3083
cmeterblanche@hotmail.com

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I, Christina Maria Etrechia Terblanche, id nr 771105 0031 082, hereby declare that I have edited the masters degree dissertation of MJ Cussons without viewing the final product. I declare that all payment for my services have been settled.

Regards,
CME Terblanche