

**A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending
parents to report child sexual abuse**

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**A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending
parents to report child sexual abuse**

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- All the wonderful children- still leaving footprints

“My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”

2 Cor. 12:9

ABSTRACT

A PROTOCOL FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF NON-OFFENDING PARENTS TO REPORT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse; Disclosure; Empowerment; Non-offending Parents; Protocol; Reporting

The statistics of child sexual abuse is alarmingly high. Even though this is the case, further statistics prove that a great percentage of parents do not ever report the sexual abuse of their child. This study focuses on describing and exploring non-offending parents' experiences regarding suspicions of or disclosure of their child's sexual abuse to ultimately formulate a proposed protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report the abuse. This proposed protocol can be used by health professionals to empower parents to report and will contribute to the intervention strategies in forensic investigations.

As research methodology, the qualitative approach was utilized to investigate non-offending parents' experiences regarding suspicions of or disclosure of their child's sexual abuse and to explore and describe a protocol of guidelines to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse. The case study method was used as a research strategy to accomplish these aims. Ten interviews and a focus group were conducted during which an interview schedule focussing on the parents' reactions, perceived support, and experiences of reporting was employed.

The schedule was presented based on the following themes:

- Theme 1:** Finding out about the sexual abuse
- Theme 2:** Reactions of the parents
- Theme 3:** Support
- Theme 4:** Reporting the child's sexual abuse
- Theme 5:** Parents' experiences of the reporting process
- Theme 6:** Suggestions to make the reporting process easier

Subthemes, as elicited by these themes, were explored and described in order to contribute towards the formulation of an appropriate protocol that would empower parents to report child sexual abuse. It became clear that parents experience a vast array of emotions upon finding out or having suspicions of their child's sexual abuse. The parents who participated in this study indicated the need for support on different levels- it was proposed that more support might subsequently increase reporting rates. The parents involved in this study were in agreement that the reporting process is extremely taxing and, based on this, various aspects that could help make the reporting of child sexual abuse easier for parents were explored. Further recommendations to empower parents to report child sexual abuse were also made. The data from the interviews was analyzed and a protocol to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse was formulated.

OPSOMMING

'n PROTOKOL OM NIE-OORTREDENDE OUERS TE BEMAGTIG OM SEKSUELE MISBRUIK VAN HULLE KIND AAN TE MELD

Sleutelsterme: Seksuele misbruik van kinders; Onthulling; Bemagtig; Nie-oortredende ouers; Protokol; Raporteer

Die statistieke van seksuele misbruik van kinders is skokkend hoog. Verdere statistieke toon egter ook dat 'n groot persentasie ouers nooit die seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aanmeld nie. Hierdie studie het ten doel om nie-oortredende ouers se ervaringe op die vermoede of onthulling van hul kind se seksuele misbruik te beskryf en te ondersoek om 'n protokol te formuleer wat nie-oortredende ouers sal bemagtig om hierdie vorm van misbruik aan te meld. Die voorgestelde protokol kan deur die professie van gesondheidswerkers benut word om ouers te bemagtig om aan te meld en dit sal 'n bydrae lewer tot intervensiestrategieë in forensiese ondersoeke.

Die kwalitatiewe benadering is as navorsingsmetodologie gebruik om nie-oortredende ouers se ervaringe van vermoede of onthulling van hul kind se seksuele misbruik te ondersoek en om 'n protokol van riglyne te ondersoek en te beskryf wat nie-oortredende ouers sal bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld. Die navorsingsstrategie wat benut is om hierdie doelwitte te bereik was gevallestudies. Tien onderhoude en 'n fokusgroep is gehou, waartydens 'n onderhoudsskedule benut is wat gefokus het op ouers se reaksies, waargenome ondersteuning en hul ervaringe van aanmelding.

Hierdie skedule is geformuleer volgens die volgende temas:

- Tema 1:** Ontdekking van die seksuele misbruik
- Tema 2:** Reaksies van die ouers
- Tema 3:** Ondersteuning
- Tema 4:** Aanmelding van die kind se seksuele misbruik
- Tema 5:** Ouers se ervaringe van die aanmeldingsproses
- Tema 6:** Aanbevelings om die aanmeldingsproses makliker te maak

Nie-oortredende ouers se patrone van oortuiging, soos dit deur die bogenoemde temas ontlok is, is verder ontdek en beskryf om by te dra tot die formulering van 'n protokol wat ouers sal bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld. Dit is duidelik dat nie-oortredende ouers 'n verskeidenheid emosies ervaar wanneer hulle uitvind van of begin vermoed dat hulle kind seksueel misbruik is. Die ouers wat in hierdie studie deelgeneem het, het ouers se behoefte aan ondersteuning op verskeie vlakke aangedui- dit was veronderstel dat dié ondersteuning 'n invloed op aanmelding sal hê. Die betrokke ouers was dit eens dat aanmelding 'n moeilik proses is, en gebaseerd hierop is verskeie aspekte wat ouers kan help om aan te meld ontdek. Verdere aanbevelings om ouers te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld is ook voorgestel. Die data van hierdie onderhoude is geanaliseer en 'n protokol om nie-oortredende ouers te bemagtig om aan te meld is geformuleer.

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FOREWORD

This 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 the journal Child Abuse Research in South Africa (CARSA).

This article counts 50% of the total programme.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The requirements as set out by the Journal CARSA, Child Abuse Research in South Africa, was utilized as a framework from which this article was formulated. Child abuse research: a South African journal is a multidisciplinary journal which publishes contributions relating to child abuse, with particular reference to the African context. While the emphasis is on empirical research, the journal also accepts theoretical and methodological papers, review articles, short communications, reviews and letters containing fair comment. All articles that appear in CARSA are subject to the usual academic process of anonymous peer reviewing. Electronic submission of articles by e-mail should be done in MS Windows Word, WordPerfect or ASCII File Format. Main headings should be typed in upper case and begin in the left margin. No indentation is allowed. Dates should be written as follows: 9 January 2000. Bold, italics, and underscore should be formatted as such in the original document. The recommended style for reference purposes is the abbreviated Harvard technique.

The Editor

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DECLARATION AND PREFACE

With this declaration I, Nolene Rust, state that this article entitled “A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse” is my own work. I also declare that all the sources that were used or quoted by me by means of standard referral techniques are indicated and acknowledged.



Signature

5 October 2011

Date

A PROTOCOL FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF NON-OFFENDING PARENTS TO REPORT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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1 INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa is very high, and even though the reporting of child sexual abuse is legislated by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (32 of 2007), the rate at which sexual abuse is reported is alarmingly low. Based on experiences obtained in private practice, it is the researcher's opinion that many parents are concerned about the possibility of their child being abused, or know of child sexual abuse being perpetrated, but fail to report it. This article focuses on these parents' experiences of this devastating process in order to explore and describe an appropriate protocol that will empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2004-2005 the number of reported sexual offences against children in South Africa was 22 486 (Reyneke & Kruger, 2006:74). In 2009 alone Childline received 1 million calls relating to children suffering abuse in South Africa (Ncana, 2009:1). Despite these numbers, a report by Solidarity Helping Hand in June 2009 stated that more than 88% of cases in South Africa were not being reported (Mashaba, 2009:2).

Confirming this, Collings, Griffiths and Kumalo (2005:282) state that merely 12% of sexual abuse is ever reported to authorities.

Sexual abuse is devastating and has far-reaching effects, not only for the victim but for everyone involved in the victim's life. Heitritter and Vough (2006:25) indicate that the impact of sexual abuse can be seen as clusters of effects that are experienced over time. This does not only pertain to the victim, but also to individuals close to the victim and the community (Smit, 2007:111). Non-offending parents of children who have suffered sexual abuse are faced with severe and unique traumatic stressors (Mashiloane, 2005:9). Smit (2007:11) emphasizes the importance of parental guidance through this devastating process.

Non-offending parents are affected in numerous ways by having suspicions of sexual abuse or by their child's disclosure of abuse. Smit (2007:137) mentions that parents not only have to deal with the child's trauma, but also with their own emotions and emotional processes, all the while also having to deal with law-enforcement, judicial and welfare organizations. In a study undertaken by Grosz, Kempe and Kelly (2000:15) the parents' initial reactions were characterized by feeling immobilized and not knowing what to do in order to help their children. Typical reactions such as these can influence whether parents report sexual abuse or not.

Children rarely disclose sexual abuse and Heitritter and Vough (2006:36) and Spies (2006:49) explain that, in the minds of children, their silence serve the purpose of protecting their families. In a study done by Roesler (2000) it was found that 76% of victims will delay their disclosure for this very reason. Lovett (1995:735) and Regehr (in Mashiloane, 2005:36) found that children's uncertainty of their parents' response is a reason for concealing or for denying the abuse altogether. Another variable that may lead to recanting or denying the abuse is disbelief by the parents. This response can play a major role in the child's disclosure of sexual abuse (Melz in Mahomed, 2005:59), effecting the reporting of it on the parent's behalf.

The non-offending parent, when receiving support, is much better equipped to establish and maintain an environment in which healing can occur (Lindros, 2010:5). The results of the study done by Lindros (2010:6) suggest that support for the non-

offending parent can be instrumental in efforts to keep the family intact and support a healthy resolution of the crisis. This healthy resolution also implies reporting the abuse, as this action forms part of the legal process the victim and the family go through. Lovett (1995:736) emphasizes the importance of empowering the parent in this process. Support in the form of a protocol can empower the non-offending parent and give the parent crucial information that stresses the importance of reporting the abuse.

Collings *et al.* (2005:273) and Townsend and Dawes (2004:56) emphasize the limited South African research on sexual abuse. Research regarding the experiences of non-offending parents in the unique context of South Africa might help cast some light on necessary guidelines that will lead to the empowerment of parents to report child sexual abuse.

From the abovementioned, the following research questions emerge:

- What are non-offending parents' experiences regarding suspicions of or disclosure of their child's sexual abuse?
- What would be an appropriate protocol to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse?

3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to develop an appropriate protocol to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse. The objectives or steps required to accomplish the aim of the study were the following:

- To investigate non-offending parents' experiences regarding suspicions of child sexual abuse or disclosure of their child's sexual abuse
- To explore and describe a protocol of guidelines to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse

4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

A protocol of guidelines will empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

5 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

5.1 Analysis of literature

Fouché and Delport (2005:84) state that a literature study should contribute to the development of a framework that will lead to the interpretation of results in relation to theory. The literature that was reviewed to provide more insight into the research question included literature about child sexual abuse and the experiences of non-offending parents. Local and internationally accredited scientific works in the fields of Social Work, Psychology and Forensic Social Work were incorporated. Databases and journals that were consulted were EBSCO Host Web, Sabinet Online, Google Scholar, SA ePublications, Proquest, Science Direct, Child Abuse & Neglect, and the South African Journal of Psychology.

5.2 Empirical investigation

5.2.1 The Design

Social work research usually serves more than one purpose (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:123), and the purposes of this study were a combination of exploration and description. Rubin and Babbie (2005:123) explain that exploration involves the examining of a relatively new interest and that description implicates the researcher describing a situation. When conducting descriptive research the researcher observes and then describes what was observed (Babbie, 2007:89).

The qualitative approach was used in this study and Henning (2004:3) explains that through qualitative research “qualities, characteristics or properties of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation”. The collective case study method was employed as research strategy in formulating a protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse. Babbie (2007:G1) defines a case study as an in-depth examination of a single instance of some social phenomenon. This method assisted the researcher in describing experiences of the participants as it relates to the aim of the study. As Rubin and Babbie (2011:441) further explain, case studies should lead to the description of in-depth data (Rubin & Babbie, 2011:441).

5.2.2 Participants

For this study, participants were approached for the individual interviews and for the focus group. Ten non-offending parents with suspicions of their child being sexually abused, or whose children disclosed abuse to them, were included as participants in the individual interviews. These participants were South African parents who are based in the Pretoria and Johannesburg area and who had, during the past two years, received help at the Child Trauma Clinic, RAPHA Therapy and Training Institute, FACT (Forensic Assessment Consultation Training), and Solidarity Helping Hand regarding their concerns about possible sexual abuse of their child. The ages of these children ranged between five and sixteen years.

After the individual interviews a focus group was conducted, consisting of mental health professionals (three social workers, four forensic social workers, a play therapist, and a psychologist) who deal with families in the forensic process. The participants of this focus group individually represented the Ondersteuningsraad, RAPHA Therapy and Training Institute, FACT (Forensic Assessment Consultation Training), and two private practices based in Pretoria and Benoni. These participants are experts in the field of forensic work and on working with parents of sexually abused children as well as with the criminal and judicial system on a daily basis. Their inclusion contributed to the exploration and description of a protocol as stated as objective of this study.

The purposive non-probability sampling method was used for the selection of the participants for the interviews and focus group. The participants were chosen based on the features they possess that were of interest to the study and best fit the aim of the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:247). Inclusion in this study could not be statistically derived, but was determined by the researcher (Grinnell, 2001:216). According to Grinnell (2001:216) this method of sampling brings forth rich detail and this information was utilized to explain and describe a protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

5.2.3 Measuring Instruments

The measuring instrument that was utilized for this study was a semi-structured interview with non-offending parents. Rubin and Babbie (2005:178) and Grinnell (2001:287) explain how interviewing helps the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of people's experiences. In addition to this a focus group was also conducted with a team of professionals, as this best served the aim of the study and contributed towards triangulation (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:181). Greeff (2005:299) states that a focus group involves a collective activity shared by participants who have common characteristics. A similar interviewing schedule was used for the interviews and for the focus group: this schedule revolved around appropriate content to ultimately explore and describe guidelines in the form of a protocol that would empower parents to report child sexual abuse.

5.2.4 Procedures

During data collection the following procedures were followed:

- Possible participants were approached and invited to take part in the interviews and focus group
- The purpose of the study was fully explained to the participants who agreed to take part

- The researcher formulated an interview schedule to be utilized during the interviews and the focus group
- Written and informed consent was obtained from the participants
- Permission was also obtained from the participants for recording of the interviews
- Hereafter, the date for the interviews was set with participants, and the interviews were conducted and recorded
- Afterwards verbatim notes of the recordings were made
- The researcher then coded the themes and subthemes that re-emerged in the interviews before correlating these with the applicable literature
- The final research report was written

5.2.5 Ethical Aspects

On commencing, information regarding the aim, objectives and the purpose of the study was made available to the participants in writing (Rubin & Babbie, 2005:71), after which they provided written and informed consent (see addenda E and F). The participants were also notified of the recording of the interview, for which their permission was also obtained. The participants' identities remained anonymous, and necessary steps were taken to ensure confidentiality (Babbie, 2004:65). The researcher created a safe, supporting environment for the participants rendering them an opportunity to debrief afterwards (Babbie, 2004:68). The findings of the study were clearly presented in written form, portraying accuracy and objectivity and these findings were also presented in a way that was easy to understand and unambiguous (Strydom, 2005:65).

5.2.6 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews and the focus group was analyzed by utilizing Creswell's spiral of data analysis in combination with Marshall and Rossman's process of data-analysis (De Vos, 2005:334). The following steps were included:

- The recording of the data was planned

- The data was collected
- The data was managed and organised
- Memos were read and written
- Subthemes were generated
- The data was coded
- Understanding of the data was tested
- Alternative explanations were explored
- The data was formally presented in written form

6 TERMINOLOGY

The following terminology is applicable to this study.

6.1 Child Sexual Abuse

Lawrence and Janse van Rensburg (2006:128) give the following definition of sexual abuse: "Sexual abuse can broadly be defined as any action that violates, humiliates, or exploits, or attempts to violate, humiliate, or exploit the bodily integrity or dignity of the complainant which has an element of a sexual nature".

6.2 Disclosure

In the context of this study, the term disclosure will be used to refer to a child making what has happened to him/her regarding sexual abuse known. This correlates with the definition rendered by the Oxford dictionary which explains disclosure as "the action of making new or secret information known" (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/disclosure>).

6.3 Empowerment

In the Oxford dictionary the term empowerment refers to giving someone the authority or power to do something (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/empower>). It is further defined as making a person stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life.

6.4 Non-offending Parents

A parent is defined by the Oxford dictionary as a person's father or mother (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/parent>). Furthermore, as also explained by the Oxford dictionary, the term offender refers to a person committing an illegal act (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/offender>). For the purposes of this study the non-offending parent is defined as a mother or a father who is not the person committing an illegal act pertaining to child sexual abuse. In this study the term parent will be used meaning the non-offending parent who was included as a participant in this study.

6.5 Protocol

According to the Oxford dictionary (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/protocol>), protocol refers to an official system of rules or a code of procedure amongst a group. A further definition, as rendered by Munson (2011:45), explains a protocol to be a plan by which intervention processes are carried out. Munson (2011:45) explains that a protocol can be used for a number of purposes, including for the purpose of providing information.

6.6 Reporting

The Oxford dictionary defines reporting as "to make a formal complaint about something to the necessary authority" (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/report>). Throughout this article the term reporting will be used to refer to a lawful statement or complaint rendered to the applicable authorities.

7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Through the process of conducting this study, the following limitations were identified:

- Due to their experiences of the system, parents are very sceptical and weary about whom they can trust: this influenced the amount of parents agreeing to partake in the research.
- Because of the sensitivity of the issue, it was difficult to gain access to parents as potential participants. This closely relates to the difficulty of gaining access to the population of this study, because cases of child sexual abuse are so rarely reported.
- In some of the cases a period of time had elapsed between the parents' first suspicion of possible child abuse and the request for them to take part in this study. This time lapse could have had an influence on the recounting of their experiences in this process as investigated in this study.
- In some other cases not enough time had passed for the parents to become fully involved in the reporting process, or to be properly informed about the reporting process. This could also have influenced their reported experiences regarding their child's sexual abuse.

8 FINDINGS

In this section the profile of the participants will be discussed first. This will be followed by a discussion of the experiences of these parents regarding their suspicions of child sexual abuse or the disclosure of their child's sexual abuse.

8.1 Profile of the Participants

Ten parents who either had suspicions about their children being sexually abused, or who had definite knowledge of the abuse were included as participants in the interviews. Nine interviews were conducted with only mothers and one interview

was held with both parents. Two of these parents were English-speaking and the rest spoke Afrikaans. In eight of these cases the abuse was intrafamilial, and in the other two the indicated perpetrators were outside of the family system. The researcher also made use of a focus group comprising of nine mental health professionals; including three social workers, four forensic social workers, a play therapist, and a psychologist.

8.2 Experiences of Parents

In order to investigate parents' experiences of suspected or confirmed sexual abuse of their children, the following themes and subthemes were explored by the individual interviews and the focus group (see addenda A, B, C and D):

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1:	Finding out about the sexual abuse
Theme 2:	Reactions of the parents
Theme 3:	Support
• Subtheme 1:	People whom parents initially disclosed to
• Subtheme 2:	Forms of support
• Subtheme 3:	Support from a social worker
• Subtheme 4:	Support during the criminal court case
• Subtheme 5:	Required support for parents
Theme 4:	Reporting the child's sexual abuse
• Subtheme 1:	Decision of when to report
• Subtheme 2:	Factors influencing the decision to report
• Subtheme 3:	Role of the child's verbal disclosure on the decision to report
• Subtheme 4:	Person to whom the first report was made
• Subtheme 5:	What parents would have done differently in the reporting process
Theme 5:	Parents' experiences of the reporting process
• Subtheme 1:	Parents' perception of reporting
• Subtheme 2:	Experiences of and difficulties in the reporting process

Theme 6:	Suggestions to make the reporting process easier
1. Subtheme 1:	Information needed by parents
2. Subtheme 2:	Factors that make reporting easier

8.3 Discussion of the findings

8.3.1 Theme 1: Finding out about the sexual abuse

The parents were asked how they had found out about their child's sexual abuse or what had given rise to their suspicions. It was clear that most parents found out about the possible or confirmed abuse during a routine care-taking activity, such as bathing or toilet training. London, Bruck, Ceci and Shuman (2005:208) state that spontaneous, accidental disclosures occur more often with young children. It would therefore be more likely that younger children would disclose sexual abuse during activities that involve their bodies. Six parents stated that their children were too young to verbalize exposure to abuse, and their first suspicions arose during these activities. A parent said that her little boy complained about his penis hurting during bath time. Another mother stated that, in her opinion, children feel more vulnerable during care-taking activities involving their bodies and this might lead to disclosure

During this time the parents also reported changes in their child's behaviour: sexually acting out, having nightmares, and suffering from enuresis or encopresis. This correlates with the information obtained from the focus group; most parents found out about sexual abuse from their child's behaviour. Behavioural indicators, as highlighted by Berliner and Elliott (1996:56), are often reported by parents of sexually abused children. One mother said that her son just started crying and continued crying after visiting his father. He also isolated himself from the peer group and started telling lies.

Two of the parents who participated in this study indicated that the school teachers' concerns gave rise to their own suspicions. One mother explained that the teacher noticed aggressive behaviour and the other mother was informed of her child

displaying bullying behaviour and telling lies. One parent's child left her a note in the car in which she wrote about her stepfather molesting her. Research indicates that school-aged children are more likely to make verbal disclosures than pre-schoolers (London, *et al.*, 2005:207) and that the age of the child plays an important role in the manner of disclosure.

8.3.2 Theme 2: Reactions of the parents

Upon finding out about child sexual abuse, parents experience significant distress (Elliott & Carnes, 2001:314; Mashiloane, 2005:10). Hagens and Hagens (in Mahomed, 2005:60) compare parents' reactions upon finding out about sexual abuse to the process of grieving. Parents were asked to elaborate on their reactions and emotions after suspecting or finding out that their child was being sexually abused. Various emotions were discussed, with two parents elaborating on experiencing a whole range of emotions at once, as confirmed by Elliott and Carnes (2001:320) and Mahomed (2005:62). Two parents indicated a sense of hopelessness and six described intense anger. A mother said: "A sense of absolute hopelessness fills you when you are not only faced with your child's pain, emotions and physical challenges, your own hurt and pain but then also with a system that lets you down". One parent said that she was so angry it felt like "ek het net oorgekook" ("I boiled over"). Another mother said that "I wanted so much to restore her, her innocence, that I had worked so hard to protect and I was livid to think that someone took that away from her".

Three parents indicated disbelief, while another two said that they felt to blame for the abuse by not doing something to stop it: they somehow experienced the abuse as their fault. One mother said "Ek het gedink dat as ek dit gestop het toe dit met my as kind gebeur het, sou dit nie nou met my seuntjie gebeur het nie" ("I thought that if I had stopped it when it happened to me as a child, it wouldn't have happened to my little boy"). Being shocked is an emotion that six parents who participated in this study indicated, and three described feeling numb or not really feeling anything at all. A mother indicated feeling dumbstruck and another mother said her first reaction was going numb: "Ek het het niks gevoel nie" ("I didn't feel anything at all").

Levenson and Morin (2001:30) found shock to be the initial emotion most parents experienced at finding out about the sexual abuse of their children.

Two parents indicated feeling very worried after finding out about the abuse and four had the instinct to want to protect and comfort their child at all costs. As one mother said “My moedersinstink wou hom net beskerm” (“My maternal instinct just wanted to protect him”). Adding to this, two other parents stated that they developed physical distress as a result of finding out about their child's sexual abuse, and one mother even described being hysterical. Another mother said that she had to go to the doctor because of intense physical pain and a lack of energy. According to the focus group, parents who require professional assistance are usually in a state of panic.

Two other parents described feeling powerless. This emotion is recognised by Mahomed (2005:58), who explains that parents realize their limited power over the situation. Five parents said that they felt unsure and confused about what to do next, the process, and whether or not to believe their child. One participant said that she didn't know which way to go, where to begin, or what to do next. One mother said: “Die wind was uit my seile, ek wou seker maak dis waar” (“The wind was knocked out of me and I wanted to make sure that it was true”). Collings *et al.* (2005:271) state that sexual abuse is less likely to be reported in situations where the caregiver has doubts about the child's disclosure (Hershkowitz, Lanes & Lamb, 2007:113). When parents do not believe their child, they are less likely to intercede on their child's behalf and assist the child in reporting the incident.

Mahomed (2005:59) found that mothers who suffer from denial, fear, guilt, anxiety and depression, as elaborated upon in the section above, may be impaired in their ability to cope. In a study undertaken by Faust, Runyon and Kenny (2002:108), it was underlined that mothers of abused children are at risk of developing depression and other psychological problems. As Pellegrin and Handy (in Mashiloane, 2005:9) state, it will be difficult for parents impaired in their ability to cope to be more concerned with their child's well-being than with protecting themselves and the family system.

Hershkowitz *et al.* (2007:121) found that the child's expectation of the parents' reactions, as discussed above, is very realistic and associated with cooperativeness. When children expect negative reactions their willingness to disclose diminishes (Hershkowitz, *et al.*, 2007:111). Therefore, these reactions ultimately influence whether the sexual abuse is reported, as it influences the child's willingness to disclose (Mahomed, 2005:59).

8.3.3 Theme 3: Support

In this theme the parents and the focus group were asked to elaborate on perceived emotional, practical and legal support upon finding out about or suspecting child sexual abuse. Subthemes were consequently formulated.

8.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: People whom parents initially disclosed to

Five parents talked to social workers about the suspected or confirmed sexual abuse of their children. One mother talked to a pastor at her church, and three other parents to psychologists. Two parents indicated talking to a friend (of which one was a friend at church), one parent spoke to a medical doctor, and another shared her suspicions with a close colleague at work. Robertson (2005:77) identifies seeking help as one of the functional family coping strategies that mobilise parents. Reaching out for help as these respondents did has a very positive influence not only on the parent but also on the family system. Parents' first step of talking to someone is a significant step towards maintaining power and supporting themselves (Robertson, 2005:76,102).

8.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Forms of support

Robertson (2005:103) found that extended families, friends, the church community and counselling were significant forms of support for parents. Two parents in this study felt that their biggest emotional and practical support came from their religious

community; one parent experienced emotional support from a social worker; and three other respondents perceived no support at all. In this study, five parents indicated that their main source of support came from their close relationships, such as a wife, husband, family, and or grandparents. This was confirmed in the focus group discussion. Two parents turned to friends for support, as these were relationships in which they felt safe to talk about their knowledge or suspicion. A mother said “The support from our friends helped us immensely and if they didn't give us direction, we would've ended up totally overwhelmed”.

The abovementioned relationships are very important as parents often feel isolated (Mahomed, 2005:57) as one father explained: “Dit voel of ander nie sal verstaan nie” (“It feels as if others won't understand”). Another mother illustrated this further by saying: “It's difficult to talk to anyone about it, as other people won't know how to deal with it”. Yet another mother summed it up as follows: “Mense kan nie besef wat ek beleef het as hulle nie ook self deur so iets is nie” (“Others can't understand what I experienced unless they have been through a similar situation themselves”). Thus the relationships where parents feel safe and understood can be a valuable form of support.

The type of support received by the parents involved in this study varied from having someone to talk to, to having someone go with them to report the abuse, to getting support in terms of the legalities of the process. The latter was only experienced by two parents, and the rest were in agreement that legal support for parents is lacking. A father said that “Daar is geen {wettige} inligting vir enige ouer wat op 'n plek aanmeld nie” (“There is no {legal} information for any parent reporting anywhere”). One mother said: “Daar is nêrens inligting oor die kriminele proses nie, waar kry 'n mens dit?” (“There is no information regarding the criminal process, where does one find it?”). Only one mother received assistance from the family advocate and another parent from the commissioner of the children's court.

8.3.3.3 Subtheme 3: Support from a social worker

The seven parents who indicated that a social worker was involved, mentioned that it was solely in the capacity of a forensic investigator; rendering support in terms of the forensic process. These mentioned social workers have to be objective and can't offer the necessary emotional support for the parents. As one mother stated: "The forensic worker couldn't show any sympathy, she couldn't support me", and another said: "I don't think that forensic social workers are positioned in the process to be able to provide assistance".

The focus group deemed the abovementioned dilemma a very difficult aspect of the process, as it is impossible for these social workers to support the parents and at the same time remain objective in terms of the investigation. According to Faller (2007:4) a forensic social worker's involvement pertains to the case itself in as far as determining the likelihood of sexual abuse, thereby rendering a service to the court in terms of legal proceedings. This involvement is not in the capacity of offering any emotional support to the parents, as it is not included in the forensic social worker's mandate.

8.3.3.4 Subtheme 4: Support during the criminal court case

Only one parent indicated receiving support from family, colleagues and the involved social worker where the case went to court. A mother stated that there was, in her opinion, very little communication between the court and parents. Another mother mentioned: "The case was viewed by the state prosecutor with questionable feedback and absolutely no support or urgency". More than one parent expressed the need to be informed about the process and about what will happen next. A father said: "My behoefte is 'n stelsel wat beskikbaar is wat hierdie inligting alles aan mekaar verbind" ("My need is for a system that is accessible and that links all the information together"). Support from the authorities will equip parents with knowledge that will help them and ensure the most successful intervention (Akal, 2005:6). Also, as one mother stated, support from the professionals involved in the

investigation would have been valuable to her, especially in view of the court process.

8.3.3.5 Subtheme 5: Required support for parents

The respondents in this study were aware that parents have the need to be strong for the sake of their child, but they themselves also require support. One mother remarked: “Ek dink 'n mens het die behoefte aan terapie, maar jy fokus dan net op jou kind. Ek sou ook met iemand wou praat” (“I think one does need therapy for oneself, but your focus is on your child only. I would also have liked to talk to someone”). Obtaining help for oneself is a coping factor that parents utilize in order to protect their family, as explained by Robertson (2005:78).

Five parents mentioned the need for some form of emotional and spiritual support from someone who understands, or someone who has been through something similar. “Ek dink dis belangrik dat ouers met ander ouers kan praat wat reeds deur hierdie proses is, en dat daar ook meer geestelike ondersteuning is” (“I think it is important that parents talk to other parents who have been through this process, and that there is also more spiritual support”), one mother explained. Another mother said that parents receiving support will be better able to support their child. This, in effect, will have an influence on the child's disclosure.

Five parents expressed the need for support and information regarding the legal and forensic processes and where or whom to go to for help. A parent explained that this would prepare parents for their role and what to expect in terms of the process. In addition to this, three of the parents explained the need for a knowledgeable, informed, and trained professional who is equipped to deal with these incidences and to render support. As one mother mentioned: “I feel that an area should have a network of educated and trained professionals that communicate their service to the community in order to give parents informed support from an early stage”.

When parents find out that their child is being sexually abused, they go through a crisis; support for a parent is of paramount importance (Mahomed, 2005:60). A

mother said that if guidance and support had been available to her, it would have been a great comfort and relief. The sad reality, as was highlighted by the focus group in this study, is that there are no real, formal support systems in South Africa for parents being confronted with the sexual abuse of their children.

8.3.4 Theme 4: Reporting the child's sexual abuse

In terms of the reporting of sexual abuse, the next subthemes were explored with the parents and with the focus group.

8.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Decision of when to report

When asked if they had reported their suspicions or knowledge of the sexual abuse of their child, seven parents answered that they had reported it to the person designated by law. These reports of their knowledge or suspicions of sexual abuse were filed within a day to two weeks. For three of these parents, the pursuit of their child's safety was indicated as the primary motivator for an immediate report: "I firstly wanted to protect my child and take a stand for her". Another parent reported only after finding out that she was legally required to do so, while three other parents decided to report in order to protect possible future victims. A mother said that she had felt guilty at the thought of the perpetrator still being at large and having opportunities to do the exact same thing to other children, which moved her to report.

Another mother indicated only reporting "eventually" and two other parents decided not to report at all; one of whom said that they had not wanted the family member (alleged perpetrator) to be sent to jail. As stated by Akal (2005:16), non-disclosure, when leading to non-reporting, renders the relevant authorities less effective in having to deal with the issue of sexual abuse in a wider context. Intervening and reporting on behalf of the parents then becomes impossible. The sequelae of this would be a lack of access to the police and mental health services, as well as the children suffering prolonged exposure to the abuse.

8.3.4.2 Subtheme 2: Factors influencing the decision to report

One parent explained that she had felt ethically bound to report the abuse as she felt it was her moral duty- offenders should be prosecuted: “Morally, religiously, I believe sexual offenders should be prosecuted and I did not even consider not reporting”. Legal obligation moved two other parents to report; as they received advice that they were legally bound to report the abuse. One of the parents reported the abuse upon encouragement from a good friend. Three other parents reported because they wanted to keep other children safe in the future: “Geen kind of vrou verdien om so misbruik te word nie, en ons kan nie toelaat dat mense bloot hiermee wegkom nie” (“No child or woman deserves to be abused in such a way, and we cannot let perpetrators get away with this”). Two other parents indicated reporting to get help for the alleged offender.

A factor influencing one parent's initial decision not to report was the fact that she was going through severe life stress (a divorce) at the time. In this case the reporting was postponed, and she indicated that she finally reported much later. Levenson and Morin (2001:30) state that this reaction is common, as the parent might have other urgent matters to tend to in the heat of the sexual abuse allegations. For these parents, the only way to hold it all together is to make use of denial; thus the abuse is not reported. One parent was motivated by the social worker's ultimatum: if she, the mother, did not report the abuse within three days, the social worker would do so. Another factor that influenced four parents to report was their child's safety, as they believed that reporting the crime would influence the safety of their child.

For one parent it was important to give her daughter the choice of reporting; if her daughter was not ready to render a statement, the mother would not force her. She explained that her daughter had been through enough and that she didn't want to force her child into a process that could retraumatize her. She further stated that she would only put her daughter through the process if she could be assured of her daughter's fair and appropriate treatment during the process. This mother's own experience had been quite the opposite.

The core value of justice having to be served was another factor that influenced one parents' decision to report: "I wanted the guilty parties to be brought to book". Parents' perception of justice being served is a strong motivator of their behaviour. Fouché (2007:57) adds to this by concluding that conviction rates, as reflected in the justice system, also play an important role in parents' decision to report.

Another parent who decided not to report did so because he wanted to avoid subjecting his child to the court process, and also because he wanted to protect his family system, of which the alleged offender was a part. Finkelhor, Wolak and Berliner (in Akal, 2005:18) found that when family members are involved, the victims are less likely to report. The focus group mentioned a history of childhood abuse and the relationship of the parent with the offender as two additional factors affecting parents' decision to report.

8.3.4.3 Subtheme 3: Role of the child's verbal disclosure on the decision to report

Upon exploring the role of the child's disclosure in the reporting process, it became clear that a lot of meaning is attributed to the child putting the experience of sexual abuse into words. Seven parents stated that their child's disclosure played a big role in their decision to report. The role it played was described as "pivotal" and/or "biggest". One parent even indicated feeling relieved when her daughter put her experience into words. However, she added that she also felt guilty for not acting on her child's behaviour sooner, irrespective of her child's verbal disclosure.

The importance of the verbal disclosure was confirmed by the focus group, who were in agreement that the verbal disclosure seems to carry the most weight in the forensic and court processes. It is possible that the child's disclosure contributed to the parents' perception of the seriousness of the matter. Once this realisation set in, it influenced their reporting of the crime and seeking help (Akal, 2005:18), as a mother reiterated: "I feel terribly guilty that I only acted when she verbalized her experiences and after her disclosure was confirmed by a professional person. I should have acted sooner". This aspect in itself can have a great influence on the outcome of sexual abuse cases, according to Mahomed (2005:56).

8.3.4.4 Subtheme 4: Person to whom the first report was made

One parent reported the abuse at the social worker's office, while three others went directly to the police. Two parents reported their suspicions at the school. Another parent reported it to the family advocate, and one mother reported her child's sexual abuse allegations to the family violence, child protection and sexual offences unit (FCS) of the police. A mother initially reported the abuse to a pastor at her church, after which she went to the police station; another parent reported her immediate concerns to a psychologist, and another to a counsellor. Another parent only mentioned her concerns about possible sexual abuse to a close friend, but never reported her suspicions to any professional person.

8.3.4.5 Subtheme 5: What parents would have done differently in the reporting process

A mother said she would have, in retrospect, documented everything in the process of reporting, as every bit of detail is important. Three parents indicated that there is nothing they would have done differently about their reporting. One of these parents mentioned that she would not have done anything differently, but she would have wanted the process to be different in terms of better expert service and more sympathetic assistance. Another mother stated that, in retrospect, she would not have waited so long for the forensic investigator's opinion and let it delay the process to the extent that it had.

Another parent said that she would not have reported the sexual abuse if she had known beforehand that it wouldn't amount to anything, as it had turned her life "upside down". She added that "Ek weet nie op hierdie stadium of dit die moeite werd was om aan te meld nie" ("At this stage I don't know whether it was worthwhile reporting it"). One of the mothers felt that she should have insisted on a female officer to take her statement in her language of choice, and in a secluded area. One parent also stressed the importance of acquiring legal representation in the beginning of the process.

8.3.5 Theme 5: Parents' experiences of the reporting process

The parents' experiences of the reporting process were explored as the next theme in the interview schedule. This theme was also further explored by means of subthemes.

8.3.5.1 Subtheme 1: Parents' perception of reporting

In terms of the parents' perception of what the reporting of child sexual abuse entail, three said they knew beforehand what it would encompass going to the police and rendering their statement. The focus group mentioned that, usually, parents know very little about this process. Even though she knew what the reporting process consisted of, one mother mentioned that “nothing could have prepared me for the effect it had on me; it was very traumatic”. Two other parents said that they had no idea what the reporting would include and that they felt “completely at the mercy of the professionals” who guided them through the process.

Another parent said she was shocked to find out that the reporting also implied that her four-year-old would have to verbalise what she had been through to the officer taking the four-year-old's statement. One parent had the expectation that, after her statement was given, immediate action would be taken – which was not the case. This led to her feeling that the system had failed her and her family. Robertson (2005:89) highlights the experience of being let down by the system as another challenge parents have to face when reporting child sexual abuse. “I was frustrated and it felt like there are no competent officials, and there was a lack of action on their behalf”, a mother explained.

8.3.5.2 Subtheme 2: Experiences of and difficulties in the reporting process

The following feelings were mentioned when the parents and the focus group were asked to elaborate on parents' experiences of the reporting:

- helpless
- shocked and traumatized
- exposed
- disillusioned
- they felt that the police were unsympathetic and insensitive
- they felt that the police treated them in an unfriendly and unhelpful manner
- they felt that they had received no proper guidance by the involved professionals

It is clear that the parents in this study experienced the process of reporting very negatively. More than one parent voiced a need for feedback, which was never received. A father said “Die polisie het gesê dat hulle sal terugkom na ons toe, maar ons het niks terugvoer gekry nie” (“The police said they would get back to us, but we received no feedback”). In the study done by Robertson (2005:101) it was found that parents feel more secure when they perceive that justice has been served. These negative experiences would have been different for most parents if they had perceived that justice had been served. This, however, was not the case for any of them.

Two parents indicated that they had felt very frustrated – especially towards the police and the investigating process. As one father said: “Ons het die raad gekry om net stil te bly en nie daaroor te praat nie, wat vir ons baie frustrerend was” (“We were advised to keep quiet and not talk about it, which was very frustrating”). This father wanted to contribute in some way, but was told that there was nothing he could do. This just increased his level of frustration. He described feeling as though his “hands were cut off”; not being able to do anything. Another mother said “Ek het magteloos gevoel, want ek kan eintlik niks doen nie omdat ek nie die kennis het nie” (“I felt powerless because I can't do anything, since I don't have the knowledge”). His experience of the system made another father and his family feel exposed. The focus group was in agreement that, in their professional experience, the police could be very insensitive towards parents. Levenson and Morin (2001:43) found that parents often experience the authorities as being insensitive towards them. This will definitely have an impact on parents' subsequent actions in this already difficult

process. One of the parents who participated in this study said that it traumatized her to report, as she was not treated well and found it very difficult to even understand the officer taking her statement. In this case the language barrier was a significant obstacle. The abovementioned and other inadequacies in the criminal justice system just add to the challenges that parents have to face (Robertson, 2005:88), and these deficiencies might have an influence on reporting.

Another parent described the reporting process as “useless” and the personnel as “incompetent”, which added to her confusion. For her, the difficult part was not knowing anything about the process or her role in it, and being ignorant of what would happen next. The focus group mentioned that parents don't have guidelines in terms of the details of rendering their statement, and what the requirements of the process are. Another mother said that she considered the police assistance to be questionable, unprofessional and of little help to her and her child. Yet another parent described the assistance as a very frustrating “nightmare”. The focus group agreed with the heightened levels of frustration which is worsened by a lack of feedback from the police.

One parent had a positive experience with a police officer who treated her with respect and who was helpful. She attributed this to him being the only person in the police station who had any knowledge of reporting sexual abuse. Johnson and La Fontaine (in Fouché, 2007:56) reason that sexual abuse is not reported readily due to limited resources, as is often the case in South Africa. In the South African context, linking parents to appropriate resources becomes a challenge as these resources are few and far between. More than one parent voiced the need for linked professional services that could support parents on various levels at the same time.

Upon further exploration of the difficulties experienced by parents, one parent highlighted the responsibility the reporting process placed on her; she not only had to report, but she also had to be there for her child while being confronted with and dealing with her own emotions. Four other parents also mentioned having difficulty dealing with their emotions, since they were being treated as the guilty party without any empathy or understanding. A father said: “Jy voel soos die oortreder, asof jy iets verkeerd gedoen het” (“You feel like the perpetrator, as if you did something wrong”).

“Hierdie was n baie onsimpatieke pad; hulle behandel jou asof jy die oortreder is” (“This was a very unsympathetic road; they treat you as if you are the perpetrator”), another mother added.

One parent stated that, for her, the most difficult part of the process was dealing with the unknown. According to the respondents in the focus group, parents who undergo the forensic process first feel better equipped with knowledge and have a better sense of the direction of the whole process. In addition to this, research indicates a strong relationship between previous informal reports made by the child and disclosures in a formal setting, such as a forensic interview (Hershkowitz, *et al.*, 2007:113). This highlights the importance of referring parents for forensic investigations in order to increase the chances for disclosure.

8.3.6 Theme 6: Suggestions to make the reporting process easier

Information that parents might need in the process and factors that will make it easier for parents to report were further explored as a part of this last theme.

8.3.6.1 Subtheme 1: Information needed by parents

Mahomed (2005:63) states that parents will need specific information when their child has been sexually abused. This includes information about what happened as well as information regarding child abuse in general, which would assist parents in making decisions involving themselves and their child (Levenson & Morin, 2001:33). Four parents expressed the need for information about accessing emotional support for themselves, while two other parents believed that parents need information about the emotional repercussions for their child and what to look for in order to support their child through this process. One mother said parents need to know the specifics of how to help their child get through the ordeal.

Most of the parents and the focus group emphasised the need to know where parents can get support for their child, as every parent wants to know that their child

will be unharmed in the end. On this point a mother said: “Ek wil verseker wees dat my kind ‘okay’ gaan wees, ek kan nie toelaat dat die proses haar verder traumatiseer nie” (“I want to be assured that my child will be okay, I cannot allow the process to traumatize her further”).

Two parents said that parents need information regarding the forensic process and what that entails, while five parents deemed obtaining information about the criminal process as very important. These parents wanted to know who they could talk to, what to expect in terms of the process, and they required guidance on how not to contaminate information and acquire reports and documents. One mother summarized this by mentioning the importance of including detailed information (names, numbers, etc.) and not leaving out any information that could be important later in the process. Two of these parents felt very strongly that awareness of these guidelines would encourage parents to report. The additional involvement of a multidisciplinary team serving as a resource of information would give parents a sense of control. Stander (2009:37) mentions that, for example, a referral to a forensic medical doctor (or nurse) forming part of such a team will equip parents with more information and resolve uncertainties that they might have.

Four parents highlighted the importance of information on the necessity of reporting by law, as the point was raised that parents need to know that, according to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (32 of 2007), even a suspicion of abuse should and can be rightfully reported. The acquisition of extra legal information was another source of information that the participants in this study saw as helpful for parents. One father stated that information regarding parental rights would have helped him a lot.

Two other parents thought that parents should have access to information regarding the alleged offender and know the steps taken to ensure the safety of all parties involved. Three parents reiterated the necessity of being informed of the progress of the investigation. If the public saw that something was being done about the reports, more people might be inclined to report: “Ouers het nodig om te weet daar gaan iets van die ondersoek kom” (“Parents need to know that the investigation will amount to something”). One of the parents also emphasised the need for correspondence

between the police and the psychologist or forensic worker involved, stressing the importance of the involvement of a multidisciplinary team.

8.3.6.2 Subtheme 2: Factors that make reporting easier

The availability of information and knowing how to handle the process, was an issue five parents and the focus group considered a factor that might make reporting easier for parents. It was suggested by more than one parent that a printed handout or parent hotline could be media granting parents access to the specific information about where to go to and how the process works. This could ultimately influence the process, as it can encourage parents to make informed, decisive choices about reporting. Elliott and Carnes (2001:327) reiterate the importance of considerable education and support for parents in this regard. The parents involved in this study felt that the necessary support would make it easier for parents to report child sexual abuse. It was suggested that parents should be encouraged, for example, to take a knowledgeable person, friend or family member with them when reporting. Adding to this, the focus group felt strongly that, if support is lacking, it might be very sensible for the involved professional person to report on the parents' behalf.

Upon investigating this theme of the study, it became clear how faith in the system could influence the reporting of child sexual abuse in itself. The parents involved in this study believed that an accessible and comfortable environment would influence reporting rates. One parent said that if people were treated better when reporting, more parents might be willing to see the reporting process through. This mother also said that if she had been treated better at the police station, she would have had the faith that her child would also be treated well when making her statement; and this would have influenced her to encourage her child to give a statement. For two parents knowing your child is safe and will not be exposed to secondary trauma were important factors that might make it easier for parents to report. One parent reiterated this point, stating that the focus should be on children. If this were the case, more people would report, because they will know that their child is taken care of during this daunting process.

9 DISCUSSION

Throughout the study it was evident that parents go through a severe crisis upon finding out or having suspicions of their child's sexual abuse (Mahomed, 2005:60). Most of these parents found out during a routine care-taking activity that their child was being sexually abused and they indicated experiencing a variety of emotions, ranging from shock to anger and helplessness. Mahomed (2005:59) explains that parents' feelings and reactions have a significant influence on their child's disclosure, as was also indicated in this study. It is obvious that this will have an impact on parents reporting child sexual abuse.

In terms of support, it was indicated that support on various levels is extremely important for the family unit as well as for the parents' own coping, which will influence their subsequent actions (Robertson, 2005:78). The parents and the focus group who participated in this study emphasized the necessity of emotional, legal, forensic, and criminal support. Information of this nature would empower parents and it would give them a sense of control.

Most parents stated that they had no idea what the reporting of sexual abuse entailed and what to expect. This implied that they also had no idea of the process, what it would require of them and what their rights were. Almost all the parents experienced the reporting process very negatively and indicated the need for easily accessible resources with adequately trained personnel. Parents reporting the knowledge or suspicion of their child's sexual abuse need physical support of a loved one when doing so, and they need to be referred to professionals who can give them feedback on the process.

Almost all the parents and respondents in the focus group were in agreement that a lot of information is required during this process (Mahomed, 2005:63). Parents need forensic, legal, and abuse-related information as well as information on the progress of the criminal case in the form of continuous feedback from an appointed professional person who liaises with all of the involved parties.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Recommendations to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse: a protocol

From the findings made above it is clear that support and access to information for parents are lacking. The following protocol for parents and health professionals is proposed to empower non-offending parents to report their suspicions or knowledge of child sexual abuse.

10.1.1 Step 1

The health professional should listen to the parent's experience and definition of the problem. This will lead to insight into what gave rise to their suspicions. Limited, but important information regarding how and when children disclose should be shared, seeing as this will have an influence on parent's decisions about the process. Basic abuse-related information empowers the parents, as it gives them a sense of control and relief and should be shared at this point.

10.1.2 Step 2

Strydom and Stander (2011:387) reiterates the importance of early referral of parents for therapeutic intervention, as this serves the purpose of supporting them and rendering much needed help. In a study undertaken by Robertson (2005:101) the following additional points of advice were offered:

- Go for counselling
- Get help immediately: report the abuse and accept all the help you can get
- Take time for yourself
- Support each other as parents
- Talk about what happened

- Do things together as a family

Parents will need to be made aware of their reactions and that their experiences are normal. They should be referred to an appropriate counsellor or psychologist to help them deal with these experiences and their symptoms need to be monitored continuously by this professional. Relationships in which parents feel understood and safe might just be the most important supportive factor and should also be encouraged. This will not only ground and empower them but it will also increase the chances of their child disclosing (Elliott & Carnes, 2001:328). The child's disclosure will, in turn, mobilize parents to take action towards reporting (Robertson, 2005:117-118).

10.1.3 Step 3

Parents should be informed that the law requires that any form of disclosure or suspicion of child sexual abuse be reported. They should also be advised to document everything during the course of the process. Parents have the need to be guided in terms of where and to whom to report, and what their legal and parental rights are upon reporting.

When referring, the professional person involved should mobilize all and or any multidisciplinary resources available to the parent and refer them to the appropriate professionals. A suggestion to this regard is to inform the parents of their option to report at a FCS (Family violence, sexual offences and child protection) unit of the police.

10.1.4 Step 4

Parents need to be prepared in terms of the reporting process. They should be briefed on what to realistically expect and what will be expected of them and their child. More information should be supplied by means of a handout or in consultation with a specialized organization such as Childline, which can make this information

readily available. It would be extremely beneficial for parents to be encouraged to take someone along for support when reporting. In the case where the parent has no coping mechanisms or support, the involved professional should report on their behalf.

10.1.5 Step 5

Parents should be referred to a trained forensic social worker who should, in turn, continuously inform the other involved professionals of the situation of the parents. This person should equip them with as much information as possible (Stander, 2009:37), especially regarding the forensic and criminal processes. The social worker could, for example, make an additional referral incorporating more members of the multidisciplinary team. Each member of such a team would be able to supply information and clear up specific uncertainties parents might have (Stander, 2009:37). Finally, the forensic social worker should also appoint a professional person who can continuously correspond with the parents about the process.

10.2 Recommendations for future research

- For extended future research it is proposed that this protocol be implemented in a larger population and that the parents' experiences and subsequent actions be documented.
- It would be insightful to investigate in more detail the support that parents need during this process, to elaborate on the proposed protocol and to ultimately increase quality services and resources for parents.
- Research in terms of parents' perceived support and the influence this has on their reporting can offer valuable insight to encourage the implementation of much needed resources in South Africa.
- Based on the abovementioned, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary model could be developed in order to increase the accessibility of appropriate resources for South African parents.

11 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to develop an appropriate protocol to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse. The objectives formulated to accomplish this aim were to investigate parents' experiences regarding suspicions of child sexual abuse or the child's disclosure of sexual abuse, and to explore and describe possible guidelines to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

In this study it was clear that parents undergo severe stress upon finding out or suspecting that their child is being sexually abused. This study further indicated that parents who suspect or have knowledge of their child's sexual abuse not only have a need for support, but also for information about the process.

The aim of this study was achieved as reflected by the proposed protocol. The protocol can be used by parents but also as a guideline for health professionals, as it gives a clear indication of how to assist parents in this process. This will serve as a source of information and support for parents. Parents who feel supported will be able to do the same for their child, which will have an impact on the child's disclosure. More disclosures could lead to higher reporting rates.

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ADDENDUM A: SCHEDULE FOR THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE NON-OFFENDING PARENTS

A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

Theme 1 Finding out about the sexual abuse

- How did you come to know/ what gave rise to your suspicion that your child was being sexually abused?

Theme 2 Reactions of the non-offending parents

- How did you feel when you found out/ had the first suspicion that your child was being sexually abused?
- Tell me about your reactions when you first found out/ suspected that your child was being sexually abused.

Theme 3 Support

- Before deciding to report, whom did you talk to about your suspicion/ knowledge that your child was being sexually abuse (e.g. family/ neighbours)?
- What, if any, support did you receive during this process (family/ social workers/ police)?
- If you received support from a social worker, what type of support was that?
- If the case went to court, did you receive any support during the trial?
- What support do you think is necessary for parents in this process?

Theme 4 Reporting the child's sexual abuse

- Did you report the knowledge/ suspicion of your child's sexual abuse?

- What is the time lapse between your first suspicions/ finding out about the sexual abuse of your child and your reporting thereof?
- What are the reasons for the time lapse?
- To whom did you first report your suspicions/ knowledge of your child's sexual abuse (doctor/ police/ social worker/ school teacher)?
- What factors played a role in your deciding to report/ not to report?
- In retrospect, what would you have done differently in your reporting of the sexual abuse?
- What role did your child's disclosure play in your decision to report, or not to report?

Theme 5 Non-offending parents' experiences of the reporting process

- What did you think the reporting of child sexual abuse entailed?
- When reporting your knowledge/ suspicions of child sexual abuse, what was your experience?
- What, if anything, did you find difficult during this process?

Theme 6 Suggestions to make the reporting process easier

- What information do you think parents need during this process?
- What do you think will make it easier for parents to report?

ADDENDUM B: SKEDULE VIR ONDERHOUDE MET DIE NIE-OORTREDENDE OUERS

'n Protokol om nie-oortredende ouers te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld.

Tema 1 Die ontdekking van die seksuele misbruik

- Hoe het jy uitgevind/ wat het aanleiding gegee tot jou vermoede dat jou kind seksueel misbruik is?

Tema 2 Reaksies van die nie-oortredende ouer

- Hoe het jy gevoel toe jy uitgevind/ begin vermoed het dat jou kind seksueel misbruik is?
- Vertel my meer van jou reaksies toe jy uitgevind het/ begin vermoed het dat jou kind seksueel misbruik is.

Tema 3 Ondersteuning

- Voordat jy besluit het om aan te meld/ nie aan te meld nie, met wie het jy jou kennis of vermoede rakende die seksuele misbruik van jou kind gedeel?
- Watter ondersteuning, indien enige, het jy in hierdie tyd ontvang (familie, maatskaplike werkers, polisie)?
- Indien jy ondersteuning van 'n maatskaplike werker ontvang het, watter tipe ondersteuning was dit?
- In die geval van 'n kriminele hofsaak, het jy enige ondersteuning gedurende die hofsaak ontvang?
- Watter ondersteuning dink jy is nodig vir ouers gedurende hierdie proses?

Tema 4 Aanmelding van die kind se seksuele misbruik

- Het jy jou kennis/ vermoede dat jou kind seksueel misbruik is aangemeld?
- Wat was die tydsverloop vanaf jou vermoede/ kennis van die seksuele misbruik van jou kind tot die aanmelding daarvan?
- Wat is die redes vir die tydsverloop?
- Met wie het jy eerste jou kennis/ vermoede van die seksuele misbruik van jou kind gedeel (dokter, polisie, maatskaplike werker, skool)?
- Watter faktore het 'n rol gespeel in jou besluit om dit aan te meld/ nie aan te meld nie?
- In retrospek, wat sou jy anders gedoen het in die aanmeldingsproses?
- Watter rol het jou kind se onthulling gespeel in jou besluit om aan te meld of om nie aan te meld nie?

Tema 5 Nie-oortredende ouers se ervaringe van die aanmeldingsproses

- Wat het jy gedink behels die aanmelding van seksuele misbruik van kinders?
- Wat was jou ervaring toe jy jou kennis/ vermoede van die seksuele misbruik van jou kind gaan aanmeld het?
- Wat, indien enigiets, het jy moeilik gevind in terme van die aanmeldingsproses?

Tema 6 Aanbevelings om die aanmeldingsproses makliker te maak

- Watter inligting, dink jy, het ouers gedurende hierdie proses nodig?
- Wat dink jy sal dit vir ouers makliker maak om aan te meld?

ADDENDUM C: SCHEDULE FOR THE INTERVIEW WITH THE FOCUS GROUP

A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

Theme 1 Finding out about the sexual abuse

- How do parents usually find out about/ or what gives rise to parents' suspicions of their child's sexual abuse?

Theme 2 Reactions of the non-offending parents

- What feelings do parents experience upon finding out/ having suspicions that their child was being sexually abused?
- What are common reactions of parents when finding out/ having suspicions that their child was being sexually abused?

Theme 3 Support

- Before deciding to report, who do parents talk to about their suspicions/ knowledge of their child's sexual abuse (e.g. family/ neighbours)?
- What, if any, support do parents receive during this process (family/ social workers/ police)?
- If parents receive support from a social worker, what type of support is it?
- Should a criminal case go to court, are there any support for parents?
- What support do you think is necessary for parents in this process?

Theme 4 Reporting the child's sexual abuse

- What is the time lapse between parents' suspicions/ knowledge of child sexual abuse and the reporting thereof?

- What are the reasons for the time lapse?
- To whom do parents first report the allegations/ knowledge of child sexual abuse (doctor/ police/ social worker/ school teacher)?
- What factors play a role in parents' decision to report/ or not to report?
- In retrospect, what do parents wish they have done differently in the reporting process?
- What role does a child's disclosure play in parents' decision to report or not to report?

Theme 5 Non-offending parents' experiences of the reporting process

- What do parents think the reporting of child sexual abuse entails?
- When reporting knowledge/ suspicions of child sexual abuse, what are parents' experiences?
- What, if anything, is difficult for parents during this process?

Theme 6 Suggestions to make the reporting process easier

- What information do you think parents need during this process?
- What do you think will make it easier for parents to report?

ADDENDUM D: SKEDULE VIR DIE ONDERHOUD MET DIE FOKUSGROEP

'n Protokol om nie-oortredende ouers te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van kinders aan te meld.

Tema 1 Die ontdekking van die seksuele misbruik

- Hoe vind ouers uit/ wat gee aanleiding tot ouers se vermoede dat hulle kind seksueel misbruik is?

Tema 2 Reaksies van die nie-oortredende ouer

- Watter emosies ervaar ouers as hulle uitvind/ begin vermoed dat hulle kind seksueel misbruik is?
- Wat is algemene reaksies wanneer ouers uitvind/ vermoed dat hulle kind seksueel misbruik is?

Tema 3 Ondersteuning

- Voordat hulle besluit om die misbruik aan te meld, met wie deel ouers eerste hulle kennis/ vermoede rakende hulle kind se seksuele misbruik (familie, bure)?
- Watter ondersteuning, indien enige, ontvang ouers gedurende die aanmelding (familie, maatskaplike werkers, polisie)?
- Indien ouers ondersteuning van 'n maatskaplike werker ontvang het, watter tipe ondersteuning was dit?
- Sou 'n kriminele hofsaak in die hof opeindig, is daar enige ondersteuning vir ouers?
- Watter ondersteuning dink jy is nodig vir ouers in hierdie proses?

Tema 4 Aanmelding van die kind se seksuele misbruik

- Wat is die tydsverloop vanaf ouers se vermoede/ kennis van seksuele misbruik tot die aanmelding daarvan?
- Wat is die redes vir die tydsverloop?
- By wie meld ouers gewoonlik eerste hul vermoede/ kennis van seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan (dokter, polisie, maatskaplike werker, skool)?
- Watter faktore speel 'n rol in ouers se besluit om aan te meld/ nie aan te meld nie?
- In retrospek, wat sou meeste ouers anders wou doen in die aanmeldingsproses?
- Watter rol speel 'n kind se onthulling in ouers se besluit om aan te meld al dan nie?

Tema 5 Nie-oortredende ouers se ervaringe van die aanmeldingsproses

- Wat dink ouers behels die aanmelding van seksuele misbruik van kinders?
- Wat is ouers se ervaringe wanneer hulle hul kennis/ vermoede van seksuele misbruik van hulle kind gaan aanmeld?
- Wat, indien enigiets, is vir ouers moeilik gedurende die aanmeldingsproses?

Tema 6 Aanbevelings om die aanmeldingsproses makliker te maak

- Watter inligting, dink jy, het ouers gedurende hierdie proses nodig?
- Wat dink jy sal dit vir ouers makliker maak om aan te meld?

ADDENDUM E: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Title: A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

Aim: To develop an appropriate protocol to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

Dear Parent/ guardian/ health professional

I am currently in the process of completing my Master's degree in Social Work: Forensic Practice at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). As a part of my studies I am undertaking research in the field of Forensic Social Work under the supervision of Dr. Corinne Strydom and Ms. Antoinette Vermeulen. The objective of the proposed research will be to explore and describe a protocol that offers guidelines to empower non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse.

You have been identified as a possible participant in this study. Please note that this is voluntary and the process will be confidential. Participation involves taking part in one semi-structured interview that will be recorded to ensure thoroughness. After the data of the recording is analyzed it will be destroyed. Participation will be anonymous and every effort to protect the privacy of the participants will be undertaken. Afterwards each participant will be afforded the opportunity (as deemed necessary) to debrief regarding the experience of taking part in the research. The findings of the research will be published in written form, accurately and objectively and with due consideration of confidentiality and anonymity.

I _____ give my consent to be interviewed as a participant in the abovementioned research. I understand the aim and objective of the research and the ethical aspects that will be followed in the process. I also understand what will be expected of me and I take note that participation is voluntary, implying that I can withdraw from the research at any time.

Signed by _____ at _____

on the _____ th day of _____

Thank you in advance for considering participating

Nolene Rust

MDiac (Playtherapy)

BPsych (Counselling)

e-mail: nolene.rust@gmail.com

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ADDENDUM F: VERSOEK OM DEELNAME

Titel: 'n Protokol om nie-oortredende ouers te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld.

Doelstelling: Om 'n gepasde protokol te ontwikkel om nie-oortredende ouers te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld.

Geagte ouer/ voog/ geestesgesondheidswerker

Ek is tans 'n meestersgraadstudent in Maatskaplike Werk: Forensiese Praktyk verbonde aan die Noordwes-Universiteit (Potchefstroomkampus). As gedeeltelike vereiste moet ek verdere navorsing onderneem onder supervisie van dr. Corinne Strydom en mev. Antoinette Vermeulen. Die doelwit van die voorgenome studie is om 'n protokol te ontdek en te beskryf wat riglyne vir nie-oortredende ouers daar sal stel om hulle te bemagtig om seksuele misbruik van hulle kind aan te meld.

Jy is geïdentifiseer as 'n moontlike kandidaat vir deelname. Neem egter kennis dat dit 'n vrywillige proses is wat vertroulik sal wees. Deelname behels 'n eenmalige, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud wat opgeneem sal word om deeglikheid te verseker. Nadat die data van die opname geanaliseer is, sal die opname vernietig word. Deelname sal anoniem wees en elke poging sal aangewend word om die privaatheid van die deelnemers te verseker. Na hierdie onderhoud sal elke deelnemer die geleentheid gegun word (indien nodig) om sy/ haar ervaringe van die proses te ontloot. Die bevindinge van die studie sal akuraat en objektief gepubliseer word in geskrewe formaat met inagneming van vertroulikheid en anonimiteit.

Ek _____ onderneem om deel te neem aan die bogenoemde studie. Ek verstaan die doelstelling en doelwit van die studie, en ek neem ook kennis van die etiese aspekte wat nagevolg gaan word, soos hierbo uiteengesit. Ek verstaan wat in die proses van my verwag gaan word en ek is bewus daarvan dat deelname vrywillig is, wat impliseer dat ek enige tyd sou kon onttrek.

Geteken deur _____ te _____

op die _____ e dag van _____

Byvoorbaat dankie dat jy deelname oorweeg

Nolene Rust

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ADDENDUM G: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

8 Oktober, 2011

Potchefstroom

Hiermee gee ek, Ina-Lize Venter, kennis dat ek hierdie artikel, getiteld A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse, op versoek van die student, me. Nolene Rust en met die goedkeuring van haar studieleier, dr. Corinne Strydom, taalkundig versorg het.

8 October 2011

Potchefstroom

I, Ina-Lize Venter, hereby declare that I proofread and edited this article, entitled A protocol for the empowerment of non-offending parents to report child sexual abuse, upon the request of the student, ms Nolene Rust, and with the approval of her promotor, dr Corinne Strydom.

Ina-Lize Venter

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