

**THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN MOTIVATING
PARENTS TO DISCLOSE THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF
THEIR CHILD**

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**The role of the social worker in motivating parents to disclose the sexual
abuse of their child**

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OPSOMMING

TITEL: Die rol van die maatskaplike werker in die motivering van ouers om seksuele misbruik van hulle kinders aan te meld.

Sleutelwoorde: kind, motivering, ouer, seksuele misbruik, maatskaplike werker.

Die seksuele misbruik van kinders is 'n groot probleem wat nog altyd met gesinne en die gemeenskap was, en ook altyd sal wees. Seksuele misbruik van kinders kom voor binne die gesin, en ouers verwag soms van die kind om dit nie bekend te maak nie of dit te ontken. Hierdie stand van sake word soms vererger deur die posisie van die skuldige in of teenoor die gesin. Ouers moet bewus gemaak word van die verskillende fases van die proses van seksuele misbruik. Daar word van ouers verwag om toegewyd te wees en om betroubare beskerming aan hulle kinders te bied. Seksuele misbruik van kinders is 'n sensitiewe saak wat die innerlike emosionele persoon van die slagoffer en die ander familieledede affekteer. Die kind en die ouer het 'n maatskaplike werker nodig wat die kennis en vaardighede het om die gesin te help. Die gesinstruktuur, die funksionering van die gesin en die verhoudinge is alles belangrik binne die konteks van seksuele misbruik.

Die navorsing is uitgevoer onder die maatskaplike werkers in Madibeng Munisipaliteit. Die doel was om die rol van maatskaplike werkers in die motivering van ouers om seksuele misbruik van hulle kinders bekend te maak, te ondersoek en te beskryf. 'n Empiriese studie deur middel van 'n kwalitatiewe benadering is gevolg om die rol van die maatskaplike werker te ondersoek. 'n Self-toegepaste skedule is gebruik om onderhoude met elke maatskaplike werker te hê.

Vanuit die data wat uit hierdie navorsing te voorskyn kom, word dit duidelik dat maatskaplike werkers forensiese opleiding nodig het om die relevante vaardighede en tegnieke te ontwikkel om gevalle van seksuele misbruik van kinders te hanteer. Die kennis uit die opleiding word nie net gebruik om die kind te bevoordeel nie, maar die ouers vind ook baat by die dienste van die maatskaplike werker.

Die navorsing toon dat meeste maatskaplike werkers binne beide regerings- en nie-regeringsorganisasies in die Madibeng area nie genoeg formele onderrig ontvang het oor hoe om met gevalle van seksuele misbruik van kinders te werk nie. Maatskaplike werkers weet nie hoe om ouers te motiveer om die seksuele misbruik van hulle kinders

bekend te maak nie. Riglyne is geformuleer oor hoe maatskaplike werkers ouers kan motiveer om seksuele misbruik van hulle kinders bekend te maak.

SUMMARY

TITLE: The role of the social worker in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child.

Key words: child, motivation, parent, sexual abuse, social worker.

Child sexual abuse is a serious problem that always has been and will be with families and communities. Child sexual abuse occurs within the family, and parents sometimes expect of the child not to tell, or tell the child to deny the abuse. This situation is sometimes exacerbated by the position of the perpetrator within or towards the family. Parents need to be familiarized with the different phases of the process of sexual abuse. Parents are expected to be committed and to provide reliable care and protection for the child. Child sexual abuse is a sensitive issue that harms the inner emotional person of the victim, and affects other family members. The child and the parents need a social worker who has the knowledge and skills to help the family. The family structure, its functioning and the relationships in the family are all important within the context child sexual abuse.

The research was conducted among the social workers in Madibeng Municipality. The aim was to explore and describe the role of social workers in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child. An empirical study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore the role of the social worker. A self-administered schedule was used to evaluate the role of the social worker by means of interviews with each social worker.

From the data collected during this research it becomes evident that social workers need forensic training so that they could learn the relevant skills and techniques to interview and handle child sexual abuse cases. The knowledge received during training will not only benefit the children, but also the parents.

This research found that most social workers employed in both government and non-government organizations in the Madibeng area have not received formal training on how to deal with sexually abused children and their parents, especially with regard to how to motivate parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child. Guidelines are offered for social workers on how they can motivate parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their children.

FOREWORD

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

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

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

The Journal publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions may be written in English and 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 or more than 10,000 words are normally not considered for publication. Two copies of the manuscripts 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 reference. 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 role of the social worker in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child

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(Me Motshego, is a social worker and Dr Roux and Prof Wessels are senior lecturers in the school of Psychosocial Behavioral Sciences, Social Work Division, Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University).

OPSOMMING

Die seksuele misbruik van kinders is 'n verskynsel wat in die hedendaagse samelewing en veral ook in gebiede in Suid-Afrika soos die Madibeng Munisipaliteit na vore kom. Ouers beleef die bekendmaking van die seksuele misbruik van hulle kind as traumaties. Baie ouers, veral die moeder, word dikwels met negatiewe gesinsverhoudings gekonfronteer sou hulle of sy die misbruik bekend maak (Hill, 2001:385; Strydom & Stander, 2011: 371). As gevolg van hierdie situasie, asook die feit dat ouers dikwels nie glo dat dit wat die kind, hulle vertel waar is nie, weier hulle om die misbruik openbaar te maak. Die ouers se reaksie op die bekendmaking van die seksuele misbruik het dikwels ook tot gevolg dat ook die kind weier om die misbruik openbaar te maak. Dit is dan in hierdie situasies waar die maatskaplike werker 'n noodsaaklike rol het om in die beste belang van die kind die ouers tot insig te lei om wel die seksuele misbruik openbaar te maak.

Hierdie artikel fokus dus op die rol van die maatskaplike werker in die motivering van ouers om seksuele misbruik van die kind openbaar te maak. Die studie is in die Madibeng area gedoen.

SUMMARY

The sexual abuse of children is a phenomenon in society that currently needs special attention in South Africa, especially in areas such as Madibeng Municipality. Parents experience trauma as a result of child sexual abuse. Parents, especially the mothers, are frequently confronted with negative family relationships should they tell and make the abuse known (Hill, 2001: 385: Strydom & Stander, 2011:371). As a results of this situation, as well as the fact that parents often do not believe that the child is telling the truth, the child ends up refusing to make the abuse public. The parent's reaction to the

announcement of the sexual abuse sometimes results in a situation where the child refuses to make the abuse public. This is where a social worker can fulfil a valuable role to protect the best interest of the child and to guide the family with insight so that they are able to make the sexual abuse public.

This article focuses on the role of the social worker in the motivation of parents to make the sexual abuse of their child public. The research was conducted in the Madibeng area.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The number of reported cases of incest and child sexual abuse is only the “tip of the iceberg” (Spies, 2006:12). Sexual abuse towards children is a very serious offence. The victim experiences it as humiliating, degrading and a brutal invasion of his or her privacy and dignity. It is therefore not surprising that the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (1989) specifically embraces the right of a child to protection against physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, child sexual abuse is not an uncommon occurrence. “Sexual abuse of children is a reality and it happens to children of every class, culture, race, religion and gender” (Spies, 2006:45). According to Bromberg and Johnson (2001:355), “child sexual abuse remains a social concern and when it comes to light, the people directly involved are staggered”.

Inspector Nyirongo (2010) indicates that the South African Police Service, Child Protection Unit statistics for Madibeng/Brits Municipality reveal that 132 cases of child sexual abuse were reported and attended to during the period January 2009 to December 2009. A total of 73 cases were withdrawn, while 59 cases were finalized. This figure does not reflect the number of unreported cases. The large number of cases that were withdrawn might be a result of the way in which the parents and the child approach the matter of sexual abuse.

De Voe and Faller (2002:6) indicate that many children find it difficult to talk about their experiences of being sexually abused. Parental reactions or anticipations are likely to affect the willingness to disclose abuse. “Sexual abuse may result in a traumatic event in which a child can often be engaged in self-destructive behaviors to regulate their emotional states” (Phyllis & Joshua, 2003:113). Karp and Butler (1996:11) indicate that “children who have been abused sexually, physically or emotionally, experience severe

damage to their self-esteem". Briere et al. (1992:750) note that "severe child maltreatment may interfere with the child's access to a sense of self."

According to Salter (1995:231) the child is sometimes viewed as having betrayed the family by telling strangers about their experience of sexual abuse. Burkhart and Rotatori (2000:112) indicate that the "children's most frequent reasons for not reporting a perpetrator revolved around negative consequences, fear of getting in trouble, worry about being denied privileges, concern about being laughed at or physically hurt, not being believed or fear of retaliation by the perpetrator." Glaser & Frosh (1988:59) support the above statement that children see disclosure as betrayal of the abuser, and this is then recognized as the first step towards his or her own incrimination. Children do not disclose, because they are threatened with the consequences of disclosure that involve harm to family members or to the self. Bolen and Lamb (2004:194) proposed that "non-supportive reactions to child sexual abuse disclosure are likely to constitute a normative reaction to disclosure in contexts where the confidant, experiences, tension, dissonance, positive and negative between the perpetrator and the child". According to Bruck and Ceci (2004:232) children, like adults, may experience difficulties remembering or giving accurate accounts of what happened.

Sorenson and Snow (1991:14) assert that "children who are sexually abused may experience recanting due to family pressure, the offender or court proceedings. Disclosure of sexual abuse is a process with a definable phase and characteristics rather than a single event". Van Dam (2006:43) agrees that "children wait longer to disclose abuse when the perpetrator has groomed them and established a close relationship".

Martins and Corbeck (1997:4) indicate that the family is viewed as a crucial factor in the initiation and maintenance of sexual offences and it is the primary context in which sexual victimizing behavior is learned and expressed. "The family sometimes has reason for maintaining this secret" (Crosson-Tower, 2005: 175-176; Spies, 2006: 12).

Watchel (2004:22) says that "parents are viewed as a source of support to every child irrespective of class. Parents should know that the child's problem of sexual abuse is not her own problem, but it is the problem of the whole family". According to Van Dam (2006:141), parents should be encouraged to discuss their observations and worries about the sexual abuse with trained professionals in order to help them differentiate unnecessary anxiety from legitimately worrisome conduct.

Faller (2007:8) is of the opinion that “child sexual abuse is by definition a forensic issue, because it is both a crime and a threat to child safety”. South Africa has introduced a new Children’s Act no. 38 of 2005 (SA, 2005) which states the obligations of care givers and professionals to report ill treatment of children to police officials, commissioners of children’s courts and social workers.

“The social worker has to perform a central role together with other agencies and professionals in the management and coordination of services to children who have been sexually abused as well as their families” (Du Bois & Miley, 2005: 374-376). Müller (2001:08) explains the role of the social worker in forensic interviews as to “obtain a truthful account from the child in a manner which will best serve the interest of the child, while at the same time being legally acceptable”. Social workers must be knowledgeable in many aspects of child development and must possess different techniques and skills to obtain the information needed. Social workers are likely to be involved during the early stages of the abuse and through the post-disclosure process. Ferrara (2002:167) has examined the patterns of disclosure, and notes that children are able to narrate about the abuse, but the disclosure may come out in fragments across many interviews.

Jordan (1990:84) asserts that social workers have the role of investigating allegations of cruelty, sexual abuse or neglect of children, and of doing interviews in an attempt to protect children. According to Spies (2006:12), families and parents “experience a high degree of emotional pressure to maintain this secret and each member may also have a very special reason for maintaining the family in its current form”.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the reasons why parents do not want to disclose the sexual abuse of their child?
- What is the role of the social worker towards the parents of the sexually abused child when assisting them in disclosure?

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Aim

To investigate the role of the social worker in motivating parents of the sexually abused child, to disclose.

2.2 Objectives

- To investigate the reasons why parents do not want to disclose the sexual abuse of their child.
- To investigate the role of the social worker in motivating the parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child.

3. CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

Social workers can play an important role in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abused of a child.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology will include a literature study as well as empirical research.

4.1 Literature study

Neuman (1997:89) indicates that “literature is based on the assumption that knowledge is accumulated on what we learn from and builds on what others have done”. The main focus of the study is on the role of the social worker in assisting the sexually abuse child and his/her parents to disclose the sexual abuse.

Deblinger and Hoflin (2001:03) highlight that “Parents can play a significant role in the child’s sexual abuse recovery. The parents can participate in treatment to help them cope with their own personal distress and it may also help parents to respond more supportively and effectively to their children’s difficulties”.

4.2 Empirical research

The study undertaken falls within the scope of applied research because the findings obtained from the study contribute to the practice of social work. Applied research, according to Fouché and De Vos (2005:105), is most often “the scientific planning of

induced change in a troublesome situation”. Neuman (1997:23) describes applied research as the seeking of a solution in a specific setting. In this study the role of the social worker in assisting the parent of the sexually abused child in disclosing the abuse will be investigated.

4.2.1 Research design

According to Grinnell (2001:547) research design is a plan that includes every aspect of a proposed research study from the conceptualization of the problem right through to the dissemination of the findings. Mouton (2001:55) defines a “research design as a plan or blue print of how you intend to conduct the research”. Research design focuses on the end product, formulates a research problem as a point of departure and focuses on the logic of research.

Fouchè and De Vos (2005:106) point out that descriptive research can have a basic or applied research goal and can be qualitative or quantitative in nature. The research design focuses on the end product, formulates a research problem as a point of departure and focuses on the logic of research. This study will use a qualitative research design. According to Fouché (2005:269), a qualitative strategy differs inherently from the quantitative design in “that it does not usually provide the researcher with a step-by-step plan or a fixed recipe to follow”.

A qualitative approach was followed as the researcher wished to explore and describe the meaning and promote an understanding of the role of a social worker toward child sexual abuse.

4.2.2 Participants

The respondents were selected by means of a purposive sampling method. Strydom (2005a:202) states that a purposive sample relies on the judgment of the researcher “in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics, representative or typical attributes of the population”. A non-probability sampling was used in the study as the researcher gave preference to those social workers who had previous experience in interviewing sexually abused children (Strydom, 2005a:202) as they would contribute positively to the outcome of the study.

The social workers practicing in Madibeng Municipality were selected because they were considered to be a rich source of information because of their continuous contact with children who are sexually abused and their parents. The study involved a total

population of 28 social workers who had experience in interviewing sexually abused children. The sample consisted of social workers and probation social workers from the Department of Social Development, Women, Children, and People with Disability, social workers from the Department of Health, Education, SAPS Forensic social workers and social workers from private practices. The participants are all situated in Madibeng Municipality.

4.2.3 Measuring instrument

The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. A self-administered schedule with open-ended and closed-ended questions was compiled and used as a tool to collect the data by means of face-to-face interviews. **(Addendum A)**. Greeff (2005:287) is of the opinion that the interview “is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research”. Mindel (1993:238-40) states that a measuring instrument should be evaluated before it is administered by a sample of individuals who are similar to the study sample or population to determine whether the individuals asked to answer the questions understand the way the researcher intends them to. For this reason the researcher interviewed two social workers who were not part of the research study population.

4.2.4 Data analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed and interpreted in a qualitative way. “Qualitative data analyses transform data into findings” (Patton, 2002:432). According to De Vos (2005:333) this means “to reduce the volume of raw information, sifting significance from trivia, identifying significant patterns and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals”.

4.2.5 Research procedure

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the researcher’s office. The research design steps for a qualitative approach were followed and included the following:

- Permission to use experienced social workers and probation officers for this research was verbally obtained from Department of Social Development, Women, Children and People with Disability in the Madibeng Municipality where the researcher is a social worker.
- Consent was obtained from the qualified social workers to be part of the research.

- Schedules with open and closed-ended questions were compiled, pre-tested and revised before final use.
- The researcher explained the questions to the participants so that they could respond in the researcher's presence.

4.2.6 Ethical issues

Strydom (2005b:57) defines ethics as “a set of moral principles which offers rules and behavioral expectations about the most correct conduct towards subjects and respondents”. According to Neuman (1997:196) “treatment may involve placing people in contrived social settings and manipulating their feelings or behaviors”. Bailey (1994:454) writes that a conflict of interest between the right of the majority to be informed and the right of the individual to privacy created the need for written ethical standards. There are different ethical issues the researcher has to consider with regard to the participants.

- The participants were debriefed on what they have gone through. The researcher debriefed participants in order to contribute to the healing process. “The easiest way to debrief the participants was to discuss their feelings about the project immediately after the sessions” (Strydom, 2005b:66). The participants were not harmed during the research. In order to protect the participants from any harm one has to be sensitive, accepting and one has to maintain good relationships. Neuman (1997:446) finds that “although physical harm to respondents is rare in social research, researchers have to make sure that no physical harm will come to respondents as a result of the research”.
- Consent was obtained from the participants The participants were legally and psychologically competent to participate in the research. The participants were not forced to participate in the research, but did so voluntarily. ‘The respondents have adequate information to make decisions about their participation” (Strydom, 2005b:65).
- Confidentiality and anonymity was strictly applied when the participants completed the questionnaires. The anonymity of the subject was assured by not disclosing their identities. All information gathered was dealt with in confidence. “Confidentiality places a strong obligation on the social worker. The anonymity, privacy of the

respondents and confidentiality of information was protected at all times” (Strydom, 2005b: 61).

- The participants were given a fairly detailed explanation of what the research aims to achieve through their involvement in order to alleviate any fears that the subject may have. They were also informed about the participants’ procedures.
- Written permission **NWU-00027-09S1** was given for the research by the Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University.

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1 Child

A child means a person under the age of 18, according to the Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005 (SA, 2005). Doyle (1994:04) defines a child as a “child in character, manners, and attainments and especially in experience and judgment”. For the researcher and for the purpose of this study a child will refer to someone below the age of 18 years and whose experience and judgment is not yet matured.

5.2 Motivation

The Business Dictionary (2011) “defines motivation as internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested in and committed to a job, role or subject to exert persistent effort in attaining a goal”. The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:40) describes motivation as a technique in social work “to encourage a client to participate and get involved in the process of assistance”.

For the purpose of this study motivation means that the social worker should use all the techniques in social work to encourage parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child.

5.3 Parent

Hawkins (1996:315) in the South African Oxford School Dictionary defines a parent as a father or a mother of a person or animal. The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:44) describes parent as “Father or mother of 1) a child born out of or legitimated by a marriage; 2) an illegitimate child; 3) an adopted child”.

For the purpose of the study the concept parent will refer to a father or mother of a person and it will include stepparent, adoptive parent, foster parent or any adult who finds herself/himself acting in this position at a particular moment.

5.4 Guardian

It is a person who has the “legal right to take care of the child. It is the one who guards, watches over or protects the child” (Free Dictionary, 01/05/2011).

5.5 Sexual abuse

Mather and Debye (2004:5) define sexual abuse as “taking advantage of a child through any act that is designed to sexually stimulate the child or to use a child to sexually stimulate someone else”. Kearney (2001:16) defines child sexual abuse “as any kind of sexual act between a child and an adult, between infant or young child and an older child”. According to Zastrow (2010:201), the sexual abuse of a child “includes not only sexual intercourse (genital or anal) but also oral-genital contact, fondling, and behaviors such as exposing oneself to a child and photographing or viewing a child for the molester’s erotic pleasure”.

The researcher came to the conclusion that child sexual abuse refers to the following: any contact or interactions between a child and an adult or someone in a position of authority that involves sexual activities of an adult. Although the child is involved he or she is not yet mentally developed and matured to understand the meaning of the sexual experience or interaction.

5.6 Social worker

Social worker refers to a person who is registered or deemed to be registered as a social worker in terms of the Social Service Professional Act (Act 110 of 1978). Social worker basically entails the scientific knowledge, investigations and assessment of an individual or individuals that are involved in social problems. Hoffman and Zeffertt (1988:98-99) indicate that through gaining this type of knowledge the court would be better enabled to understand the factors that might have had a role to play in the crime or the behavior of the defendant, victim or a witness.

5.7 Forensic social work

According to the South African Council for Service Professions (2008:1), forensic social work is a “specialized field of social work that focuses on the interface between society’s legal and human systems and is characterized by the social worker’s primary function of providing expert testimonies in courts of law with the primary client being the judiciary system”.

The researcher views forensic social worker as a distinct way of providing specialized detailed social information of a sexually abused child. Forensic social work basically entails the scientific investigations and assessment of an individual or individuals that are involved in a criminal case and giving expert testimony in court.

6. PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED DURING THE RESEARCH

It was difficult for the researcher to get statistics of sexually abused children from the Child Protection Unit of the South African Police Services because their Department has strict measures of accessing such type of information.

The social workers lack theory of the area of the research. It was not easy for them to answer the questions. There were only a few social workers who managed to have theory about the research. It was also not easy to get social workers who agreed to participate to interview them. Some social workers who agreed to participate in the research did not attend the interview.

7. RESEARCH RESULTS

7.1 Identification particulars

7.1.1 Organization employing the social workers

The respondents were asked at what organization they work, and the following answers were received.

Table 1: Organization

Organization	F	%
Dept of social Development	18	64,29
NGO	5	17,85
Private Practice	1	3,57
SAPS	2	7,15
Dept of Health	1	3,57
Dept of Education	1	3,57
N	28	100

The above results indicate that 18 (64, 29%) of the social workers in the research were from the Department of Social Development. In the **Madibeng** Municipality, most of the social workers are in the Department of Social Development. There are a few social workers in other organizations and private practice.

7.1.2 Experience as social worker

The respondents were asked how many years of experience they have and they gave the following answers:

Table 2: Years experience

Years	F	%
0-5 years	9	32,15
6-10 years	11	39,28
11-15 years	4	14,28
16-20 years	3	10,72
21-25 years	1	3,57
N	28	100

20 (71,43%) of the respondents have been working less than 11 years as social workers. Schenck (2004:158) indicates that social workers mostly do not practice many years as social workers. The factors that lead to the tendency of only a few years of practice are personal and organizational factors, including a high caseload, professional commitment to children and their families and job satisfaction. All of these social workers have experience in handling child sexual abuse cases.

The respondents were asked how many cases of child sexual abuse they have handled. This question was asked to see how much experience they had with the sexual abuse of a child. They gave the following answers:

Table 3: Child sexual abuse cases handled by social workers

Cases handled	F	%
0-5 cases	12	42,85
6-10 cases	2	7,15
11-15 cases	1	3,57
21-25 cases	2	7,15
26-30 cases	1	3,57
More than 30	10	35,71
N	28	100

Most of the social workers, 12 (42,85%) handled less than five cases. These were mostly the social workers who gave less than five years experience in the field of social work. Ten (35,71%) of the social workers handled more than 30 cases of child sexual abuse. Of these social workers, the social worker in Private Practice handled 85 cases of child sexual abuse; the social worker in the Department of Education 13 and the social worker in the Department of Health 19 cases. One of the ten social workers who handled more than 30 cases, handled 60 cases, one 100 cases, one 163 cases and one answered so many that she can't remember. These answers accentuate the seriousness of child sexual abuse in South Africa. In this regard Collings (2008:11-14) and Van Niekerk (2004:266) wrote about the massive increase in the number of child sexual abuse cases presenting over the past eight to nine years.

7.2 Training in handling child sexual abuse cases

The respondents were asked whether they have been trained to assess the sexual abuse of children. Of the 28 social workers 9 (32,14%) answered "yes". All the other social workers have only attended short term training and no one has done the two-year forensic training. Smith (2007:22) had the same results for her study amongst 164 social workers in South Africa. Only 16 (26,24%) attended short courses in forensic social work.

7.2.1 The content of the training received

A follow-up question on training asked as follows: “What did the training entail”? The following answers were received from the nine social workers:

- Social behavioral problems experienced after the abuse (urinating often, isolating the opposite sex, isolating him/herself, school performance deteriorating, nightmares, and early menstruation cycle).
- Risk assessment with families who experience abuse of their children.
- Dealing with traumatized children and being able to offer trauma counseling.
- Expert Witness and Play Therapy.
- Assessing children’s needs, identifying the risks and rendering relevant intervention.
- Intermediary services to sexually abused children.
- Forensic social work assessment training.
- Developmental assessment plan.
- Child protection and sexual offences.
- Assessment of feelings through play techniques.
- Referral procedures of sexually abused children.

When asked whether their knowledge on child sexual abuse had improved, all 9 (100%) answered “yes”. The reasons why they answered this were the following:

- Learnt child assessment techniques, how to build rapport with the child and report writing. It helped with confidence in dealing with sexual abuse cases.
- Learnt that each child has to be approached differently.
- Gained in-depth knowledge in dealing with the child’s feelings and emotions.
- Attitude of family members towards the child were explored.
- Child sexual abuse is a sensitive issue that needs to be handled urgently.

One social worker said that the training did not entail how to handle the sexually abused child.

7.2.2 Duration of training

The respondents were asked how long the training was in months. One respondent's training was one month, one two months, one six months, two had training of one week, one of two days, two of three days and one of five days. From these answers it was clear that all of the nine respondents only attended short course trainings. Not one of the social workers has post-graduate training in the assessment of child sexual abuse. This correlates with the study of Alpert and Paulson (1990: 370) that there is "resistance and anxiety which may be a contributing factor to the inadequate training of social workers who will work with sexually abused children".

7.2.3 Specialized training in sexual abuse

The respondents were asked whether social workers should have specialized training in handling child sexual abuse cases. All 28 (100%) of the respondents answered "yes" and their motivation for their answer included:

- Child sexual abuse cases are very sensitive, and therefore social workers need special training.
- Parents should receive all professional help and assistance when abuse is reported to avoid secondary abuse to the child.
- Social workers need to learn how to reach the inner person of the child and should know exactly how to handle the abused child so that they can open up and speak freely about the abuse.
- Social workers receive minimal training with regard to sexual abuse at university. Intensive training on the assessment of the sexually abused child is a need.
- Children are sometimes not able to express their feelings and play therapy can be applied.

From the above discussions it is clear that the social workers acting as respondents in this research did not have specialized training in handling cases involving the sexual abuse of a child. There was no social worker who attended a post-graduate course on Forensic Social Work that they could apply to practice. In research done by Smith (2007:22) amongst 164 social workers in 9 Provinces in South Africa, 129 (78,65%) had no extra qualification in forensic social work. Only 4 (2,43%) had a Masters Degree in Forensic Social Work. For this reason specialized training in Forensic Social Work is a must.

7.3 Disclosure of sexual abuse

According to Berliner and Elliot (2002:58), most of the sexual abuse cases is neither revealed immediately nor reported to authorities subsequent to disclosure. “Many sexual abuse children never disclose because they are afraid but also silenced by threats, blames and bribery” (Fouché, 2006:211). Parents do not want to disclose in many cases because of reasons such as not believing the child, attachment to the perpetrator, or protecting the family. According to Pipe et al. (2007:93), disclosures were more likely to be delayed when the suspect was a family member.

Respondents were asked their opinion as to why parents hesitate to disclose the sexual abuse of the child, and the following answers were received:

- Parents fear rejection and being stigmatized by the community.
- Sexual abuse cases are sensitive.
- Parents are not informed about the impact and effects of the sexual abuse of children.
- Parents do not have enough knowledge of how the child feels and their experiences.
- The abuser might be known to the family, or threaten the parent, or be a breadwinner, or the parent might not believe the child.
- Parents fear disapproval by the community.
- Parents fear to appear in court as witnesses, and avoid exposing the child to court.
- Parents have inferiority complexes, ignorance and lack of information.
- Parents blame themselves for the sexual abuse.
- Child sexual abuse is seen as taboo or culture related, and they prefer it to be treated within the family.

It is important to realize that when a child discloses sexual abuse, a private event becomes public and the disclosure represents a turning point in the life of the child and his or her family. Although a “majority of non-offending parents are described as supportive of their child disclosing abuse, a significant proportion have inconsistent or rejecting responses” (Rickerby et al., 2011:1-2). Factors such as the above mentioned influence the disclosure of sexual abuse of a child by the parents.

7.4 The social worker's role in motivating parents to disclose

Respondents were asked what they think the role of the social worker is in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abuse of the child.

Table 4: Social worker's role

Role of social worker	Always	Sometimes	Never
Obtaining a short history of the sexual abuse	28	0	0
Discussing the parent(s) relationship with the perpetrator	24	2	2
Helping the parent(s) identify, acknowledge and explore their emotions	23	5	0
Discuss the impact of the abuse on the child	28	0	0
Discuss the impact of the abuse on the family	19	9	0
Monitoring the child's safety	24	4	0
Helping the parent(s) to encourage and support the child with positive messages	23	5	0
Helping the parent(s) to manage any behavioral problems the child may have as a result of the abuse	16	12	0
Discuss the importance of the disclosing the sexual abuse	27	1	0
Explaining the process of disclosure	18	10	0
Explaining the process of the medical examination	22	5	1
Giving the parent an understanding of the child's assessment process - who they are going to talk to	25	2	1
Explaining the role of the forensic social worker	23	3	2
Other role(s) Specify	2	11	15

According to the above table all the social workers (100%) were of the opinion that they should obtain a short history of the sexual abuse of the child, and discuss the impact of the abuse on the child with the parents. Discussing the importance of the disclosure of the sexual abuse were important to 27 (96, 42%) of the respondents. Twenty four ((85, 71%) of the respondents were of the opinion that they should discuss the parent's relationship with the perpetrator, as well as monitor the child's safety. Helping the parents to understand the role of the forensic social worker were the answer of 23 (82, 14%) of the social workers. The NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:2)

shows that it is very important to engage the parent to accept the help of the social worker on how to disclose child sexual abuse as early as possible after the notification is made (Anon, 1993:18). This help is for the parents themselves, the child, as well as the other children in the household.

In practice parents are afraid of the disclosure of the sexual abuse of their child. In some cases after they have laid the charge the parent or child has the tendency to recant on the disclosure due to factors such as:

- Feelings of disloyalty to the family.
- Disbelief by the parent.
- Feelings of concern about the alleged perpetrator.
- Self-blame for the abuse.
- Anger from other family members.
- Fears of what may happen.
- Fear of threats made by the perpetrator (NYC Administration for Children's Services, 2010:16).

It is because of the above-mentioned factors that the social worker plays an important role in assisting the parents to disclose the abuse and lay charges. The social worker needs to pay attention to the following, according to the NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:28-35):

➤ ***Build report with the parents***

- Communicate with the parent on the impact of the abuse on the life of the child, the parent and the other members of the household.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of their situation and explore their feelings and the challenges they have in facing the situation.
- Assess the parent's attitude and feelings toward the perpetrator.
- Assess the parent's feelings toward the child (Hewitt, 1999: 253-255; NYC Administration for Children's Services, 2010:28-29).

According to research done by Corcoran (1998:367) & Cottrel *et al* (2000:486) the majority of parents whose children were sexually abused appear to suffer greatly or to be traumatized by the discovery of their child's sexual abuse.

➤ ***Address the parents emotions***

As you work to understand the reaction of the parents to the disclosure, you always have to assess the parent's capacity to protect their child from impending danger. Aspects to address are:

- Their ambivalence over who or what to believe.
- Their confusion over a close relationship with the alleged perpetrator and their desire to protect their child.
- Feelings of anger towards the perpetrator or the child (NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:29).

According to Dybe, Holen, Steinberg, Roderiguez, and Pynoos (2003:940), parents who disclose the sexual abuse of their child experience several emotions, including anger, fear, helplessness and secondary life changes.

➤ ***Assess the need for support for the parent***

The parents and the family may feel overwhelmed and in need of support. Parents may also experience considerable social, emotional and economic consequences, which may be more pronounced depending on whether the abuse is interfamilial or extra-familial (Elliott & Carnes, 2001). In addition the family may depend on the alleged perpetrator for some kind of support. The social worker has to pay attention to the following in this regard:

- Examine the extra financial burden on the family due to this situation. How will the perpetrator's absence affect the family?
- Ask the parent(s) who they can turn to for support and reinforce that it is important in situations like these to get help from other people as soon as possible.
- Provide assistance with referrals for services to help the family (NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:29-30).

In research done by Stander (Strydom & Stander, 2011:386), all the respondents were of the opinion that the forensic social worker should refer the mother or parents and the child for therapy.

➤ ***Explore multiple alternative explanations***

In some cases parents may give alternative explanations or motivations to explain the child's allegations. In some cases they may accuse the child of lying or making up stories. In situations like these the social worker should pay attention to the following:

- Although it is important that you remain neutral and open to other possibilities, give greater weight to the child's allegations than the parent's explanations. The child's safety is your concern.
- Assess the information the family gives and weigh the child's statement against the family's motivation not to disclose.
- Help the parents to see that it is uncommon for a child to make false allegations of sexual abuse (NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:30-31)).

➤ ***Educate the parent about sexual abuse***

Some parents' knowledge about sexual abuse is limited. In such cases it is important to give the necessary information so that parents can acknowledge the abuse or accept help to disclose. Aspects that the social worker may pay attention to in this regard are the following:

- Explore the parent's cultural and religious beliefs while emphasizing the importance of the parent's role to protect their child.
- Remind them that it is your duty as social worker to find out the truth and to act in the best interest of the child.
- It is important that the parent should not tell the child that the abuse is his/her faults or accuse the child of lying, even if the parents are not sure the abuse happened.
- Help the parents in identifying specific supportive behaviors they can implement to support the child (NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:31-33)).

According to Jinich and Litrownik (1999:176), "there is a need to develop and evaluate interventions aimed at helping the parent of molested children cope with the initial crisis surrounding disclosure. It is the role of the social worker to motivate the parents to

disclose the sexual abuse of their child and to lay charges against the perpetrator, but besides this task it is very important to make referrals for getting help from specially trained professionals". According to the NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:34), "Practice shows that when there is ongoing communication with and support of the family, the risk of recantation is lower" as well as the risk of not disclosing.

8. CONCLUSION

The research shows convincingly that there is a need for professional training for social workers with regard to child sexual abuse need. The social workers who participated in the research handle child sexual abuse cases with basic training acquired during their work with abused children. Most social workers employed in government and non-government organizations in the Madibeng area have not received formal training on how to deal with sexually abused children and their parents. It is not clear whether the few days of training some of these social workers have attended has had a significant impact on children involved in sexual abuse cases and their parents.

The involvement of the social worker in child sexual abuse cases holds the benefits of collaboration, which includes faster and more proactive responses, more holistic services, reduced family separations and lower levels of anxiety for the children, parents and social workers. Initial reactions by parents may include anger towards the perpetrator, displaced anger towards family members, guilt, self-blame, helplessness, panic, denial, and feelings of betrayal, a desire for secrecy and fear for the child victim.

It appears that social workers only focus on the child when dealing with sexual abuse cases, and they forget to involve the parents to help with the healing process. The social worker's role requires more formal training to help the child and the parent.

Elliot & Carnes (2001) indicate that "inadequate support by non-offending parents may be due to several factors, including an initial lack of help during the initial crisis of disclosure, and difficulty accessing services". The researcher agrees with the statement as this is what happens in most cases where the parents are reluctant to support the child. Parents become destructive when they do not acknowledge the rights and needs of the child and distorts reality. "To deal with concerns of secondary trauma as well as other psychosocial difficulties parents should be immediately evaluated and offered appropriate treatment in order to provide support and guidance" (Deblinger and Hofflin,

2002). The behavior of a parent following the disclosure is important, as it often used to gauge their ability to protect and support their sexually abused child.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Parents and children involved in sexual abuse cases need to be offered crisis counseling. Such counseling should include evaluation through individual and family sessions. Victims must be helped to share disclosure information with their parents. Elliot and Carnes (2001) suggest that the goal should be to help parents remain calm and continue to focus on their children's needs and objectively examine the emerging evidence of the abuse.
- Parents should overcome feelings of inadequacy in order to help a sexually abused child. Many parents condemn themselves and feel ashamed not only about their children, but also about the abuse. Arnold (1978:104) indicates that many parents have poor self-judgment and suffer from feelings of inadequacy. Parents need to be taught how a child acquires a negative or a failure identity and becomes a weak person. The child's personality world continuously diminishes, and the capacity to cope with the obstacles in life is weakened.
- The researcher feels that parents need to have a good understanding of basic personal identity development and how it can be used to help the child gain and maintain a success identity. Parents need to build involvement through communication with their children and need to recognize and capitalize on everyday intimate moments with their children.
- Swenson and Hanson (1998) note that treatment needs to be addressed through individual interventions, especially for parents who have been unable to provide belief, support, and protection for their children.
- Social workers need to strengthen the parent's support and belief, reduce the child's symptoms of anxiety, anger, and depression, and attend to the parent's symptoms of guilt and sadness. They need to address feelings of isolation and stigma and address the economic situation of the family.
- Social workers should work in partnership with the parents whose children were sexually abused.

- Parents need to be empowered by having easy access to clear information about ways in which services to a child may be delivered. This will help parents to exercise a higher level of rationality.
- Parents need to be empowered by being given information about the intention and expectation of social workers and social services, and hence the opportunity to express their own ideas, which in turn may influence the actions of social workers.
- Parents need to be involved in the decisions taken in relation to their children. Thomas (2010) also agrees that sharing information on child sexual abuse with parents in the local community is important when discussing the development and debates surrounding the disclosure.
- Social workers should see to it that children who have been sexually abused get treatment that will help the child learn to distinguish between his healthy and destructive coping skills. They should educate the community regarding child sexual abuse and its causes, and should attempt to find measures that can be used to eradicate it.
- Social workers should understand the cultural values and norms that will inform them regarding the appropriate activities to protect the children, and for using cultural strength.
- The social workers who handle child sexual abuse cases need to have two years of training so that they have more information on how to deal with the cases.
- There should be more interview guidelines to address the role of the social worker in relation to the parent whose child was sexually abused.
- The Department of Social Development at National Level needs to introduce Forensic Social Work as a specialist field in order to enable more social workers to enroll for the degree. This will improve service delivery.
- The Department of Social Workers should introduce a Forensic Social Work Course and to allow social workers to be trained.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN MOTIVATING PARENTS TO DISCLOSE SEXUAL ABUSE OF THEIR CHILD

Introduction

- The goal of this research is to establish the role of the social worker in motivating parents to disclose the sexual abuse of their child.
- The results of this research will be used without identification of participants.
- The results from this research will be used by me Motshegoa to fulfill the requirements of the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus to require the MSW in Forensic Practice.
- Thank you for your co-operation, inputs and time. Your opinions are valuable.

1. Where are you working? (Mark one)

Dept Social Development	
NGO	
Private Practice	
SAPS	
Other (Specify)	

2. How many years of experience do you have in social work?

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3. During your practice have you handled child sexual abuse cases?

YES	NO

4. If "yes", how many cases of child sexual abuse did you handle until now?

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10. Do you think social workers need specialized training in handling child sexual abuse cases?

YES	NO

11. Motivate your answer.

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12. What do you think are the reasons why the non-offending parent hesitates to disclose the sexual abuse of their child?

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13. How can you help the non-offending parent to disclose the sexual abuse of the child?

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14. Rate according to the following what you think is the role of the social worker in motivating the non-offending parent to disclose the sexual abuse of the child?

Role of social worker	Always	Sometimes	Never
Obtaining a short history of the sexual abuse			
Discussing the parent(s) relationship with the perpetrator			
Helping the parent(s) identify, acknowledge and explore their emotions			
Discussing the impact of the abuse on the child			
Discussing the impact of the abuse on the family			
Monitoring the child's safety			
Helping the parent(s) to encourage and support the child with positive messages			
Helping the parent(s) to manage any behavioural problems the child may have as a result of the abuse			
Discussing the importance of the disclosing of the sexual abuse			
Explaining the process of disclosure			
Explaining the process of the medical examination			
Giving the parent an understanding of the child's assessment process-who they are going to talk to			
Explaining the role of the forensic social worker			
Other role(s) Specify			

15. Any other suggestions?

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Thank you for your participation.

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Me MJ Motshegoa

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ANNEXURE B

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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 Motshegoa entitled THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN MOTIVATING PARENTS TO DISCLOSE THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF THEIR CHILD, without viewing the final product. I declare that all payment for my services has been settled.

Regards,

CME Terblanche