

ARTICLE TWO

THE EMPOWERMENT NEEDS OF FOSTER PARENTS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

H.J. Galloway is a PhD student at the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences Division Social Work at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) and social worker at the therapy unit of Christelike Maatskaplike Raad: Mpumalanga,

C.C. Wessels is a senior Lecturer at the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences Division Social Work at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

C Strydom is a lecturer at the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences Division Social Work at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

Abstract

The aim of this article is to establish the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children. A focus group discussion was used as a method to collect relevant qualitative data. Five (N=5) foster parents with foster children that have been sexually abused, took part. They were identified from the caseload of a Child Welfare Society in Mpumalanga. From the discussion group two main themes, namely **feelings, experiences and challenges** of foster parents of sexually abused foster children and the **needs** of foster parents of sexually abused foster children were identified. Eight sub-themes were derived and identified.

KEYWORDS: Child sexual abuse; empowerment needs; focus group discussion; foster care; foster parent.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children often have to be removed and placed in foster care when sexual abuse occurred in the family. This happens while the case is being investigated, as well as being a way of protecting the children against further abuse (Spies, 2006:267). Taking care of sexually abused children in foster care requires specific and special skills from the foster parents. Often foster parents do not have these special skills and need to acquire more specialised knowledge as well. Triseliotis *et al.* (1995:44) are of the opinion that empowerment of foster parents is important, because “... *foster carers could not be expected to undertake such demanding tasks without preparation, training, post-placement support and continued training*”. Rhodes *et al.* (2003:135) are of the opinion that in order to engage families in fostering, professionals should focus on their resources for overcoming challenges as well as the difficulties and needs they might have that could possibly interfere with fostering. They are further of the opinion that foster families with more resources find it easier to overcome the demands and challenges of caring for a child with special needs (which would include a sexually abused child) and are thus more likely to continue fostering (Rhodes *et al.*, 2003:136). They further found that foster families have psychosocial problems which includes limitations in parenting or problems in marital or family functioning (Rhodes *et al.*, 2003:136).

In order to ensure effective foster care it is thus necessary to establish the specific needs, feelings, experiences and challenges of foster parents and for the purpose of this article, specifically foster parents taking care of sexually abused children. Children that were abused are mostly deeply traumatised and they have very specific needs regarding their foster parents. The foster parents need to have the necessary skills to undertake this difficult task. The foster parents of foster children that were sexually abused also have very specific needs.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The contribution that foster parents can make to the welfare of sexually abused children who are removed from their own homes, is very important (O'Hagan, 1989:142). Taking care of sexually abused children can be an extremely stressful and difficult task for foster parents and their families. (Delaney, 2007a:1; Pollock & Farmer, 2005:18; Spies, 2006:267). Researcher supports the opinion of Pollock and Farmer (2005:30) and Spies (2006:274) that many foster care placements fail because caregivers have limited knowledge of the impact of child sexual abuse on the child and how to cope or respond effectively behavioural patterns of the sexually abused child in their care. Research done by Pollock and Farmer (2005:28-29) indicate that it will be beneficial to the abused child if caregivers understood the survival behaviour of a sexually abused child. It might thus be necessary to train foster parents in order to empower them to effectively care for children who have been sexually abused and as a result have special needs.

An extensive search by researcher revealed that there is no training programme available, developed based on research in South Africa, specifically for foster parents of sexually abused children. Researcher is thus of the opinion that there is a need for the development of an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children in South Africa. The first step in developing such a programme to empower foster parents to provide a secure environment for sexually abused children to heal and thrive from their previous experiences, will be to establish the needs, feelings, experiences and challenges of foster parents. O'Hagan (1989:143) sees the first major exercise in constructing a relevant empowerment programme as *“an intensive exploration of foster parents' perceptions of their own needs and an honest assessment on the part of social workers and trainers of the degree to which those needs can be met”*.

Researcher is of the opinion that foster parents are likely to know better than anybody else what their needs, feelings, experiences and challenges are, what they need to know, and what skills they need to acquire that should be

included in an empowerment programme. The foster parents are the persons confronted with the behaviour of the foster child on a daily basis. Because taking care of an abused foster child can be very demanding, foster parents need support to cope with this situation. This article is aimed at establishing the empowerment needs of foster parents through a focus group discussion, interviews with experts and a literature review.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study attempts to find answers to the following research question:

What are the empowerment needs of foster parents to understand the sexually abused child's behaviour?

4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

A theoretical statement or a proposition is described by De Vos and Strydom (2011:34) as a relationship expressed in a theory. Before it can be accepted as a valid theory or part of a valid theory, it needs to be tested against reality.

The following **central theoretical statement** was developed for study:

If the empowerment needs of foster parents are addressed they will be able to understand the sexually abused child's behaviour..

5. AIM AND OBJECTIVE

5.1 AIM

The **aim** of this research is:

To develop, implement and evaluate a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children to improve their psychosocial functioning and their knowledge and skills regarding the dynamics of sexual abuse.

5.2 OBJECTIVE

The **objective** for this part of the study can be formulated as follows:

To determine the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children to understand the sexually abused child's behaviour.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

An explorative research design within a qualitative approach was used in this part of the study. According to Fouchè and De Vos (2011:96) the explorative study aims at *“collecting information where little or no information is available”*. Little information or research has been done regarding specifically the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children. No research could be found that was done locally in South Africa regarding this theme. The research thus aims at adding to the knowledge base of social work, by collecting information on the empowerment needs of foster parents in order to compile an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. Alpaslan (2010:13) describes the qualitative approach as *“The process of research involves incorporating emerging questions and procedures into the evolving shape and direction of the research endeavour: the collection of data typically in the participant's setting; and a process whereby data are analysed inductively building from particulars to general themes, with the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.”*

6.1.1 INTERVENTION MODEL

Researcher decided to utilise the intervention model of Rothman and Thomas (De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:475). This model enables the researcher to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in intervention research.

The six major phases of intervention research that were followed are:

1. Problem analysis and project planning
2. Information gathering and synthesis
3. Design
4. Early development and pilot testing
5. Evaluation and advanced development

6. Dissemination

This study will have a combined emphasis on both basic and applied research. Exploratory research will be used in the needs analysis (Fouché, 2002:109) as part of the information gathering and synthesis phase of the intervention model.

When an intervention programme is planned, the first step is to establish what has been done by others to understand and address the problem. This article forms part of the **second phase** of the intervention model, which is called information gathering and synthesis (De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:480). The outcome of this phase is a list of apparently functional elements that can be incorporated into the design of the intervention. In this article it will be the empowerment needs of the foster parents which will be included in the design of the empowerment programme. The steps of this phase utilised are discussed next (De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:476).

6.1.2 PHASE TWO - INFORMATION GATHERING AND SYNTHESIS

▪ Using existing information sources

“A literature review usually consists of an examination of selected empirical research, reported practice and identified innovations relevant to the particular concern being studied” (De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:480). Computerised databases is also seen as particularly helpful in retrieving possible sources of information. The main sources of information for this study were literature study and consultations with experts.

According to Fouché and Delport (2002:127-136) a review of literature is aimed at *“contributing towards a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified”*. For the purpose of this literature study, various textbooks on a multi-professional level, including psychology, education, forensic social work, clinical social work, legal professions, medical professions, occupational therapy, therapy and assessment were consulted. It included national and international resources. A comprehensive internet search was done in order to be updated on the

latest research done in this specific context. Various databases were consulted including EBSCO Host, ERIC, Psychinfo, Lexis Nexis. Literature available at the libraries of the North-West University and UNISA were consulted as well as Questia website. Through these resources, information on national as well as international developments was obtained.

Fawcett (in De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:481) is of the opinion that by interviewing people who have experience of the problem, insights can be provided into which interventions might or might not succeed and the variables that may affect success. For this study interviews were conducted with experts in the field of sexual abuse and foster care for the purpose of getting their views on such research and the development of the empowerment programme intended (Delport, 2010; Erasmus, 2010; Grobler, 2008; Petzer, 2010). These are experts who have in-depth knowledge of foster care and child sexual abuse. Their contributions were used to gather more information and enabled researcher to narrow down towards a synthesis on the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children and to prepare questions to be used in the focus group discussions which also form part of this phase.

Once the information is gathered, researchers analyse the critical features of the programmes and practices that have previously addressed the problem in question. By studying successful and unsuccessful models or programmes, researchers identify potentially useful elements of an intervention (De Vos & Strydom, 2011b:481). Researcher perused various programmes, on the empowerment of foster parents, but none was available specifically for foster parents of abused children. Applicable elements of relevant programmes were extracted in order to use in the synthesis of information towards the development of an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children.

6.2 POPULATION, SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

According to Sarankos in Strydom and Delport (2011:391) *“sampling in qualitative research is relatively limited, based on saturation, not*

representative, the size not statistically determined, involving low cost and not being time-consuming”.

Non-probability sampling and more specific purposive sampling was utilized as sampling method. The identified population was foster parents with sexually abused children on the case load of Child Welfare South Africa: White River. E

Eight foster parents on the caseload of a Child Welfare South Africa: White River, were identified as potential participants for a focus group discussion. These eight foster parents also formed the population of foster parents who have sexually abused children in their care, on the caseload of Child Welfare South Africa: White River.

Criteria for purposive selection of respondents for focus group discussions:

- Foster Parents of sexually abused children
- Be on the case load of Child Welfare South Africa: White River
- Understanding Afrikaans or English
- Prepared to take part in the focusgroup discussion
- Male or female

These eight foster parents were identified with the help of the Office Manager of Child Welfare White River, contacted and asked to participate in the study. They gave written informed consent by completing the consent form (ADDENDUM B1) Only five foster parents (N=5), 4 female and 1 male attended the focus group discussion, the other indicated telephonically that they wish to withdraw. Although it was a relatively small number of participants, researcher decided to go forward with the research and conduct the focus group discussion as there were no other possible participants available within a relatively reasonable radius.

The participants were between the ages of 34- 45 years of age and each participant had one foster child who had been sexually abused in his/her care. All the participants had at least a matric qualification. Although the

participants, except for one, were married, only one partner of the couple, attended the research discussions. Two of the participants who withdrew, were partners of the participants and indicated that the couple would be presented by the one participant attending. The participants were recruited, screened and attended basic foster parent training presented by the welfare organisation prior to the research. This did not include training specific on sexual abuse and relevant behaviour issues.

A table providing demographical detail regarding the foster children in the care of the participants of the focus group discussion:

Table 2.1: Demographics of the foster children

AGES	3YRS	5YRS	6YRS	7YRS	9YRS	12YRS	17YRS	TOTAL
MALE	1		1	2			1	5
FEMALE		1	2	1	1	1		6
TOTAL	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	11

6.3 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

Focus group discussion was used as a method to collect relevant qualitative data within the qualitative paradigm. According to McRoy (in Fouché & Delpont, 2002:79) the qualitative paradigm is " ...holistic in nature, and aims mainly to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life." In this study the qualitative paradigm was aimed at establishing and understanding the needs of the foster parents of sexually abused children.

The purpose of a focus group discussion is to promote self-disclosure among participants; it is also a cost and time effective way of collecting a large amount of data in a limited time. According to Greeff (2011:361) focus group discussions "*have the ability to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest.*" She is further of the opinion that focus groups are useful when multiple viewpoints or responses are needed on a specific

topic (Greeff, 2011:361). For this study it was necessary to obtain of as much data from different viewpoints, as possible on the possible empowerment needs of the foster parents of sexually abused children. It was therefore the most appropriate way of gathering data for this study. Researcher also view focus group discussions as valuable as the dynamics of the group tends to stimulate participants in revealing more information than when interviewed on an individual basis

Questions were compiled to be utilised in a semi-structured way as not to be too directive but to allow for the participants to be as self-revealing as possible. The questions were thus only utilised as a stimulant to set off discussion in a focussed way, but also not to limit the feedback. These questions were compiled with the input of experts in the field, two foster parents not related to the study, and after a literature review (Delpont, 2010; Erasmus, 2010; Grobler, 2008; Sihlali, 2009). This correlates with the opinion of Greeff (2011:369) of the steps to be followed to compile questions for focus group discussions. It was used as a guideline to direct the focus group discussions in a less structured way.

The following questions were used as a guideline to direct the focus group *discussions* (ADDENDUM C1):

- *What are your most prominent feelings and experiences regarding the foster child/foster care?*
- *What do you regard the most important needs of the foster child/foster care?*
- *What have been the challenges you have experienced in the foster care situation?*
- *Any specific knowledge that you would like to acquire that would enable you to cope better within the foster care situation?*

The feedback from foster parents during this discussion was recorded to ensure the accurate collection, then transcribed and analysed by hand

(Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:397). Researcher ensured that the recording did not intrude excessively on the flow of the discussion (Greeff, 2011:359).

6.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

According to Greeff (2011:373) the analysis and interpretation of focus group data can be very complex and should the data from focus groups be thought of as potentially incompletely collected. She states that though possibly subject to some constraints, the collected data represents the reality of the experiences of the group members. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to collect data during focus group discussions and compare it with literature and interviews with experts. Creswell's (2003:191-195) procedure, as well as Greeff's (2011:373) recommendations for the analysis for focus group discussions were followed. The analysis of the data was done in a process and the following steps were followed (Poggenpoel, 1998:345):

- Transcribe the focus group discussion.
- Read through the data to get an overall impression.
- Code the data (identify core words with different colours).
- Identify themes.
- Describe the themes representing it through graphics or verbatim.
- Interpret data making use of literature.

An important principle that Greeff (2011:373) mentions is that *“analysis must be systematic, sequential, verifiable and continuous: Focus group analysis combines many different elements of qualitative research and, in addition, adds the complexity of group interaction. In analysing, the researcher should consider the words, the context, the internal consistency, frequency of comments, extensiveness of comments, specificity of comments, what was not said, as well as finding the big idea”*. Researcher did the analysis following this principle. Open coding (De Vos, 2011:373) was used to analyse the data into categories, themes and sub-themes and relevant literature was used in the process of comparison. This was done because it was the most useful way to analyse the data. Definite categories, themes and sub-themes were apparent from the discussion group data.

After the recording and transcription of the focus group discussions, the qualitatively analysed information was used as a framework and guideline to develop a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children.

6.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Guba's model of trustworthiness of qualitative research was used to ensure validity (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:419-422). He proposes four strategies to ensure trustworthiness in the categories of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These categories will be discussed next.

CREDIBILITY

The goal is to demonstrate that research was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the phenomena were accurately identified and described (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:419). Foster parents involved as participants were selected with the help of social workers. They all have sexually abused children in their care for at least a year, and thus have applicable knowledge to ensure valuable contributions in the focus group discussion.

TRANSFERABILITY

It is the transferability of one set of findings to another context and is the alternative to external validity or generalisability (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:420, Babbie & Mouton, 2011:277). According to Lincoln and Guba (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:419) triangulation is a strategy to ensure transferability. In this study video recordings were made after which the information was transcribed and field notes were used to verify information. Literature study was done to verify information collected during focus group discussions. Experts were also consulted to verify the information gathered (Delpont, 2010; Erasmus, 2010; Grobler, 2008; Petzer, 2010).

DEPENDABILITY (RELIABILITY)

This criterion of trustworthiness considers the consistency of the data i.e. whether the findings would be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:420). According to Lincoln and Guba (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:420) this is problematic in itself as it implies that the social environment stays unchanged, which is impossible. In this study the procedure is described in detail in order to ensure replicability.

CONFORMABILITY

Conformability is focused on whether the results of the research could be confirmed by another and places the evaluation on the data itself. According to Lincoln and Guba (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:421) it is necessary to ask if the results are confirmed by another study. In this study the results could be confirmed by literature based on other studies. It is ensured through triangulation by focus group discussions, field notes, literature study and discussions with experts.

The overall study will be executed within the framework of the intervention model (De Vos & Strydom, 2011:473). This article will be positioned within the framework of the intervention research model and the specific phase in the following section which focusses on research procedures.

6.6 ETHICAL ISSUES

Babbie (2007:62) defines ethics as both associated with *“morality and both words concern matters of right and wrong.”* He refers to the Webster New World Dictionary which defines ethical as *“conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group.”*

According to Strydom (2011:123) *“the entire research project must run its course in an ethically correct manner. From the composition of the research population, the sampling procedure, the methodology utilised and the*

processing of the data, to the writing of the research report, the researcher should constantly be aware of his or her ethical responsibility.” Attention was given to professional ethical issues regarding the rights of participants and the responsibilities of the researcher (Strydom, 2011:123) during the execution of this research. The following ethical aspects were taken into consideration:

6.6.1 Voluntary Participation

According to Strydom (2011:118) informed consent from participants ensures cooperation of subjects. Participants were informed about the aims of the research. Informed consent was obtained from participants beforehand by signing a consent form (ADDENDUM B1). Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Respondents were informed about the potential impact of the investigation. They were thus not misinformed about the purpose of the research and the methods used. Although they are under obligation to participate in training programmes due to the fact that they are legally bound to give co-operation to the organisation they are affiliated to, they are not obligated to participate in this research. They were not forced to participate in any way.

6.6.2 No harm to the participants

Babbie (2007:63) states *“Social research should never injure the people being studied, regardless of whether they volunteer for the study.”* He is also of the opinion that the researcher should be on the lookout for the subtlest dangers of the participants being harmed psychologically. Researcher informed participants that she is available for therapy should they require it afterwards. They would also be referred to the social worker of the organisation should they request that. No such requests were made during or after the research.

Researcher was aware of her ethical responsibility throughout the research and protected them against any physical or emotional threats. The research took place in the office of the researcher where they had access to sufficient ablution facilities and where they would not be exposed to embarrassment.

Debriefing and grounding was done after the discussion group where participants had the opportunity to discuss any relevant matters.

6.6.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

According to Babbie (2007:64) the biggest concern in research is the protection of the subject's identity. Strydom (2011:119) defines it as follows *"Privacy implies the element of personal privacy, while confidentiality indicates the handling of information in a confidential manner."* Babbie (2007:64) distinguishes between anonymity and confidentiality. He states that confidentiality implies that only the researcher should be aware of the identity of the participants. If staff knows about the identity they should also, together with the researcher be committed with regard to confidentiality. He further delineates anonymity in that no one, *"not even the researcher"* should be able to identify any participants afterwards. In the research the recordings made of the group discussion was stored securely and will be destroyed soon after examination. The transcription was done anonymously.

The principle of confidentiality was adhered to throughout the research process. Information has been treated confidentially and this was conveyed to the respondents and was included in the informed consent form.

6.6.4 Analysis and reporting

According to Babbie (2007:69) researchers have ethical obligations concerning the analysis of data and the reporting thereof. He states that negative finds, should be reported. He states: *"Researchers can best serve their peers – and scientific discovery as a whole – by telling the truth about all the pitfalls and problems they have experienced in a particular line of inquiry."*

Researcher reported the data obtained during the focus group meticulously although she did not always agreed with it. The transcription and the analysis according to themes and sub-themes were made honestly and precisely. No relevant information was withheld.

6.6.5 Actions and competence of researchers

According to Walliman (in Strydom, 2011:123) researchers are “*ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent, honest and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation*”. It is also important that the culture, beliefs and customs and norms of participants be respected (Strydom, 2011:123). Researcher ensured that she is adequately qualified and experienced to execute this research. Researcher already executed similar research and has conducted numerous focus group discussions. She also respected all the participants and valued their input. She acknowledged their availability for the research and acted in an ethical manner.

6.6.6 Ethical committee

The research proposal for this research was reviewed by the ethical committee of the North West University and permission granted for the research to be executed, (NWU-00027-09 S1). According to Strydom (2011:126) these “... *institutional review boards can be regarded as the watchdogs or gatekeepers of society as far as research is concerned...*”

6.6.7 Professional code of ethics

The South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) issued a publication Policy of conduct, code of ethics and the rules for caring professions (2006). All the ethical issues regarding social work research was adhered to in this research and used as a guideline in executing the research (SACSSP, 2006:9-12).

7. DEFINITIONS

7.1 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse refers to sexual abuse of a child by an adult, or some other person significantly older or in a position of power or control over the child, where the child is used for sexual stimulation of another person (American Humane, 2008:1; O'Connor & Schaefer, 1994:319).

Munro (2000:1) defines child sexual abuse as follows: “*Child sexual abuse is any form of sexual activity with a child by an adult, or by another child where*

there is no consent or consent is not possible; or by another child who has power over the child. By this definition, it is possible for a child to be sexually abused by another child who is younger than they are”.

The sexual activities may include all forms of sexual contact including “*oral-genital, genital, or anal contact by or to the child or abuse that does not involve contact, such as exhibitionism, voyeurism, or using the child in the production of pornography, also humiliation, and sexual torture*” (New Hampshire Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2008:1; Orton, 1997:90; Townsend & Dawes, 2004: 55).

7.2 EMPOWERMENT NEEDS

The term empowerment is a complex and multi-dimensional concept used in different disciplines. Empowerment is also a concept central to the strengths perspective. Barker (1997:153) defines empowerment as follows: “*the process of helping individuals, families, groups and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances*”.

Another possible definition: “*Empowerment is a process of helping people to assert control over the factors which affect their lives (Barr, 1995:123; Gibson, 2006:354).*

In order to develop an empowerment programme for foster parents with sexually abused foster children it is necessary to identify the needs in which areas they need to be empowered.

7.3 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Babbie (2007:308) gives the following description of a focus group: “*A group of subjects interviewed together, prompting a discussion.*” Green and Thorogood in Alpaslan (2010:22) are of the opinion that: “*A focus group interview or discussion is, in essence, a small (Usually six to twelve people) group brought together to discuss a particular issue, under the direction of a facilitator who has a list of topics to discuss*”. For the purpose of this part of

the study a focus group was used to interview foster parents with sexually abused foster children in their care to discuss and gather information regarding the specific empowerment needs of the foster parents, to enable them to cope within their foster care situation and that will improve their psychosocial functioning.

7.4 FOSTER CARE

The Children's Amendment Act, 41 of 2007 (SA, 2008:12) describes foster care as follows: *"foster care' means care of a child as described in section 180(1) and includes foster care in a registered cluster foster care scheme."* Section 180 (SA, 2008:72) states:

"(1) A child is in foster care if the child has been placed in the care of a person who is not the parent or guardian of the child as a result of –

an order of a children's court; or

a transfer in terms of section 171.

(2) Foster care excludes the placement of a child-

(a) in temporary safe care: or

(b) in the care of a child and youth care centre.

(3) A children's court may place a child in foster care –

(a) with a person who is not a family member of the child:

(b) with a family member who is not the parent or guardian of the child; or

(c) in a registered cluster foster care scheme."

Foster care is the placement of a child, who needs to be removed from the parental home, into the custody of a suitable family or person willing to be foster parents. This is done by order of the Children's Court (Cape Gateway, 2009:1).

Foster care can be summarized as the care of children by some one other than biological parents, appointed by the children's court to act as foster parents.

7.5 FOSTER PARENT

Although this term has a wide variety of possible definitions, it is generally used to refer to *“adults who is appointed by the state to provide a temporary home for children whose birth parents are unable to care for them. These services may be provided with or without compensation, and can often continue for several months or even years, depending on the circumstances of the child and the foster parents”* (Adoption Glossary, 2009: 1).

The Children's Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007), (SA, 2008:12) provides the following definition of a foster parent: *“**foster parent** means a person who has foster care of a child by order of the children's court, and includes an active member of an organisation operating a cluster foster care scheme and who has been assigned responsibility for the foster care of a child.”*

For the purpose of this study a foster parent will be a single person or a couple who has a foster child in his/her care by order of the children's court, and excludes cluster foster homes.

In South Africa, foster parents are not yet compensated for taking care of a foster child, but a foster care grant is paid by government to cover part of the expenses towards caring for a foster child.

Foster parents can be described as alternative parents for children removed from the care of their parents who are not able, for a variety of reasons, to care for the child on a temporary or permanent basis.

8. DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL DATA OBTAINED FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Five foster parents (N=5) took part in the focus group discussion. As participants were both English and Afrikaans, the discussions took place in

both languages. Quotations will therefore be made in Afrikaans and English as uttered during the discussions. Two group discussions of one-and-a-half-hours each were conducted with the same participants. It was conducted in the researcher's office on a Saturday morning. Refreshments were provided.

The following questions were used as a guideline in the focus group discussions in a semi-structured way.

- What are your most prominent feelings and experiences regarding the foster child that has been sexually abused or foster care?
- What do you regard the most important needs that you have regarding the foster child that has been sexually abused or foster care?
- What are the challenges you have experienced in the foster care situation in regards to the sexually abused foster child?
- Any specific knowledge that you would like to acquire to enable you to cope better within the foster care situation in regards to the sexually abused foster child?

Data obtained from the focus group discussions were analysed according to the procedure described by Tesh for the analyses of qualitative data. Open coding (Schurink, *et al.*, 2011:412) was used to investigate the data in order to categorise the phenomena '*needs of foster parents of sexually abused children*'.

Two main categories namely: **(1) feelings, experiences and challenges** of foster parents of sexually abused children and, **(2) needs** of foster parents of sexually abused children were identified. Ten themes and eleven sub-themes were derived and identified. A summary is presented in the following table and thereafter it is discussed in more detail.

Table 2.2: Categories, Themes and sub-themes

CATEGORIES		THEMES		SUB-THEMES	
1.	Feelings,	1.	Foster care is	1.	Contact with biological

	experiences and challenges of foster parents of sexually abused children.		challenging. (Underlying need is for self-care to be able to cope with foster care)		parents is challenging.
		2.	Feelings of failure and disappointment.		
		3.	Ambivalent feelings	2.	Fear to lose the child vs. wishing to bond.
				3.	Feelings of unwillingness to continue fostering.
		4.	Feelings of discomfort, disbelief, embarrassment and anger.		
		5.	Feelings of contentment, sympathy and urge to protect.		
		6.	Positive feelings towards the impact of foster care.		
2.	Needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.	7.	Need to understand the foster child's behaviour.	4.	Need more information on normal child development and how it is impacted on by sexual abuse.
				5.	Need more information on the specific foster child.

		8.	Need knowledge on how to cope with the child's sexualised behaviour .	6.	Need more knowledge on sexualised behaviour.
				7.	Need to acquire knowledge on how to deal with the sexualised behaviour.
		9.	Need for guidance on contact between child and biological parents .	8.	Needs information on contact with the biological parents and how to manage it and the child's related behaviour.
		10.	Need for support .	9.	Need support from professionals .
				10.	Needs support from fellow foster parents .
				11.	Need for self-care .

8.1 CATEGORY ONE: FEELINGS, EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF FOSTER PARENTS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

Although the aim of this article is to establish the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children, these needs cannot be separated from the feelings experiences, and challenges of the foster parents. Underlying to these feelings, experiences and challenges are unspoken needs that can be derived after careful scrutiny (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:416). During data analysis, underlying themes were taken into consideration in order to obtain a more holistic impression of the needs of the foster parents.

The following categories, themes and sub-themes were identified as part of the answers to two of the overarching questions:

- What are your most prominent **feelings and experiences** regarding the foster child that has been sexually abused or foster care?
- What are the **challenges** you have experienced in the foster care situation in regards with the sexually abused foster child?

Table 2.2.1: Category 1, themes and sub-themes

	THEMES		SUB-THEMES
1.	Foster care is challenging . (Underlying need is for self-care to be able to cope with foster care.)	1.	Contact with biological parents is challenging.
2.	Feelings of failure and disappointment and being overwhelmed .		
3.	Ambivalent feelings.	1.	Fear to lose the child vs. wishing to bond.
		2.	Feelings of unwillingness to continue fostering.
4.	Feelings of discomfort, disbelief, embarrassment and anger .		
5.	Feelings of contentment, sympathy and urge to protect .		
6.	Positive feelings towards the impact of foster care.		

8.1.1 THEME ONE: FOSTER CARE IS CHALLENGING

On the question about their feelings and experiences, most of the participants' reaction was that they feel that foster care is challenging. The following comments were made:

- "DIS HARDE WERK... JY BELÊ, BELÊ." (IT IS HARD WORK. YOU INVEST IN THE CHILD.)
- "DIS HARDE WERK. EK DINK REGTIG SO." (IT IS HARD WORK. I REALLY THINK SO.)

- “JIS DIT WAS BAIE ERG, JA. IN DIE BEGIN ... DIT WAS BAIE ERG ...” (IT WAS BAD, IN THE BEGINNING... IT WAS BAD).

These comments compacted in a few words hold the emotional, physical, financial and social turmoil experienced by foster parents that cannot always be described in precise words, when fostering a sexually abused child. All the other participants wholeheartedly agreed that fostering a sexually abused child is challenging, and one participant said that especially in the beginning it was very “*bad*” or challenging for her family.

Although the foster parents acknowledged that foster care can have a positive impact on sexually abused children, they verbalised that it is very hard and demanding work for foster parents to foster a child, especially a child that was sexually abused. Pollock and Farmer (2005:18) also confirm that placement of sexually abused children poses particular challenges and that caring for them can be a demanding task. According to Single (2005:44) foster parents can sometimes feel as if they are in an “*alien environment*” when caring for foster children. They might have successfully raised their biological children, but when it comes to the severe behavioural problems of their foster child, they feel at a loss. This might cause the foster parent feeling a “*failure*”, and becoming depressed and experience a lowered self-esteem.

Two things that were mentioned as outstanding were: contact with biological parents and that they themselves sometimes feel overwhelmed by the demands of providing foster care.

8.1.1.1 SUB-THEME: CONTACT WITH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS IS CHALLENGING

According to Raising Children Network Australia (2011:2) “*contact between children and their biological parents and siblings is the most important factor influencing outcomes for children in foster care. This contact is a key factor in the development of children’s identities and resilience, and their perceptions of security and stability. It also prepares them for being reunited with their birth families*”. They are further of the opinion that foster parents may find

contact challenging when they have mixed feelings towards the biological parents, or if they feel the biological parents resent them. They may also feel uncomfortable if children have mixed feelings about their biological parents, or develop conflicts of loyalty between their foster and biological parents (Raising Children Network Australia, 2011:2).

The reaction of participants in the focus group discussions was similar to those described above. Their body language revealed held-in anger and unhappiness that contact between the foster children and their biological parents is allowed at all.

Reactions were as follows:

- ***“Want dit is soms ‘n situasie dat die ma nie kom nie, en dan moet ek die kind voorberei of moet ek nie.”*** (If the mother promised to visit, but does not. Should I in future prepare the child for visits or not.)
- ***“...want die ouers beloof hulle in hulle gesigte ons gaan vir jou dit en dit en dit koop en dan draai hulle om en gaan koop ‘n...”*** (The parents promise to buy something, but does not do it.)
- ***“We need to realise that alle ouers wat hulle kinders laat weggaan is foutief and the needy people are always needy so they will do to you exactly what the children are doing to you, so get used to it.”***
- ***“...sy gee nie ‘n hel om vir jou nie, en nog minder vir haar kinders.”*** (She does not care about us, and even less for her children.)
- ***“Want sy is selfgesentreerd (selfregverdig...)”*** (She is self-centred.)

Raising Children Network Australia (2011:2) list the following challenges that foster parents and especially foster parents of sexually abused children experience. It also summarises most of the feelings and needs expressed by the foster parents in the focus group discussions, but has also been discussed under different themes and sub-themes:

- *feeling there’s no-one to talk to when a crisis occurs, and finding it stressful to deal with children’s complex needs (theme 10)*

- *feeling there's inadequate training and support for dealing with foster children's specific needs (theme 8)*
- *feeling frustrated they can't access information about foster children in relation to difficult or problem behaviours or health problems (theme 8)*
- *finding it difficult to cope with the costs related to children with special needs*
- *being unsure of how to deal with the complex emotional reactions of children after they've seen their biological parents (theme 9)*
- *having mixed feelings towards the biological parents of the child in their care (theme 1)*
- *having difficulty with their own feelings of emotional attachment to the child in their care (theme 1 and 3)*
- *dealing with social and government agencies.*
- *one of the main issues is dealing with foster children's difficult behaviour, which may be violent, antisocial or sexualised. " (theme 7)*

8.1.2 THEME TWO: FEELING A FAILURE, DISAPPOINTMENT AND BEING OVERWHELMED

The early period in placement tends to be a high-risk period according to Kadushin (1980:359). The reason being because the foster parents feel a sense of frustration and anxiety when they do not see any sign of positive change in the child. Reactions from the focus group discussions that reflects these feelings, include:

- ***"I feel I should be able to control the situation."***
- ***" I make mistakes..."***
- ***" I know no matter how much ... it will never be enough..."***
- ***Jy het gedink jy gaan 'n positiewe invloed op hulle hê."*** (you thought that you would have a positive influence.)
- ***"Ons het baie foute gemaak en baie dinge gemis..."*** (We made many mistakes and missed a lot of things...)

- ***“I feel guilty. I don’t want to feel a failure...”***
- ***“Ek is oorweldig...”*** (I am overwhelmed...)
- ***“Ek kan nie ‘cope’ nie, ek het ‘n werk, ‘n man, kinders...”*** (I can not cope, I have a job, a husband, children...)
- ***“Sometimes it is just too much...”***
- ***“...dit was vir my ‘n haatlike situasie jy wil eintlik hierdie kind verwerp omdat sy met jou man dit doen...”***
- ***“Ek was deurmekaar...”*** (I was confused...)

Kadushin (1980:359) states that the social worker should assure the foster parents that his/her *“occasional negative feelings towards the foster child are understandable, acceptable and normal and that an occasional failure in dealing with the foster child is inevitable. Negative behaviour on the part of the child is not a reflection of any inadequacy on their part as parents”*.

8.1.3 THEME THREE: FEELINGS OF AMBIVALENCE

Feelings of ambivalence seem to be part and parcel of everyday life of fostering a sexually abused child as it is part of general parenting. The feelings of ambivalence expressed during the focus group discussions falls under two sub-themes as follows:

8.1.3.1 SUB-THEME: FEAR TO LOSE THE CHILD VS. WISHING TO BOND

All the participants expressed the fear to lose the child in their care when he/she is reunited with the biological parents. As a consequence of this fear, foster parents are experiencing ambivalent feelings regarding becoming attached to the child or not, in order to protect themselves against being emotionally hurt.

- ***“YOU WANT TO BOND... YOU WANT TO GIVE THE CHILD EVERYTHING... BUT YOU DISTANCE YOURSELF FROM THE CHILD... BUT YOU ARE PUTTING YOURSELF ON THE CAREFUL SIDE - GUARD YOURSELF.”***
- ***“... BECAUSE THEY ARE GOING TO TAKE HIM AWAY...”***

- “...AND THAT IS THE LACK OF PERMANENCY.”
- “THE PARENTS ARE GOING TO COME AND TAKE THIS CHILDREN...”
- “THESE PARENTS CAN WALK IN AT ANY TIME AND TAKE THE CHILDREN.”

These quotes project an implied fear felt by foster parents that they will not be allowed to have contact with the child after reunification with the biological parents. This links with the opinion expressed by the South African National Council for Child Welfare (1996:90) when they describe the task of severance by the foster parents as “...*the task found most difficult and often feared by the foster parents...*” They further state that the foster parent are always aware of the fact that the child may return to his own parents, but can easily deny to themselves the fact that the social workers are actually working with the parents in order to enable the return of the foster child to them.

On the one hand foster parents fear that they will lose the child, but on the other hand they must give much of themselves to ensure that the child’s developmental needs are met effectively. They become increasingly attached to the child, but must always be prepared to let go of the child. The result of this is a constant internal push and pull dynamic, which may cause continuous ambivalent feelings experienced by the foster parent.

Most of the time foster parents don’t know how long they’ll be looking after the children in their care. This uncertainty can contribute to feelings of instability and ambivalence for everyone – biological parents, children and foster parents. It may be only for a few months, or it may be permanent, depending on the biological parents’ situation and also relates to the reason and circumstances why the child was removed in the first instance apart from the sexual abuse as applicable for this article.

Children require fostering for various reasons. Some of these are (Raising Children Network Australia (2011:3):

- *“the home life of the biological parent is unhealthy or inadequate for the child*

- *there might be domestic violence or a history of sexual assault or physical abuse*
- *parents might be in jail or suffering from drug abuse issues.*
- *parents might be suffering mental health issues or intellectual disability”.*

All the above reasons would play a role in the reunification of the foster child with his parents and the time the child will spend in the care of the foster parents. This fear might be much worse in the case where foster children were sexually abused, especially if contact with the alleged perpetrator is still possible. This should be acknowledged and addressed in an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children.

8.1.3.2 SUB-THEME: FEELINGS OF UNWILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE FOSTERING

McDaniel *et al.* (2011:57) refer to research done by Newton *et al.* that demonstrates that the behaviour of the foster child, *“particularly externalising behaviours, is the strongest predictor of placement disruption and is cited as one of the most common reasons for foster carers to request the removal of a child.”*

The following comment from the focus group discussion demonstrates the same feelings:

“I ask every day.. Can I carry on? The review of the case is coming up soon and I ask myself ...do I have enough to make a further commitment to actually carry on with this child. But I do not give up easily”.

This foster mother expressed her emotional turmoil in the above quotation, after her husband left her and she had to be a single foster mother with a foster child with extremely challenging behaviour.

Another foster mother described the foster care situation comparing it with the metaphor, of a child born out of wedlock – *“a child of your husband and the biological mother died”*. This view ties together the above theme of ambivalence and unwillingness to continue fostering, as she views the child

as part of her family, but still having negative feelings towards the child, but cannot give up on the child due to feelings of commitment. She used this to motivate her fellow participants to not give up on a child in their foster care.

8.1.4 THEME FIVE: FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT, DISBELIEF, EMBARRASSMENT AND ANGER

Under the previous sub-themes it became clear that foster parents have an eagerness to care for the children in their care. But despite this eagerness they often experience negative feelings as result of the children's behaviour and this confuses them. It causes them to become anxious and they may feel out of control. This is underlined by Guishard-Pine, *et al.* (2007:34) when they state: *“Very often when a child in your care is driving you to distraction, it is natural to find yourself tuning in to the negatives – how they disrupt, how they hurt themselves, how unhelpful certain ways of behaving are, and even how their behaviour does not make sense to you.”*

Foster parents in the study had exactly these experiences. The feelings evoked by some sexually abused foster children were delineated during the focus group discussions by all the participants as discomfort, embarrassment, disbelief and anger. Comments were:

- ***“...ek begin ongemaklik voel. Hierdie situasie is onwerklik.”*** (I begin to feel uncomfortable. This situation is unreal.)
- ***“en dit raak verskriklik ongemaklik...”*** (and it becomes terribly uncomfortable)
- ***“I felt uncomfortable...”***
- ***“Dit is nogal bietjie embarrassing. (dis ongemaklik)”***
- ***“... jy wonder ‘is it real or not real’.”***
- ***“Dit is nogal ‘embarrassing’.”***
- ***“En sy hou aan en aan en aan en sy druk totdat jy reageer.”*** (She keeps on and on and on and push you until you react.)
- ***“I get angry everyday...like losing it...”***

An element of shock was also verbalised because of the fact that the child's behaviour was not expected: ***"I can't belief she is doing that..."***

Pearce and Pezzot-Pearce (2001:19) refers to feelings towards foster children as that of *"...desperation and frustration of those who care for them."*

Researcher concurs with Delaney (2007a:1) that foster parents often are unsure what to do when children exhibit sexualised behaviour, especially if they have not received specialised training on sexual abuse. *"At first they may not believe what they are seeing, and might ask themselves, **"Is this child really acting sexually, or do I not understand what is happening?"** They question whether the sexual behaviour is normal or not, and what to do to keep the child and others safe from this behaviour, and at the same time be aware of their own negative feelings towards the child"*. One participant verbalised it as follows very strongly: ***"...dit was vir my 'n haatlike situasie ... jy wil eintlik hierdie kind verwerp..."*** (it was an appalling situation ... I wanted to reject this child.)

Researcher is of the opinion that all the above feelings are rooted in the feeling of being out of control because of a lack of knowledge on how to act and deal with such behaviour by the sexually abused foster child. This is further elaborated on under category two as the need for information on the behaviour of sexually abused children and how to handle this behaviour.

8.1.5 THEME FOUR: FEELINGS OF CONTENTMENT, SYMPATHY AND URGE TO PROTECT

A wide range of feelings and experiences were expressed by the foster parents during the focus group discussions. It varied on a spectrum from negative to positive. Three different feelings are discussed under one theme here, as the purpose is for the reader to become aware of the spectrum of feelings that foster parents of sexually abused children experienced on a daily basis.

Guishard-Pine *et al.* (2007:13) state that the key to foster parents increasing their understanding of the children they are fostering is their self-understanding of the range of feelings that the child evokes in them.

One foster parent expressed feelings of contentment about fostering the child:

- ***“Dit is tog lekker. Ons het almal moeilike situasies, maar dit maak die lekker soveel lekkerder.”*** (*It is nice though. We all experience difficult situations, but it makes it so much nicer.*)

It is clear that although foster parents experience difficulties they also enjoy and have positive feelings towards foster care in general. Foster parents thus also find fostering rewarding. Flowing from this positive feeling, one foster parent expressed feelings of sympathy towards the child.

- ***“...‘n mens kry daai kind eintlik jammer...”*** (You feel sorry for the child)

Following this, another parent expressed the wish to protect the child from any further harm and even from the past hurt and harm:

- ***“...ons wou die kind so toe maak van al die seer wat sy gehad het”.*** (*We wanted to protect the child from the hurt that she experienced.*)

The flow of feelings of the foster parents indicated that they feel positive towards the foster situation and that the foster child evokes feelings of sympathy and the urge to protect the foster child from hurt. This correlates with what Spies (2006:274) says when she states that *“foster parents have an urge to nurture and protect these children; to be very close with them; to try to change their destructive behaviour; and to speak out against the person who abused them”*. She further offers a warning to foster parents that they should be careful when responding to these feelings they are experiencing because it may not be the needs of the foster children, resulting in the children becoming aggressive and/or withdraw from the family system (Spies: 2006:274). This is

why it is so important that foster parents are able to identify the needs of the sexually abused foster child and to be very sensitive in the way they act out on their own feelings.

8.1.6 THEME FIVE: POSITIVE FEELINGS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF FOSTER CARE

According to Raising Children Network Australia (2011:2) becoming a foster parent is an important decision and demand significant commitment. They describe foster parenting as being more than a parent and continue as follows: *“The rewards include contributing and making a difference to a child’s life, but fostering can be challenging in ways that can affect carers physically, emotionally and financially”*. This positive view was expressed by participants in the following way:

- ***“Pleegsorg vir my werk. As ‘n mens pleegouers het wat regtig ‘n verskil in kinders se lewens wil maak...”*** (Fostering works for me. If foster parents want to make a difference in children’s lives.)
- ***“Solank die kind in my huis is, is dit my kind, as hy teruggaan het, ek belê in hom.”*** (As long as the child is in my home, it is my child, when he returns, I invested in him.)
- ***“Jy los iets agter vir die kind. Jy belê, belê.”*** (You give something to the child, you invest, invest.)

They are able to make, and have already made, a difference in the lives of the foster children. They feel that foster care is a kind of investment in the foster children’s future. This investment includes the foster parents, energy, time, finances, and emotional investment. Researcher is of the opinion that the participants expressed the abovementioned feelings about investing in the children, because they want to make a difference in the children’s lives, but that it can sometimes be very draining for a foster parent to keep on giving out on a physical and emotional level, without receiving any support or nurturing themselves. Guishard-Pine *et al.* (2007:13) state: *“In truly understanding their*

(foster children) needs you will discover that, as a foster carer, the most valuable tool you have to give a child in your care is yourself.”

This view is based on the experience of foster parents expressed as fear to let the foster child return to his or her biological parents. They put in so much hard work and have invested in the child only to let him/her go back to less than ideal circumstances. These issues are important to be included and addressed incorporated in an empowerment programme for foster parents.

8.2 CATEGORY TWO: NEEDS OF FOSTER PARENTS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

The guiding questions focussing on eliciting information regarding the **needs** of the foster parents used during the focus group discussions were:

- What do you regard the most important **needs** that you have regarding the foster child that has been sexually abused or foster care?
- Any specific **knowledge** that you would like to acquire to enable you to cope better within the foster care situation with regards to the sexually abused foster child?

The responses are summarised in the following: one category, four themes and eight sub-themes:

Table 2.2.2: Category 2, themes and sub-themes

	CATEGORY		THEMES		SUB-THEMES
2.	Needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.	7.	Need to understand the foster child's behaviour .	4.	Need more information on normal child development and how it is impacted on by sexual abuse.
				5.	Need more information on the specific foster child .

		8.	Need knowledge on how to cope with the child's sexualised behaviour .	6.	Need more knowledge on sexualised behaviour.
				7.	Need to acquire knowledge on how to deal with the sexualised behaviour.
		9.	Need for guidance on contact between child and biological parents .	8.	Needs information on contact with the biological parents and how to manage it and the child's related behaviour.
		10.	Need for support .	9.	Need support from professionals .
				10.	Needs support from fellow foster parents .
				11.	Need for self-care .

8.2.1 THEME SEVEN: NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR AND SPECIFICALLY SEXUALISED BEHAVIOUR

Together with the reasons why children are put in foster care, it is also necessary that foster parents would have knowledge on how the children generally feel about their situation. Their behaviour is also a symptom of many complex and disturbing emotional issues. The following are some of these emotional issues according to the Raising Children's Network Australia (2011:3) and Foster Care (2005:1) for children put into foster care:

- *“blaming themselves for being removed from their birth parents*
- *wanting to return to their birth parents, even in abuse cases*
- *feeling unwanted or rejected, particularly if they're waiting to be adopted*

- *feeling unsettled about changes in foster parents, or having mixed feelings about their foster parents*
- *feeling uncertain of their future or identity*
- *being traumatised from episodes of abuse or neglect”.*

In the case of a child having been sexually abused, Lodwick and Meyer (2006:1) list the following feelings of the abused child victim:

- *“Frustrated by the contradictions surrounding the abusive relationship*
- *Burdened with a secret that cannot be shared, this leads to feelings of alienation and separation*
- *Harbours guilt over feelings of enjoyment during the sexual contact*
- *Feelings of remorse and sorrow, along with blame and responsibility for what has happened*
- *Feels used*
- *Feels dirty and damaged (physically & emotionally)*
- *Has difficulty trusting others”*

Participants expressed the fact that the foster child would exhibit behaviour, and especially sexualised behaviour that they were not prepared for or did not have the knowledge or skills to react on appropriately. In order to understand the child’s behaviour better it is also necessary to know why children are placed in foster care.

This theme could further be divided into two sub-themes:

8.2.1.1 SUB-THEME: NEED TO HAVE MORE INFORMATION ON NORMAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND HOW IT IS IMPACTED ON BY SEXUAL ABUSE.

It is important that foster parents are able to distinguish between normal behaviours for varying ages and behaviour that indicate unmet developmental needs (Fahlberg, 1994:68). This will enable foster parents to provide suitable guidance and to understand covert needs of the sexually abused foster child

and how they can be assisted in expressing these needs overtly in an acceptable way.

- **“Ek wil nie te veel detail hê nie, net algemene inligting...”** (*I do not want too much detail, only general information.*)

The challenging behaviour of the foster child may put the relationship between the foster parents (marital relationship) at jeopardy as indicated by the following comments:

- **“...dan begin sy *stories opmaak oor hom.*”** (Then she starts making up stories about him.)
- **“...vir haar was dit... *sodra dit intiem is, moet dit seksueel wees*”** (*For her it was sexual whenever it was close.*)
- **“*n Mens moet voorbereid wees...*”** (One should be prepared...)

This concurs with what O'Hagan (1989:151) states: *“...that foster fathers in particular are very apprehensive of sexually abused girls whose behaviour is disgustingly sexualized.”* He goes further to state that social workers should be aware of the risk that foster fathers will recognize their own vulnerability, and may feel dishonest or cowardly in not being able to say so. Researcher is of the opinion that this links specifically with the psychosocial functioning of the foster parents and that it could have a detrimental effect on the relationship between foster parents, should the foster child act out sexually towards the foster parent of the opposite sex. If this is not handled in a mature way it could lead to marital difficulties and even separation of the foster parents. It could also lead to the breakdown of the foster care placement if the children of the foster parents are exposed to such behaviour or even worse involved in it.

This was the experience of one of the participants and she verbalised it as follows:

- **“*Dit veroorsaak wrywing tussen my en my man...*”** (*It causes friction between my husband and I...*)

Participants also made the following comments regarding sexualised behaviour of the foster child:

- *“...it was just **not the kind behaviour** that you would expect from a four and a half year old.”*
- *“**Maar die gedrag, jy besef (was nie voorbereid) nie van die gedrag wat uitkom nie.**” (You were not prepared for this type of behaviour).*

The foster parents described the behaviour of the children as not age appropriate and that they did not expect that kind of behaviour from the children. They expressed the need to be prepared for such behaviour before the child is placed with them and that they would be able to understand the child's behaviour, as well as on going in-service-training and support as described under the last theme requesting support. They also need guidance and training in order to intervene in an effective way. This need has also been found to be pertinent by Everett (1995:386) when he states: *“foster parents requires competence and knowledge in many areas: child development; behaviour management; cultural diversity; the philosophy and practice of permanency planning; the effects of separation and placement on children and their families; and the needs of children who have experienced physical and sexual abuse”*.

The importance for foster parents having this knowledge in order to contribute towards the healing of the foster child can be formulated as follows: “With guidance and support from nurturing adults, children in foster care are capable of overcoming the repercussions of previous abuse and neglect” (Foster Care, 2009:1).

All the participants expressed the need to have detailed background information regarding the specific child placed in their care in order to understand him/her better. According to Single (2005:40) behavioural problems in children are usually the outward expressions of emotional conflict or attachment damage. He further explains that most foster parents find that many behavioural problems are spontaneously resolved, but that some

abused children do not fully recover from earlier traumatic experiences, or even deteriorate in behaviour when they experience a crisis. According to Runyan and Fullerton (in Puddy & Jackson, 2005:988) half of foster children in the United States are victims of sexual abuse. This revelation places the emphasis on pre-placement events that place foster children at-risk for behaviour problems that require effective child management techniques in foster placement.

Noll (2008:604) is of the opinion that the importance of assessing the impact of childhood sexual abuse throughout development of the child should not be understated. She states that “...*some forms of early abuse sequelae do not manifest until late adolescence or young adulthood, and many victims display “sleeper effects” of trauma that are triggered as issues associated with being abused become increasingly salient later in development*”. This became evident in the focus group discussions and one participant made the following comment regarding sexualised behaviour that surface in the teenage years:

- ***“Toe hulle klein was, was hulle ok, maar nou kom alles uit...”*** (It was ok when they were little, but it all surfaces now...)

Often the emotional climate in the foster home, and particularly empathy for the child, is of utmost importance in creating an environment facilitating positive behavioural change in the child (Single, 2005:39). If the foster parents can truly understand the reasons for the child’s emotional turmoil, it enables them to be tolerant and respond in an appropriate way (Single, 2005:39). This emphasises the importance of the foster parents having detailed knowledge of the past experiences of the sexually abused foster child. Guishard-Pine *et al.* (2007:13) sends out a word of warning when they mention that it is a skill that the social worker should acquire to attune the foster parent to the needs of the child without breaching confidentiality.

8.2.1.2 SUB-THEME: NEED TO HAVE MORE INFORMATION ON THE SPECIFIC FOSTER CHILD.

The foster parents in this research also expressed the need to have knowledge of the background and earlier experiences and traumas of the sexually abused child in their foster care. The foster parents' opinions and requests were expressed in the following way:

“THAT WE CAN ... MAYBE IF WE UNDERSTAND WHAT THE CHILD SUFFERED...THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND.”

“... JY VERSTAAN DAAI KIND WAARUIT SY KOM, AS JY HAAR AGTERGROND KEN”. (YOU UNDERSTAND THE CHILD, WHERE SHE COMES FROM WHEN YOU KNOW HER BACKGROUND.)

“...WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE YOURSELF...”

Sexually abused children often try to show or tell others what happened to them by doing or acting out what was done to them. In an attempt to gain a sense of mastery over the trauma that happened to them, children may repeat the events in a symbolic form. Especially male victims of sexual abuse may attempt to overcome their feelings of helplessness by doing to other children what was done to them – identification with the aggressor (Wallace, 2002:73). Sexual behaviour may be targeted toward other children in the home causing foster parents to fear that the sexualised child will *tutor* the other children about sexual behaviour (Delaney, 2007a:1).

Farmer & Pollock (2003:2) found that foster children who exhibited sexualised behaviour also experience difficulties setting suitable boundaries and thus are at risk for being revictimised. It is necessary that the foster parents be prepared on how to act in such situations in order to protect all the children in their home.

Through expressing these opinions, it is clear that the foster parents do not have any, or limited knowledge or insight regarding the dynamics of sexually abused children and their behaviour. This thus emphasise the need for foster parents to be empowered on what to expect regarding needs and behaviour

of sexually abused foster children. This is confirmed in literature by Triseliotis *et al.* (1995:46) when they express the opinion that “...*knowledge and skills combined with commitment, are more likely to lead to carers being successful, and hence finding the task rewarding.*”

Regarding the specific knowledge and skills the foster parents need to acquire, Pollock and Farmer (in Spies, 2006:275) are of the opinion that the foster parent needs to know at least the following about the sexually abused child in their care to be able to contribute to the healing process of the sexually abused child:

- *“The child’s ability to deal with emotional closeness.*
- *The way the child accommodates physical closeness.*
- *Possible shame and guilt feelings regarding the sexual abuse.*
- *The quality of the relationship between the sexually abused child and the biological parents.*
- *The way the child perceives personal and generational boundaries.*
- *Any form of destructive behaviour patterns that already exist in the child’s life as a way of coping with the pain of the abuse.*
- *The quality of the child’s self-concept.*
- *The person who abused the child and whether this person was male or female.*
- *The quality of the child’s peer relationships.”*

Derived from the information gathered during the focus group discussions, it is clear that foster parents do not only need to have knowledge on the behaviour of foster children, but they also need to have skills and knowledge on how to cope with it. This will be discussed in the following sub-theme.

8.2.2 THEME EIGHT: NEED KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO COPE WITH THE CHILD’S SEXUALISED BEHAVIOUR

Farmer and Pollock (2003:112) are of the opinion that foster parents have a need to be trained on information regarding sexual abuse, as well as practical

advice on how to deal with sexualised behaviours. It was expressed as follows by one participant in the focus group discussions:

- ***“I would like to know what behaviour to expect and different ways of dealing with it.”***

These needs are discussed into more detail under sub-themes next:

8.2.2.1 SUB-THEME: NEED MORE KNOWLEDGE ON SEXUALISED BEHAVIOUR.

The research of Farmer and Pollock (2003:112) confirms that sexually abused children prefer that foster parents be aware of any special needs they have, because it will create a safe and secure environment in which they can feel safe to venture out and take more risks in life. If foster parents are informed about the child’s specific trauma and level of functioning at the time of placement, the children do not need to share the information again with the new foster family or explain their behaviour. Due to the dynamics of sexual abuse, children most of the time do not understand why they act the way they do. Some of them even indicate that they often feel foster parents do not believe that they themselves do not know why they behave in certain way (Pollock & Farmer 2005:26). According to Spies (2006:275) sexually abused children can learn to trust again and, the healing process can begin if they experience that they are in a safe home where the situation is dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Parenting children who have been sexually abused requires knowledge and skills on how and why to set boundaries (e.g., about touching) and special understanding when it comes to certain challenging behaviours, such as a child’s need to masturbate (Children’s services practice notes, 2000a:4). Reactions from the participants regarding requiring more knowledge are:

- ***“I want to be empowered and know beforehand what to do. I can’t always phone people. I would like to do it on my own.”***
- ***“Inligting maak jou sterker...”*** (*Information makes you stronger...*)

Child sexual abuse is “*profoundly a disruptive, disorienting and destructive experience, the victim has experience a degree of physical and emotional stimulation beyond a child’s capacity to understand*” (Lodwick & Meyer, 2006:1).

The next sub-theme will discuss the need on how to deal with the sexualised behaviour.

8.2.2.2 SUB-THEME: NEED TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE SEXUALISED BEHAVIOUR.

This need became very evident in this study when it was verbalised and agreed to by all the other participants:

- **“*Ons weet nie hoe om dit te hanteer nie...*”** (We do not know how to handle it.)
- **“*If I had more knowledge of what behaviour she would exhibit and how to deal with it...*”**
- **“*Die ding is as jy ook nie vir hulle daai seksuele aandag gee nie, dan voel hulle verwerp.*”** (If you do not give them sexual attention they feel rejected.)
- **“*Jy is nie lief vir haar nie, want jy doen nie wat sy wil hê nie ...*”** (You do not love her because you do not want to do what she asks.)
- **“*vir hom was dit... sodra dit intiem is, moet dit seksueel wees...*”** (For him it was... as soon as it is intimate, it should be sexual...)

Sexually abused children often act out sexually towards other children in the home raising foster parents’ fears that the sexualised child will ‘*tutor*’ the other children about sexual behaviour (Delaney, 2007b:3). Respondents experienced it and contributions included the following:

- **“*Sy het byvoorbeeld op my seuns gaan lê...*”** (She was on top of my sons...)
- **“*Sy flirt met hom.*”** (She flirts with him..)

- ***“En dit was vir ons om haar te leer, daar is die streep.”*** (And it was to tell her that is enough...)
- ***“Sy het ook gedink seks is aandag. As ek dit vir hom gee gaan hy vir my lief wees. Dit was haar behoefte... nou nog.”*** (She also thought that sex is attention. If she gave it to him, he would love me. That was her need, even now.)

Farmer and Pollock’s (2003: 2) research found that while in foster care, sexually abused children displayed sexualised behaviours on a range from public masturbation to overt sexualized behaviour and sexual activity with peers to prostitution. They state: *“These sexualized behaviour involved girls (who perpetrated far more sexual acts than their male counterparts) acting provocatively around males, including stepfathers and other girls’ boyfriends, and both girls and boys intentionally inform others of their abuse or perpetration, thus increasing the likelihood of being revictimised. Both boys and girls demonstrated a lack of boundaries.”* This comment expresses the challenge for foster parents in learning how to cope with children’s sexualized language and behaviour (Children’s services practice notes, 2000a:4).

Research conducted by Leifer *et al.* (as quoted by Spies, 2006:274) states that it will be helpful if the foster parent understand the way sexually abused children behave to survive in the adverse situation they have been removed from. Such understanding could minimise the mistakes caregivers make during their interaction with these children, and thus contribute to their healing. In most cases it is not that the foster parents don’t believe the foster children, it is because the foster parents don’t understand the behaviour and they feel helpless to deal with this behaviour in an effective way (Lodwick & Meyer,2006:1).

The defences or survival techniques that sexually abused children often use against victimization are as follows: *“trust is conditional or non-existent; anger is a universal characteristic of abuse victims; cover up by keeping secrets; emotional numbing; withdraw/isolation/entrapment; abusive/manipulative*

behaviour; boundaries; eating disorders; manipulation; perfectionism; fear/anxiety; guilt/shame; dirtiness/ worthlessness; denial and/or memory suppression; control” (Lodwick & Meyer, 2006:4-5).

To successfully establishing a safe foundation for a child who has been sexually abused, foster parents must assist the child to reconcile her past and present live. Foster parents should also be aware of their own needs in contrast with the needs of the foster children. As discussed in the previous theme, foster parents indicate that they have an urge to nurture these children. This need of the foster parents *“may cause sexually abused children further stress and pain as they may experience closeness and nurturing as traumatic because of the association with the sexual abuse process” (Spies: 2006:274).*

“Caregivers’ urges to change their behavioural patterns may affect these children adversely” (Spies: 2006:274). This may contribute to foster children feeling that they are *“bad”* as part of the dynamics of sexual abuse, and that they are being rejected because the foster children do not accept their behaviour, and consequently them as children. According to Pollock and Farmer (2005:30) most substitute care placements fail because caregivers have little or no knowledge of sexual abuse to support them in responding successfully to the behavioural patterns of the sexually abused child in their care.

Victims of child sexual abuse have a need to be accepted and to experience emotional warmth in the foster care placement, because they might not have had that ever before. By empowering foster parents to effectively assist a sexually abused child, professionals can best help them to create a safe environment to heal. (Spies, 2006:275).

8.2.3 THEME NINE: KNOWLEDGE ON CONTACT WITH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS HOW TO MANAGE IT AND THE CHILD'S RELATED BEHAVIOUR.

“Ideally the relationship between foster parent and biological parent should be one of mutual cooperation toward achieving what is best for the child” (Kadushin, 1980:362). Weinstein (in Kadushin, 1980:363) states the reason why it often does not happen this way as the difference in perception of the relationship, by the biological mother and the foster parents: *“The foster mother may define the status of the biological mother as inferior in the relationship. She may be unwilling to entertain suggestions made by the biological mother on the grounds that she is inadequate by virtue of the child's being in placement. The biological mother may see herself as superior in the relationship, according the foster mother a position similar to that of a ‘hired servant’”*.

The issue of contact between the child and the biological parents, especially if one of the latter was responsible for the sexual abuse, became a very emotional and intense discussion during the focus group. It seemed that the foster parents perceived the biological parents as a threat because they would eventually claim the child back, even if they were responsible or allowed the abuse to happen. Also see the feelings, experiences and challenges of the foster parents under theme one.

O'Hagan (1989:144) studied the needs of a group of foster parents of sexually abused children. Two difficulties specifically related to biological parents and the perpetrator (if the perpetrator were a family member) were:

- Having strong feelings of revulsion and hatred for the perpetrator of child sexual abuse.
- Being unable to cope with the return of children to those who have sexually abused them.

O'Hagan (1989:144) elaborates that *“these difficulties are universally shared by foster parents and should not surprise anyone who has already*

encountered the age-old problem of relationships between foster parents and biological parents in child-abuse cases". Price *et al.* (2008:65) are of the opinion that conflict between foster parents and biological parents could be viewed as an important reason why failure in foster placements happens and why it is sometimes necessary to transfer the foster child to another placement.

According to Kadushin (1980:349) the movement of the foster child from the home of the biological parents to the foster home, involves a process of separation, transition, and incorporation. He lists the following reactions that children may consciously or unconsciously have:

- *“ Feelings of rejection (“My parents don’t want me”), which engender feelings of worthlessness.*
- *Guilt (“I am so bad that they had to get rid of me”), which leads the child to feel that he has contributed to break up the home.”*
- *Hostility (“I hope they get hurt having rejected me”), which reinforces the guilt, because hostile feelings, particularly against one’s own parents, are punishable.*
- *Fear of abandonment (“Will my parents want me back? What will happen to them while I am away?”)*
- *Fear of the unknown (“Where am I going? Will they like me?).*
- *Shame (“Why can’t my parents, like other parents, take care of me?”).*
- *The sense that he is responsible for his placement is particularly acute for the child whose siblings are still at home, which might quite often be the case with sexually abused children. “Why me?’ may be a difficult question to answer to the child’s satisfaction.”*

In order for the foster parents to assist the child in healing, there should be a reconciliation between past experiences and the present life. It is thus necessary for the foster parent to be aware of the above questions that the child might have and to know that this will influence the child’s behaviour, especially re visitation or contact with the biological parents.

The following are two of the responses of the participants in the focus group discussions in this regard:

- **“Want dit is soms ‘n situasie dat die ma nie kom nie, en dan moet ek die kind voorberei of moet ek nie.”** (It is often a situation that the mother does not pitch and I wonder whether I should prepare the child for a visit or not.)
- **“...ouers beloof hulle in hulle gesigte ...”** (Parents promise them to their faces.)
- **“Ek kan nie die biologiese ouers hanteer nie!...”** (I cannot handle the biological parents!)
- **“We need to realise that alle ouers wat hulle kinders laat weggaan is foutief and the needy people are always needy so they will do to you exactly what the children are doing to you, so get used to it.”**
- **“...sy gee nie ‘n hel om vir jou nie, en nog minder vir haar kinders.”** (She does not care for you and even less for her children)
- **“Want sy is selfgesentreerd (selfregverdig...)”** (She is self- centred)

Foster parents might have to deal with very complex issues regarding parent-child visits or contact, and consequent difficult behaviour on the side of the child. These issues include the *“foster parents’ feelings of anger towards the biological parents, dealing with visit-related upheaval in the child’s emotions and behaviour, scheduling and logistical challenges, and meeting the needs of the visiting child and others in the home. Without adequate involvement, education, and support, foster parents may be uncommitted to parent-child visits. In the worst cases, their attitude or actions may undermine the success of visits or lead to disruption of the foster placement”* (Children’s services practice notes, 2000b:1). These underlying anger and resentment towards biological parents were also sensed during the focus group discussions. Extreme behaviour exhibited by a child was mentioned by a participant:

- **“He would just stop eating after a visit from the mother...and I don’t know what to do.”**

This correlates with behaviour that Lodwick and Meyer (2006:5) describe that a child exhibits in order to regain at least an amount of control back, after experiences in which he did not have any control.

Kadushin (1980:358) is of the opinion that it is difficult for foster parents to understand that a child might still feel affection for the biological parents after the negative treatment he has received from them. The foster parents feel that the child rejects them if he continues to miss his parents and keeps on talking about them.

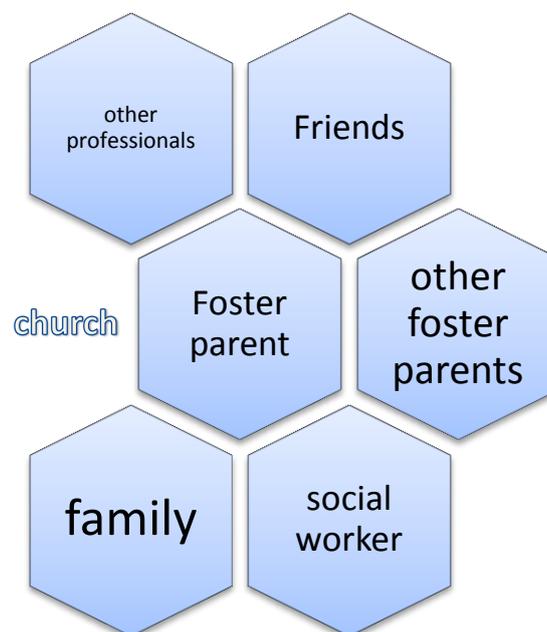
Fahlberg (1994:46) explains, *“The success of a new relationship isn’t dependent upon the memory of an earlier one fading; rather, the new one is likely to prosper when the two relationships are kept clear and distinct.”* Therefore foster parents must support biological parent-child ties. To make this possible, they may want to adopt the policy of Brenda Crider, a North Carolina foster parent. *“I never run parents down to their kids,”* she says. *“When these kids know you accept their parents, regardless of what they’ve done, the kids are easier to deal with. This makes sense. Kids are looking for approval, and if you disapprove of their parents then they think you disapprove of them, too”* (Single, 2005:43).

Kadushin (1980:352) cites Thorpe who conducted a study with 122 foster children and found that children with a good knowledge of their own background and good understanding of the foster care situation showed better adjustment. Flowing from this, there was a positive correlation between contact with own parents and the child’s adjustment in foster care. These children were able to identify successfully with two sets of parents. Kadushin (1980:354) further states that the foster parents need help in assisting the child to understand and accept the reasons for his/her placement. To do this effectively, the foster parents themselves need a clear understanding of the reasons. This will assist the foster parents to respond empathetically to the child’s actual or anticipated behaviour.

8.2.4 THEME TEN: NEED FOR SUPPORT

The implied message that could be read throughout the focus group discussions is that foster parents need support to enable them to fulfil these tasks. Support can be in various forms. Support to foster parents can be as visualised in figure 1

Figure 2.1: Support for foster parents



(Guishard-Pine *et al.*, (2007:37)

8.2.4.1 SUB-THEME: NEED SUPPORT FROM PROFESSIONALS

Foster parents would need support, either from a support group of foster parents or from the organisation and social worker who did the placement. Foster parents of sexually abused children involved in a study executed by Farmer and Pollock (2003:101), expressed the need for support to be provided for foster parents and the provision of adequate therapeutic support as well. This might be in the form of support groups where foster parents can assist each other as well as from the social worker responsible for supervision.

Foster parents more often ask for support than for instruction or advice (Kadushin, 1980:360). They are aware that social workers will not be able to

provide magical answers which will change a difficult child into an “*angelic*” child, but they appreciate it if she/he will listen with empathy, sympathy and interest.

One of the participants made the following statement in this regard:

- **“...*ons kan dit nie alleen hanteer nie. Ons het hulp nodig.*”** (We can’t deal with this on our own. We need help.)
- **“...*ons weet nie wat om te doen nie. As julle ons hande vat en ons hulp gee..*”** (we do not know what to do. If you could take our hands and help us...
- **“*As ‘n pleegouer ‘n probleem het, en hulp wil kry oor ‘n spesifieke probleem...*”** (When a foster parent encounters a problem, and needs support re a specific problem...)
- **“*I make mistakes, because I only have so much I can do...*”**

It is thus clear that foster parents need support to cope with the foster care situation, especially if the foster child has been sexually abused. One of the aspects that contribute toward success in foster placements is the support the foster parents get from the social worker (Single, 2005:7). Support could also be by other professionals or community members.

Abovementioned reaction of foster parents compares with the findings of a study executed by Farmer and Pollock (2003:101). Foster parents of sexually abused children expressed the need for support to be provided to them and the provision of adequate therapeutic support when they need it as a result of the demanding task of fostering.

8.2.4.2 SUB-THEME: NEEDS SUPPORT FROM FELLOW FOSTER PARENTS.

According to Guishard-Pine *et al.* (2007:35) consistent, reliable support is vital for all foster parents. They are of the opinion that many foster parents find support “*patchy at the best*”, and only when things go “*really wrong*”. They also call upon foster parents to allow themselves to feel contained by others

who will help them deal with their feelings of anger, confusion and anxiety in the same way that they contain the children in their care.

- **“ ’n Groep sal wonderlik wees...”** (A group would be wonderful...)
- **“ Mens moet informele opleiding kry en groepe bywoon om ondersteuning te kry in klein groepe.”** (one should get informal training and attend small groups for support.)
- **“Ek kan nie ’n groep op ’n gereelde basis bywoon nie, ek het te veel ander dinge om te doen.”** (I can’t attend a group on a regular basis, I have too many other things to do.)
- **“Ek wil iemand hê om te kontak en raad te vra.”** (I want to have someone to contact and ask for advice.)

From these reactions it is clear that although the need for support and in particular support group is expressed, there is also the hesitance to attend such groups by one foster parent. While involved with this study, researcher experienced that some foster parents express the need for more support and to be empowered, but when the opportunity was provided, some of the foster parents had various kinds of reasons why they could not attend. It might also be another topic for research to investigate why foster parents are reluctant to attend such available opportunities.

8.2.4.3 SUB-THEME: NEED FOR SELF-CARE

Researcher is of the opinion that an underlying need that was not verbalised, but was implied, was the need for self-care and support in order to be able to care for the children effectively. The task of the foster parents is best described as a difficult one (South African National Council for Child Welfare, 1996:88). This task brings with it certain needs for care of the foster parents themselves but foster parents often ignore their own needs. Mason and Linsk (2002:544) states: *“...the caregivers seldom seek help for their own needs”*. This is also implied by Delport (2007:103) when she includes the development of the self of the foster parent in her training programme for related foster parents.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This article forms part of phase two, namely information gathering and synthesis, of the intervention phase model, within the framework of the qualitative research approach. The study included a literature study and a focus group discussion.

Focus group discussion was used as interviewing method for information collection as part of a qualitative research approach. Five foster parents, male and female participated and information regarding the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children were gathered and analysed.

Two categories, ten themes and eleven sub-themes emanated from the gathered and transcribed data. The two categories were: The **feelings, experiences and challenges** of foster parents of sexually abused children, and the **needs** of foster parents of sexually abused children.

The ten themes were: Foster care is challenging; fear to lose the child; feeling of contentment, sympathy and the need to protect; feelings of discomfort, disbelief and embarrassment; need to understand the foster child's behaviour; need for knowledge on how to cope with the foster child's sexualised behaviour; need for knowledge on how to manage contact between foster child and biological parents; need for support.

Although foster care can have a positive impact on sexually abused children, they verbalised that it is very hard and demanding work for the foster parent to foster a child, especially a child that was sexually abused.

Foster parents are fearful that they may lose the child in their care when he/she is reunited with the biological parents. This might cause them to have ambivalent feelings regarding becoming attached to the child or not.

It is important for foster parents to understand their own feelings in regards to the child in foster care. Foster parents need to be careful when responding to these feelings, because these feelings might clash with the needs of the foster child – having negative consequences for the placement.

Foster parents mostly experience feelings of discomfort, disbelief and embarrassment when the sexually abused foster child exhibits sexualised behaviour. These feelings are mostly because foster parents don't expect this type of behaviour from a child.

Foster children that have been sexually abused sometimes exhibit sexualised behaviour that they were not prepared for or did not have the knowledge or skills to react on appropriately. It is necessary for foster parents to understand this behaviour in order to deal with it in a way that are suitable for the foster parent as well as the foster child.

Sometimes foster care placements fail because foster parents have little or no knowledge of sexual abuse to support them in responding successfully to the behavioural patterns of the sexually abused child in their care. Foster parents need to be informed about effective ways to handle sexualised behaviour of foster children. If this behaviour is handled wrongly it could be detrimental for the relationship between the foster parent and foster child. It can also ultimately lead to the failure of the placement.

Foster parents often perceive the biological parent as a threat because they would eventually claim the child back. Maintaining contact between the foster child and the biological parent might be very difficult for foster parents, especially if one of the parents were the perpetrator of the sexual abuse. Foster parents might feel that contact with this parent, may not be in the child's best interest. Foster parents need to be very careful about what they say about the biological parents, because negative remarks about the biological parents might cause feelings of hurt or rejection in the foster child.

Because of the challenging nature of foster care and especially where the foster child has been sexually abused, the foster parents need constant support. They need to know that there is someone willing to listen to them and that there is someone that can help them to handle difficult situations. They need to have a safety net to fall back on when problems appear within the foster care situation.

An empowerment programme including all the above mentioned aspects would be beneficial to foster parents of sexually abused children. It would enable the foster parents to have more understanding and insight into the developmental needs of the sexually abused child. The data gathered in this part of the study will be used to compile an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Foster parents should be carefully recruited, screened and trained on foster care in general and fostering a sexually abused child. Continual support from professionals is also essential.

An empowerment programme should be developed and implemented with foster parents of sexually abused children. Based on the needs assessment during the focus group discussion; interviews with specialists in the field of foster care and sexual abuse and on the literature review, the following themes might be discussed in the empowerment programme for foster parents that have foster children in their care that has been sexually abused. These themes are as follows: What is sexual abuse? (Definition and symptomatology); basic emotional needs of children; psychosocial development of the child; challenging behaviour of sexually abused foster children and how to cope with it; contact and visitation by the biological parents; relationship between foster parent and child with specific reference to attachment; an self-awareness and self-care for foster parents.

Support groups for foster parents should be formed for emotional support and to assistance in problem solving. These support groups will consist of foster parents that have similar problems. This will help each foster parent to see that he/she is not going through problems that no one can identify with. Foster parents would be able to share their experiences with each other and support each other.

11. REFERENCES

- Adoption Glossary. 2009. Foster parents. <http://glossary.adoption.com/foster-parents.html> Date of access: 12 March 2009.
- Alpaslan, A.H. 2010. Only study guide for SCK410/1/2011-2013. Social work research. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- American Humane. 2008. Child sexual abuse. http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr_fact_sheets_childsexabuse Date of access: 25 Apr. 2008
- Babbie, E. 2007. The practice of social research. 11th ed. Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2011. The practice of social research. Cape Town: Oxford Press.
- Barker, R.L. 1997. The social work dictionary. Washington: NASW Press.
- Barr, A. 1995. Empowering communities - beyond fashionable rhetoric? Some reflections on Scottish experience. *Community development Journal*, 390(2):121-132.
- Cape Gateway. 2009. Fostering a child. <http://www.capegateway.gov.za/eng/directories/services/1155/17450> Date of access: 2 Feb. 2009.
- Children's services practice notes. 2000a. http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol5_no2/effects_of_sexual_abuse.htm Date of access: 21 Feb. 2007.
- Children's services practice notes. 2000b. http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol5_no4/involved_foster_parents.htm Date of access: 27 Jan. 2009.
- Creswell, J.W. 2003. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

- Delaney, R. 2007a. Foster children and sexualized behaviour: connections. www.FosterParentCollege.com Date of access: 26 Jan. 2009.
- Delaney, R. 2007b. Foster Children and sexualized behaviour: connections. www.FosterParentCollege.com Date of access: 26 Jan. 2009.
- Delpont, J. 2007. Die ontwikkeling en evaluering van 'n maatskaplike groepwerkintervensieprogram in verwante pleegsorgplasings. Potchefstroom: Noordwes Universiteit. (Proefskrif – DPhil).
- Delpont, J. 2010. Foster care and sexual abuse [personal interview]. 16 May. White River.
- De Vos, A.S. 2011. (In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 341-375
- De Vos, A.S. & Strydom, H. 2011b. Intervention research. (In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 473-490).
- Erasmus, M. 2010. Foster care and sexual abuse [personal interview]. 12 Febr. White River.
- Everett, J. E. 1995. Encyclopedia of Social Work. 19th ed. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Fahlberg, V.I. 1994. A child's journey through placement. Indianapolis : Perspectives Press.
- Farmer, E. & Pollock, S. 2003. Managing sexually abused and/or abusing children in substitute care. *Child and Family Social Work*, (8):101-112.

Foster Care. 2005. Facts for Families, 64(5) American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org Date of access: 21 Apr. 2012

Foster Care. 2009. Success stories. People making a difference. <http://www.fostercaremonth.org/SuccessStories/PeopleMakingADifference/Pages/default> Date of access: 21 Jan.

Fouchè, C.B. 2002. Problem formulation. (In De Vos, ed. Strydom, H., Fouchè, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. 2nd ed. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 104-113).

Fouché, C.B & Delpont, C.S.L. 2002. Introduction to the research process. (In De Vos, A.S. ed., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 2ND ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 77-92).

Fouchè, C.B. & De Vos, AS. 2011. Formal formulations. (In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouchè, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L., eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 89-100).

Gibson, C.H. 2006. A concept analysis of empowerment. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 16(3):354-361.

Greeff, M. 2011. Information collection: interviewing. (In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouchè, C.B., Delpont, C.S.L., eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 341-375).

Grobler, A. 2008. Child sexual abuse [personal interview]. 25 April. Pretoria.

Guishard-Pine, J; McCall, S; Hamilton, L. 2007. Understanding looked after children. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Kadushin, A. 1980. Child welfare services. 3rd ed. New York: MacMillan.

- Lodwick, A. & Meyer, B. 2006. Impact of Sexual Abuse. Chapel Workshop. http://www.newbeginningsnh.org/html/dv_sa_child.html Date of access: 21 Jan. 2008.
- Mason, S & Linsk, N. 2002. Relative foster parents of HIV-Affected Children. *Child Welfare*, 81(4):541-569.
- McDaniel, B., Braiden, H.J. Onyekwelu, J., Murphy, M. & Regan, H. 2011. Investigating the effectiveness of the Incredible Years Basic Parenting programme for foster carers in Northern Ireland. *Child Care in Practice*, 17 (1):55-67.
- Munro, K. 2000. Incest and Child Sexual Abuse: definitions, perpetrators, victims and effects. http://www.kalimunro.com/article_sexualabuse.html Date of access: 21 Oct. 2011.
- New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. 2008. Sexual Abuse of Children. A fact sheet on the sexual abuse of children. http://www.newbeginningsnh.org/html/dv_sa_child.html Date of access: 21 Jan. 2008.
- Noll, J. G. 2008. Sexual abuse of children – unique in its effects on development? *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32 (2008):603-605.
- O'Connor, K.J. & Schaefer, C.W. 1994. Handbook of play therapy. Volume two: advances and innovations. New York: Wiley.
- O'Hagan, K. 1989. Working with child sexual abuse. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Orton, G.L. 1997. Strategies for counselling with children and their parents. Thousand Oaks: Brooks/Cole.
- Pearce, J.W. & Pezzot-Pearce. 2001. Psychotherapeutic approaches to children in foster care: guidance from attachment theory. *Child Psychiatry and Human development*, 32(1):19-44.

Petzer, C. 2010. Foster care and sexual abuse [personal interview]. 3 Aug., Nelspruit.

Poggenpoel, M. 1998. Data analysis in qualitative research. (*In De Vos, A.S. ed., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B., Poggenpoel, M., Schurink, E.M., Schurink, W. Research at grass roots: a primer for the caring professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 334-353).*

Pollock, S. & Farmer, E. 2005. A hidden population: understanding the needs of sexually abused and abusing children in substitute care. *Adoption & Fostering*, 29(2): 28-31.

Puddy, R.W. & Jackson, Y. 2005. The Development of Parenting Skills in Foster Parent Training. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 25 (12):987-1013.

Price, M.J., Chamberlain, P., Landsverk, J. Reid, J.B., Leve, L.D., Laurent, H. 2008. Effects of a foster parent training intervention on placement changes of children in foster care. *Child Maltreatment*, 13 (1):64-75.

Raising Children Network. 2011. Raising sexually abused children. Australia <http://raisingchildren.net> Date of access: 03 Sept. 2012

Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J.G., Cox, M.E. & Beuhler, C. 2003. Foster family resources, psychosocial functioning, and retention. *Social work research*, 27(3):135-150.

SA **see** South Africa

Schurink, W., Fouché, C.B. & De Vos, A.S. 2011. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. (*In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L., eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 397-423).*

Sihlali, P. 2009. Foster care and sexual abuse [personal interview]. 2 May, Nelspruit.

Single, T. 2005. Long term foster care for abused and neglected children: How foster parents can help in healing the trauma. New Castle: CIVITAS

South Africa. 2008. The Children's Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007). *Government Gazette*, No 30884. Pretoria: Government Printers.

South African Council for Social Service Professions. 1986 Rules relating the course of conduct to be followed by social workers in the practising of their profession (code of ethics) made under the Social Work Act, 1978. General notice 292 in *Government Gazette* no. 10205, 25 April 1986, Pretoria.

South African Council for Social Service Professions. 2006. Policy guidelines for course of conduct, code of ethics and the rules for caring professions. Pretoria: SACSSP.

South African National Council for Child Welfare. 1996. A guide to foster care practice in South Africa. Johannesburg: Natal Witness Printing.

Spies, G.M. 2006. Substitute care for the sexually abused child. (*In Spies, G.M., ed. Sexual abuse: dynamics, assessment & healing. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 267-275).*

Strydom, H. 2011. Ethical aspects of research in the social sciences and human service professions. (*In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouchè, C.B. & Delpont, C.S.L., eds. Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. p. 113-129).*

Townsend, L. & Dawes, A. 2004. Individual and contextual factors associated with the sexual abuse of children under 12: a review of recent literature. (*In Richter, L., ed. Dawes, A. & Higson-Smith, C. Sexual abuse of young children in southern Africa. Cape Town: HSRC.*)

Triseliotis, J., Sellick, C. & Short, R. 1995. Foster care: theory and practice. London: Redwood Books.

Wallace, H. 2002. Family violence, legal, medical and social perspectives.
3rd ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.