

Social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse

F Tanton

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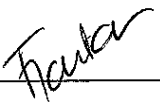
Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Magister* in Social Work at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Supervisor: Dr C van Wyk

April 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of “**Social work students’ perceptions of child sexual abuse**” (except where specifically stated otherwise), and I have not in the past submitted this document or any part of it in order to obtain any other qualification. It is my own original work and all references used or quoted were indicated and acknowledged by means of citing it in the text and also in a comprehensive reference list.



Frieda Tanton

30/04/2015

Date

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

Joan Hettema

250 Troye St

Muckleneuk

Pretoria 0002

Date: 26 April 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I have duly edited a Masters thesis: Social Work Students' Perceptions of Child Abuse by Frieda Tanton.

I have a BA majoring in Latin and English from the University of Pretoria, an Honours in English language and literature from Unisa and Troisieme Degre in French from the Alliance Francaise.

Throughout my 37-year fulltime career and the twenty years since, I have been involved with the process of writing English, editing English or lecturing in the field of Media Studies, English for Journalism and Business English at various tertiary institutions (Tshwane University of Technology, Boston, Damelin, Rosebank and College Campus) as well as editing documents and theses for students at universities throughout the country. I have also served as a judge for the annual competition of the Publications Forum of South Africa for the past 11 years.

Yours sincerely,



Joan Hettema

072-126-5174/ 012-440-4753

jhettema@absamail.co.za

“There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.”

Aldous Huxley

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I am indebted to a number of people without whom this journey would not have been possible. I would like to use this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following for their support:

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- Laaste, maar nie die minste nie, my liefdevolle ouers, Marlene en wyle Frik de Necker wat dit vir my moontlik gemaak het om self die roete vir my reis deur die lewe uit te werk deur middel van hulle liefde, ondersteuning en onwrikbare geloof in my vermoëns.

ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

Social workers are responsible for rendering services to children and families who have experienced sexual abuse. These services are to a large degree guided by legislation and organisational policy, but the question arises whether all social workers perceive child sexual abuse in the same way. This is significant since the possibility that a social worker perceives child sexual abuse differently from legislation and existing policies, could lead to having an adverse effect on the rendering of services to children and families exposed to sexual abuse.

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of social work students regarding child sexual abuse by way of a descriptive qualitative research design. For the purposes of this study the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling was used to obtain participants. Fourth-year social work students at a specific higher learning institution were allowed to volunteer for this study and ten students agreed to participate. Unstructured in-depth individual interviews were conducted in order to explore their perceptions of CSA (Child Sexual Abuse). The data was coded into six main perceptions with their categories and subcategories. These perceptions were the following: (1) Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment; (2) Description of the sexually abused child; (3) Description of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse; (4) Child sexual abuse is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects; (5) Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways; and (6) Children do not disclose sexual abuse.

These results were presented in the format of an article with conclusions, recommendations as well as the limitations of the study.

KEY TERMS

Child sexual abuse

Child protection

Perceptions

Legislation

Ecological Systems Theory

Gestalt Field Theory

Social work students

OPSOMMING EN SLEUTELTERME

Maatskaplike werkers is verantwoordelik vir dienslewering aan kinders en gesinne wat seksuele misbruik ervaar het. Hierdie dienste word hoofsaaklik deur wetgewing en organisatoriese beleid voorgeskryf, maar die vraag ontstaan of alle maatskaplike werkers seksuele misbruik op dieselfde manier sien. Die moontlikheid dat maatskaplike werkers seksuele misbruik verskillend van wetgewing en bestaande beleid sien, is betekenisvol aangesien dit daartoe kan lei dat dit 'n negatiewe effek op dienslewering aan gesinne en kinders het wat aan seksuele misbruik blootgestel is.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die persepsies van maatskaplike werk studente te verken en te beskryf deur middel van 'n beskrywende kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp. Vir die doel van die studie is deelnemers volgens doelgerigte nie-waarskynlikheidssteekproeftrekking betrek. Vierdejaar maatskaplike werk studente aan 'n hoërondewys instelling is toegelaat om vrywillig tot die studie in te stem en tien studente het ingestem tot deelname. Ongestruktureerde in-diepte onderhoude is met hulle gevoer om hulle persepsies van die seksuele misbruik van kinders te verken. Die data is in ses hoofpersepsies gekodeer met kategorieë en subkategorieë. Hierdie persepsies behels die volgende: (1) Seksuele misbruik van kinders word veroorsaak deur faktore in die kind se ekologiese omgewing; (2) Beskrywing van die seksueel misbruikte kind; (3) Beskrywing van die oortreder van seksuele misbruik; (4) Seksuele misbruik kom wyd voor word gekenmerk deur die teenwoordigheid van spesifieke aspekte; (5) Seksuele misbruik affekteer die kind op bepaalde wyses; en (6) Kinders openbaar nie dat seksuele misbruik voorgekom het nie.

Hierdie resultate is in artikelformaat weergegee tesame met gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings sowel as die beperkinge van die studie.

SLEUTELTERME

Seksuele misbruik van kinders

Kinderbeskerming

Persepsies

Wetgewing

Ekologiese Sisteem Teorie

Gestalt Veldteorie

Maatskaplike werk studente

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FOREWORD

This dissertation is presented in an article format according to the General Academic Rules (Rule A.5.4.2.7) as set out in North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus Yearbook. Therefore, this document comprises three sections. Section A provides an orientation to the research, including an introduction, the problem statement and literature study. Section B contains the article that will be submitted to *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* for publication. Section C includes conclusions and recommendations. Please note that the references provided in Section B are in line with the author guidelines of the journal (Annexure 6) which requests Harvard referencing style, while sections A and C is referenced according to the Harvard method, as provided by North-West University's referencing manual.

SECTION A: ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

This section comprises two parts:

Part 1: Introduction, problem statement, research methodology and ethical aspects

Part 2: Literature study

SECTION A

ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

PART 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Child abuse in all its forms is a worldwide problem (Pereda *et al.*, 2009:331; Pierce & Bozalek, 2004:818) and child sexual abuse especially is a growing concern in South Africa, where some authors even refer to it as being of epidemic proportions (éé, 2009:41; Richter & Dawes, 2008:81; Smith *et al.*, 2010:255). This phenomenon impacts on the victim, the family and society negatively in the long term (Koehn, 2007:38). Relevant legislation in South Africa has the aim of protecting children. Section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) entrenches the right of all children to be protected against maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. This right forms the basis of a number of acts which have been promulgated to ensure the best interests of children. The most prominent of these are the Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005), as amended by the Children's Amendment Act (Act 42 of 2007) as well as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (Act 32 of 2007). This legislation not only impacts on the roles and duties of social workers (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:90) but the Child Care Act (Act 38 of 2005) also sets the standards for the roles and responsibilities of professionals working in the sexual abuse field (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1-2). Professionals, such as social workers, should be aware of current legislation relating to child sexual abuse in order to address the problem effectively in practice. It is especially important that they understand the practical application of legislation (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1). Social workers aim to enhance the well-being of individuals and families (Sossou & Yogtiba, 2009:1231) by safeguarding and promoting children's welfare (Chitereka, 2010:36) and this should be done according to prescribed legislation.

Child sexual abuse has an extensive impact on the victim (Fouché & Joubert, 2009:41) with long- term consequences that need multi-disciplinary intervention by professionals (Bubar &

Bundy-Fazioli, 2011:4), with social workers playing a key role (Chitereka, 2009:28). Child protection agencies are involved in defining, reporting and planning intervention in cases of CSA (Sinanan, 2011:659-660) and these services are rendered on either a preventative, forensic, supportive or therapeutic level (Berliner, 2003:12; Chitereka, 2009:29; Scheepers 2008:19, Sossou & Yogtiba, 2010:1227). Varying opinions on the extent of CSA and on whether CSA took place can become a problem in practice. Consideration must be given to the presence of subjective factors such as personal bias when these disagreements cannot be explained in terms of differences in training (Everson & Sandoval, 2011:288). In South Africa where social workers originate from differing backgrounds in terms of culture, religion, race and socio-economic background (Earle, 2008:46), the presence of personal bias and other subjective factors are a real possibility. Differences in these perceptions may be due to any number of reasons; prior exposure to sexual abuse (on a personal or professional level) (Bender *et al.*, 2010:34) as well as differences in values, beliefs and perceptions (Weaver, 1998:204). How key adults, such as parents, teachers and social workers believe they would recognize CSA influences what actions, if any, they will take to intervene (Fontes & Plummer, 2010:493).

The researcher is responsible for practical supervision of fourth-year social work students at a higher education institution in South Africa. During discussions with the students regarding social work issues and how it is influenced by their values and perceptions, the issue of sexual abuse always comes to the fore, highlighting some real differences in the various students' points of view. This is confirmed by Engelbrecht (2006:261) who claims that the ways social workers perceive CSA is as diverse as their backgrounds. Social work training programs are about more than gaining knowledge (Heydt & Sherman, 2005:26); it consists of three different dimensions of equal importance: knowledge, attitude (including values) and skills, based on the understanding that a lack of knowledge or a negative attitude will have a negative impact on the skills involved in rendering services (O'Neal, 2012:160). This raised the question of a possible link between these possible differences in values and perceptions and the fact that services in terms of CSA are not always deemed effective as was found by Postmus *et al.* (2011:304).

That there are differences in how social workers view social problems is not only true for South Africa. In the United States of America (USA) a great deal of research has been conducted regarding social work and the influence of personal bias on service delivery,

highlighting that the social workers must be able to apply self-reflection to recognise own bias and also be able to integrate knowledge and reflection with practice skills (Bender *et al.*, 2010:34-36) in order to develop mature proficiency (Magnus, 2009:376). Green and McDermott (2010:2416) state in order for social workers to be effective, they need to have knowledge of the functioning of their own inner world. It is therefore important to explore the perceptions underlying this bias in order to limit the effect thereof in practice situations.

Successful child abuse intervention requires a shift in societal and individual attitudes and behaviours to address the structural issues that increase the vulnerability of children (CASE, 2005:38) and create a more congruent fit between university settings and the changing social, technological, economic, political and cultural environments which surround them (Calderwood *et al.*, 2009:112). These authors also describe how social work students undergo a process which can be termed “professional socialisation” during the course of their studies and some challenges arise when Western social work principles are applied while students are still inexperienced and more likely to lean on their own frame of reference to help with decision-making in terms of particular cases. According to these authors, professional socialization happens when students are exposed to training material and through the process of professional socialisation, the personal attitudes and opinions of social workers are shaped, potentially influencing professional behaviour.

This process of professional socialisation is closely linked to perceptions. Pierce and Bozalek (2004:818) claim that the definition and theoretical understanding of child abuse will impact program development and determines how and where intervention is aimed, making it particularly important to understand how it is perceived, especially by professionals responsible for programs. In other words, the values and attitudes of the social workers who need to interpret certain behavior as sexual abuse, will determine not only how abuse is defined, but also what needs to be done about it (Engelbrecht, 2006:257; Pierce & Bozalek, 2004:819; Redmond *et al.*, 2008:869).

Social workers’ understanding of the world as well as their skills and purpose are constructed in their background and environment (Green & McDermott, 2010:2416). This study proposes that a difference in attitudes/perceptions (influenced by personal values and life experiences) regarding sexual abuse may influence a social worker’s intervention methods and interpretation of legislation in instances of sexual abuse. Awareness and understanding of

biases of student social workers as well as how they relate their own background to their work with clients will enhance consciousness of issues that may impede effective service rendering in cases of sexual abuse (Bender *et al.*, 2010:36-37). Bozalek *et al.* (2008:5) saw the need for students to critically view their understanding of social issues by exposing them to the differential impact that these issues have had on their own lives.

Little is known about the specific perceptions of social workers regarding child sexual abuse. Research on child sexual abuse has focused on the impact of CSA (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014; Chitereka 2009 & 2010; Sossou Yogtiba, 2008); the extent of CSA as well as the need for specialist services for CSA (Sinanan, 2011; Chitereka, 2009; Chisala , 2006; Jewkes *et al.*, 2005; Richter & Dawes, 2008) and the impact of child sexual abuse on the social workers rendering services (Chitereka, 2010; Suliman & Collings, 2005). There are a limited number of studies, mainly originating from Australia (Long & Septhon, 2011) and the USA (Ashton, 2010; Bender *et al.*, 2010; Hestick & Perino, 2009; Magnus, 2009; Weaver, 1998), that explore issues regarding the perceptions of professionals, but no local studies in this regard.

Ecological System's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:11; Pack, 2013:72-73; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243; Swick & Williams, 2006:371) and Gestalt Field Theory (Blom, 2006:19; Burley, 2009:83; Parlett, 2005:44-45) served as the theoretical base for this study. According to Burley (2009:83) both these approaches are useful for depicting phenomena holistically, taking the context into account. This study aimed to explore and describe the perceptions of social work students within their contexts, making use of these approaches to provide a theoretical base for the findings.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's model (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Bronfenbrenner, 2005:11; Darling, 2007:203; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243; Swick & Williams, 2006:371) describes the individual as emerged in an interrelated set of systems (or contexts) that contribute to the development of that individual. These systems are; (1) The Microsystem, the individual's immediate environment, for example the family; (2) The Mesosystem, consisting of the participative relationships that connect two or more systems, for example between family, work and social life; (3) Exosystem, the social environment that lies outside the individual's experiential field but still has an effect on Macro and Mesosystems; and (4) The Macrosystem, which is constructed from the individual's cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and communal gatherings (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:80-81). This theory

describes the processes in the environment that influence development and maintains that context, time as well as personal characteristics have a role to play in the world of an individual. It makes provision for the context of an individual as well as the interplay between internal and external forces such as personal dynamics as well as influences from the broader systems (Lewthwaite, 2011:1). These interrelated contexts as well as the individual setting can therefore be used to form an understanding of the contexts and settings involved in forming the perceptions of social work students.

Field Theory depicts the territory of humans in their contexts which includes their relationships as well as their sense of community. This forms a holistic perspective of persons which includes their environment, their social world, organisations and cultures (Parlett, 2009:71; Resnick, 2007:2). In a field as differentiated as South Africa, the way individuals organise their lives is affected by how they shape their perceptions and how this in turn shapes them. Field Theory indicates that perceptions formed from interaction with the individual's own phenomenological field cannot be separated from their work with others (Parlett, 2009:79) and it becomes part of the field that is co-created between two individuals (Blom, 2004:19), such as the social worker and the client.

The above mentioned theoretical framework was used to explore perceptions of social work students about child sexual abuse. An understanding of the person in context demands that the influence of family, community, subculture and culture is examined in order to get an idea of how this has shaped the individual (Harney, 2007:75). In the case of social work students this means that when the student is viewed within the context of family, community and culture, it would be possible to get a clearer indication of how this had the potential to change and influence perceptions.

This study is aimed at exploring the perceptions regarding child sexual abuse within a group of social work students. More information on what these perceptions are, could benefit training institutions and possibly inform training programmes to make provision for diversity issues regarding child sexual abuse. This could promote self-reflection amongst the students and assist them in linking their perceptions with service delivery.

This discussion leads to the following question for this study:

What are social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse?

2. RESEARCH AIM

The research aim of this study is to explore and describe social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse through the use of a qualitative descriptive design.

3. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Child sexual abuse is a growing concern in South Africa. Social workers render services in instances of child sexual abuse. These practitioners and therefore also social work students are from different backgrounds and differences in their perceptions of child sexual abuse can affect service delivery. When there is a difference in the perceptions of social workers and the prescriptions of legislation as well as organisational guidelines, compliance to legislation and policies could be diminished. A description of these perceptions, using the views of the fourth-year social work students at a specific higher education institution in South Africa, may assist in making recommendations which can benefit training institutions to make provision for these differences in perception in order to limit it from negatively impacting on service delivery. This could promote self-reflections amongst the students which can assist them in linking their perceptions with service delivery.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Literature Review

For the purpose of this study several scientific sources such as books, scientific journals, research reports and research articles were accessed through the utilisation of specific databases (EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Sagepub) in order to establish a literature study. The Ecological Systems Theory and Gestalt Field Theory were studied as theoretical framework for the study. A wide variety of literature sources on perceptions, as well as several aspects of child sexual abuse and training and professional development of social work students were consulted. The following themes were reviewed:

- Child sexual abuse in Southern Africa: Chitereka (2009,2010), Sossou and Yogtiba (2008), Jewkes (2005), Richter and Dawes (2008).
- The specific legislation relevant to this study: Aucamp *et al.* (2012), The Children's Act (38/2005), Sexual Offences Act No 32
- Ecological System's Theory: Bronfenbrenner (2005), Green and McDermott (2010), Harney (2007), Rosa and Tudge (2013).
- Perceptions: Eysenck (2002), Hestick and Perrino (2009), Raftopolous (2009).
- Social Work Services: Sinanan (2011), Chitereka (2009), Chisala (2006)
- Training of Social Work students: Kaufman *et al.* (2011), Misha and Bogo (2007), Wade (2008).

Data findings were verified through a literature control. This means that findings were compared and contrasted with findings in other studies in order to indicate a relation between the literature and the findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:38).

4.2 Research Approach and Design

For the purpose of this study a qualitative approach was followed. In its broadest sense, this approach refers to research that focuses on generating participants' views of meaning, experience or perceptions (Fouché & Delpont, 2011:65; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:1; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:273) and this is in line with the research aim for this study. This aim of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions of fourth-year social work students. Qualitative research is more interested in understanding than explaining (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:308) and focuses on the way people make sense of their experiences and the world they live in (Botma *et al.*, 2009:190),. This study can be described as applied research as described by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006:273) and is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature.

The qualitative descriptive design was used. This design, described by Sandelowski (2000:335) and Botma *et al.* (2010:194) can be utilised to find straight and unembellished answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers. This design provides a comprehensive summary of a phenomenon and not in the interpretation thereof (Sandelowski, 2010:81). As described by Botma *et al.* (2010:194) and Sandelowski (2000:335), a descriptive qualitative study focuses on a describing the experiences of the

participants on a conscious level, obtaining facts. For the purposes of this study the perceptions of social work students about child sexual abuse were explored and the new information obtained can benefit the training of social workers.

4.3 Sampling

A discussion on population, sampling method and sample size follows.

4.3.1. Population

The population can be defined as the larger pool of cases from which the sample is drawn (Durrheim & Painter, 2006:13). For this study it was a group of fourth-year social work students at a specific higher education institution in South Africa.

4.3.2 Sampling Method

Participants for the study were identified according to the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling as described by Strydom and Delport (2011:392). This method allows researchers to decide on the correct participants to ensure that the participants who can verbalise their appropriate knowledge and comprehension of a phenomenon are included in the study (Green & Thorogood, 2011:138). The following criteria were also set to ensure that participants fit the purpose of the study:

- Fourth-year social work students;
- at a specific higher education institution in South Africa;
- who are able to speak and understand English or Afrikaans; and
- who agreed to voluntary participation and were willing to be recorded.

It was important to focus on fourth-year students who are already exposed to practical work and have received information about the appropriate legislation. This ensured that they have already experienced some involvement in practical cases, working with children affected by CSA and have had the opportunity to reflect on their own values.

An exclusion criterion was that students from the social worker's own supervision group were excluded from participating in the study to avoid that they might feel obliged to participate. The pre-existing relationship also holds the possibility of contaminating the findings.

The co-ordinator of a community project where fourth-year students were allocated to do their practical training was approached and the researcher was granted permission to inform the students about the research at a training workshop. The co-ordinator acted as a mediator by introducing the supervisor to the students, explaining the purpose of the study and by encouraging students to participate in the study. Students were informed that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed to assist in documenting the findings. Any students who were interested in participating, were given consent forms (see annexure 1) to complete so that they could be contacted to make the necessary arrangements. The information received from the mediator was followed up and contact was made with the students who volunteered.

4.4. Data collection

4.4.1 Method of data collection

Unstructured in-depth interviews were used in this study. This type of interview is aimed to elicit participants' views of their lives, as portrayed in their stories, and so to gain access to their experiences, perceptions and social worlds (Kelly, 2006:297). According to Greeff (2011, 351-352) these types of interviews have a purpose and a general plan, but the researcher should avoid directing the flow of the comments, instead focusing on prompts to allow the participants to explore. This is done by posing a single open-ended question at the start of the interview (Greeff, 2011:349). This technique is driven by the desire of the researcher to learn everything that the participant can share about a subject without leading, but asking follow-up questions and probes for clarity based on the discussion by the participants (Kelly, 2006:303).

In-depth interviews were used by the researcher to explore the perceptions of the students and care was taken not to introduce specific aspects of CSA, so as not to influence the perceptions that were discussed. The in-depth interview is designed to form a clear picture of participants' experience or view on a certain topic and therefore suitable for exploring perceptions as was the aim of this study. The interviews were started with the following question: "*How do you see and understand of child sexual abuse?*" This question was open

enough not to influence the participants in terms of the type of perceptions that need to be discussed. An applicable audio recording programme operated on a computer was used to record interviews.

Skills such as minimal verbal responses, paraphrasing, clarification, reflection, encouragement and summarising were used when engaging with the participants (Greeff, 2011:359). Further data was obtained by asking for more detail as well as follow-up questions based on the responses while at the same time observing non-verbal behavior. As described by Gibson (2010:133-136) the participants were not led according to any preconceived ideas, nor were they encouraged to provide particular answers by expressing approval or disapproval of what they say.

The researcher made field notes during the interviews in order to make sense of the research setting (Kelly, 2006:307; Mouton, 2006:107). These field notes not only described the researcher's experiences and observations, such as those made while engaged in participant observation, but also her reflections and interpretations after the interviews. The researcher also made unstructured observations (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2011:182) about the participants' behaviour and other qualitative aspects such as non-verbal communication. This served as an aid in writing research results (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:216) by describing the research setting and qualitative observations.

The researcher invited the students who were willing to participate, for an interview and provided time slots on three different days. The first day only had one time slot and the student who utilised this time slot served as the pilot study. A pilot test is carried out with one or more participants in order to ensure that the question was formulated in a clear way and would elicit the responses required to answer the research question (Kelly, 2006:298). Twelve students gave their contact details to the researcher and fit the criteria, two of which did not arrive for their scheduled interviews. Ten interviews were conducted in the period 14 to 28 August 2013 in a specifically booked room at the campus of the specific higher education institution. This room was private and free from distractions so that recordings could be made. These interviews lasted between 25 to 40 minutes each and were terminated once the participants had no more input or repeated information.

All the students who volunteered fitted the inclusion criteria and interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, as described by Green and Thorogood (2011:119). This was achieved after 10 interviews.

4.5 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to transform data into findings (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:397; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:321). This was carried out according to the procedure as listed by Shaw (2010:183-197) which is as follows.

- The first step was to transcribe the interviews making use of professional services. A confidentiality agreement (see annexure 2) was signed by the transcriber to ensure the confidentiality of the information.
- The transcribed interviews (see example in annexure 3) were read through thoroughly to check for inaccuracies and also for the researcher to familiarize herself with the data by making notes on the interviews, summarizing the participants responses (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:408; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:323).
- After all the transcripts were read several times, the researcher reflected on the content, scrutinising the responses for their deeper meaning to ensure that an impression can be formed of the general content (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:408). Notes were also made of repetitions in the responses in order to start identifying initial themes (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:323). The information was sorted into broad categories, writing down all the quotes under temporary headings.
- Descriptive summaries of these responses were written about what was said and initial themes identified. This was represented in a table (see Annexure 4).
- These themes were organized and the theoretical framework was applied to aid understanding and coded as described by Schurink *et al.* (2011:410-415). This was done working sequentially through the transcripts and the initial interpretations which were made were based on the summaries that were made in the first step which helped with identifying and clustering themes.
- The final themes, subthemes and categories were established by giving each one a title and identifying extracts in the data that represented these themes. A literature control was executed by comparing the themes with existing literature to either confirm or

challenge these themes as described by (Creswell, 2009:27; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:38).

During the interviews, member checking as described by Holloway and Wheeler (2010:34) was done by reflecting back to participants what they said during interviews and also by providing feedback for comment. Further member checking was done by compiling a document that outlines the themes identified during interviews and e-mailing the themes to the participants. This was done to limit researcher bias and avoid the making of unsupported inferences as described by Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2009:32). The preliminary data description of the responses, organised into themes and sub-themes was mailed to participants for feedback purposes and also to ascertain whether the content was a true reflection of their perceptions. Six out of the ten participants responded to the e-mail and confirmed in their response to the mail that they agreed with the themes and sub-themes and saw them as a true reflection of their responses. No new information was presented by any of them and none of the participants contested any of the information.

4.6 Ethical Aspects

Ethical clearance for the specific research project was granted by the North West University (Ethics Number: NWU-00060-12-A1). Written consent was obtained from the higher learning institution for including fourth-year students in interviews (see annexure 5) as well as from the participants (see Annexure 1).

The Social Services Professions Act (No 110 of 1978 as amended in 1998) as well as the general Ethical Code of the South African Council for Social Work Professions (1986) served as a guide for the research process as well as the ethical conduct of the researcher as the researcher is a social worker by profession as described by Strydom (2011:128). The guidelines for ethical practice in research (King, 2010:98-118; Mouton, 2005:238-246; Strydom, 2011:113-29; Wassenaar, 2006:61-77) were adhered to in all circumstances. This was done to ensure accountability towards the participants. The research process should not exploit human beings (Strydom, 2011:113-121), therefore the following ethical aspects were taken into account:

4.6.1 Informed consent

The participants were asked to sign a written consent form that explained the purpose and nature of the study and informed them that the interviews will be recorded. This form also confirmed that participation in this study was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw from the study. This was reiterated during the interviews. The participants were allowed to ask questions about the research project and consult other parties about participation if needed.

4.6.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

The information provided by the participants was protected by not making it available to anyone but the researcher. This data are kept secure by keeping it in a locked location for which only the researcher has a key in the researcher's office. The researcher explained to the participants that the information they provide will be confidential as stated in the consent form (King, 2010:111; Wassenaar, 2006:76).

Anonymity of respondents as described by Strydom (2011:128) was upheld by not publishing any identifying details in the research report. Participants were informed that the sessions would be recorded and would be transcribed by a third party and therefore had to provide permission for the interviews to be recorded. Participants have a right to remain anonymous (Mouton, 2005: 243) and the names of the participants were not used in the publication of this research; participants were coded when excerpts are referred to in the research document.

4.6.3 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation of respondents is essential (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:59) and this was stated during the recruitment phase. Participants were fully informed about the nature of the study as well as given the right to withdraw without prejudice at any stage. Participants should only take part in research when they have made an informed decision to do so. This information must include what the research is about, how they will be affected by the research project, whether there are any risks to being a participant and that they have a choice to participate or not (Forrester, 2010:100). This information was provided verbally and it was also included in the informed consent that was signed by all the participants.

4.6.4 Limitations to the researcher's role

Participants were selected from fourth-year groups other than the researcher's own in order to avoid role confusion and dual relationships. The risk for role confusion is greater in qualitative research than in quantitative research (King, 2010:114) and especially in this case since the researcher is seen in a supervisory capacity by students. The boundaries were clearly indicated to the participants at the time of recruiting.

4.6.5 Appropriate referral

Physical and emotional harm during research process (King, 2010:102) was avoided by ensuring students that they will be referred for counselling if the need arises. In the case of one interview that led to disclosure of the participant's own sexual abuse history, the participant was referred for debriefing/counselling to a campus counsellor after the interview was terminated. The participant did not want to terminate the interview, indicating that she wants to contribute to the findings. The specific data of the disclosure was not included in the discussion on the findings, although the rest of the interview was still utilised.

4.6.6 Right to withdraw

Participants must be informed that they can withdraw from the research project at any time, without any need to give an explanation and without any subsequent consequences. They may also request that the researcher not use the information they have already provided in the study (Forrester, 2010:112). This was explained by the researcher in person to the participants and is also included in the consent form.

4.6.7 Ethics in analysis and reporting

The researcher is not allowed to fabricate data or change anything that she observed or encountered in the research process (Bless *et al.*, 2008:145). The researcher ensured that she only reports on data collected and what was directly observed. In order to ensure this, member checking was done by obtaining feedback from participants after the initial findings were documented.

4.6.8 Expertise of the researcher to do research

The researcher is a social worker by profession and was bound by the ethical code of the South African Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP). The study was conducted under the supervision of a qualified social worker.

4.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is at the core of establishing research quality (Shaw, 2010:52) and this can be ensured by keeping the research process as transparent as possible. One way of achieving trustworthiness is to keep an audit trail, showing the process of transforming raw data to interpretation presented in the results (Shaw, 2010:182). This was ensured by keeping a record of all reflections and summaries during the process. Member checking was also done to ensure trustworthiness. This was done by eliciting feedback from the participants on the themes, subthemes and categories identified, in order to provide the opportunity for participants to refute the initial findings if they were not in agreement.

Trustworthiness was achieved by using certain strategies. Lincoln and Guba (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:304) developed and systemised these in their writings as credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

- *Credibility*

Qualitative research does not make use of specific measuring instruments; instead the researcher is at the core of the data collection process. Member checking (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:304) and member reflections were done to ensure the credibility of the data. Member checking and member reflections have the potential not only to confirm for the researcher whether he managed to capture the true nature of the participants' responses, but also may yield new perspectives and information (Tracy, 2010:844). This took place on several levels, the first of which was reflecting back to the participants what they had said during the interviews. Different interview techniques were used; paraphrasing, reflection, clarification, encouragement, summarising in order to check that the perspectives of the participants are documented as clearly as possible. The second way this was done was by organising the preliminary data description of the responses into themes and sub-themes that

were mailed to participants for feedback purposes and also to ascertain whether the content was a true reflection of their perceptions. The participants did not reject any of the preliminary findings.

- *Transferability*

It is important to make sure that the data collected in the research are valid in other contexts and situations (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420). Transferability also refers to whether a duplicate study in a different setting would provide similar results. This necessitates a thick description of the process, context and people in the research to provide a basis for the evaluation of quality as described by Holloway and Wheeler (2010:310) and Tracy (2010:842). During this study this was done by describing the setting and context of participants in great detail.

- *Dependability*

Dependability refers to whether the same study could be repeated with the same participants in a parallel setting and still yield a similar result (Botma *et al.*, 2009:233). An audit trail (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420) was kept by being transparent in the systematic documentation of the research process. This audit trail contained descriptions of the methodology followed to obtain the findings. This will ensure that if the same study is done in a parallel context, it will yield similar results. Member checking was done to ensure that findings are verified and validated. The research was completed under the supervision of a qualified social worker in order to ensure objectivity and procedural compliance.

- *Confirmability*

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings (Botma *et al.*, 2010:292). This approach has to do with ensuring that the research findings reflect the participants' true experiences and is not a reflection of the researcher's own bias. In order to make sure that the researcher's bias does not influence the findings of this study, the in-depth interview did not have an interview schedule, but started with a single question and participants' responses were explored further. This prevented the possibility of the researcher structuring the interviews to prove her bias. A literature control as described by Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) was used to verify the findings of this study.

5. CHOICE AND STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is in the format of an article and makes use of the following structure:

Section A

Part 1: Introduction and orientation to study

This part introduces the study by discussing the problem statement as well as the research methodology used.

Part 2: Literature Review

A literary review deals with social work students' perceptions within the theoretical framework of Ecological Systems Theory as well as Gestalt Field Theory

Section B

This section contains an article in which the research findings of the empirical study are written according to the guidelines of the journal *Social Work/ Maatskaplike Werk*.

Section C

This section presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of this study

PART 2

A LITERARY REVIEW ON SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS WITHIN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY AS WELL AS GESTALT FIELD THEORY.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Section A, Part 1, a broad overview on the rationale and problem statement of this study was provided. The research question, aim of this study, as well as the research methodology was discussed. In Part 2 a literature study will be undertaken in which the Ecological Systems perspective as well as Gestalt Field Theory is discussed as theoretical basis for this study. An overview of child sexual abuse (CSA) as well as the role of social workers in rendering services to sexually abused children will be given. Further aspects that will be reflected on are; the development of perceptions and possible factors which can influence these perceptions.

The following is a discussion of the theoretical framework of the study; Ecological Systems Theory and Gestalt Field Theory.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY

Social Work is a profession that deals both with society and individuals and has been changing as society has evolved (Chisala, 2006:2). In order to assist social workers in explaining and developing insight into behaviours and situations, theories are used to make sense of what is happening in practice (Green & McDermott, 2010:2415; Teater, 2010:4; Tudge *et al.*, 2009:198; Williams, 2010:39). The theoretical foundation for this study will be provided by two theories: Ecological System's Theory as well as Gestalt Field Theory. Both these approaches focus on the individual holistically in his unique context and on the meaning that these individuals derive from their environment. Burley (2009:83) mentions a fundamental likeness between Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory and Gestalt Field Theory. Both these approaches provide useful means of depicting complex phenomena holistically, based on the context in which they occur. In terms of this study these approaches are useful as a framework for understanding the perceptions of social work students about

child sexual abuse within their changing environment. Firstly, the Ecological System's Theory will be discussed.

2.1 Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner)

Darling (2007:205) states that there are several themes which were present from even the earliest writings of Bronfenbrenner, namely social and historical contexts, the active person and the impossibility to understand the individual in isolation. Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development changed considerably from its beginnings in the 1970's until Bronfenbrenner's death in 2005 (Rosa & Tudge, 2013: 243). The original focus on children and their development has been expanded to include the interdependence, interrelationship and reciprocal interaction between individuals and the different contexts which they inhabit (Harney, 2007:75). Green and McDermott (2010:2416) explain person-in-context as social work's "*defining and unifying personal stance*" – an approach to explaining the way individuals live and understanding the complexity of the world. Person-in-context recognises the interdependence of phenomena and explains how it affects, changes and sustains the way individuals live.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory organises the world of an individual in five systems of interaction; (a) Microsystem, (b) Mesosystem, (c) Exosystem, (d) Macrosystem, and (e) Chronosystem (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Pack, 2013:72-73; Swick & Williams, 2006:371). Lau and Ng (2014:4) describes it as a systematic framework where the environment of an individual can be pictured as a set of structures, one within the other one. These structures can be represented as expanding circles wherein individuals function; within a reciprocal process of influence between contexts and people (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014: 49; Harney, 2007:75). This is represented in Figure 1.1

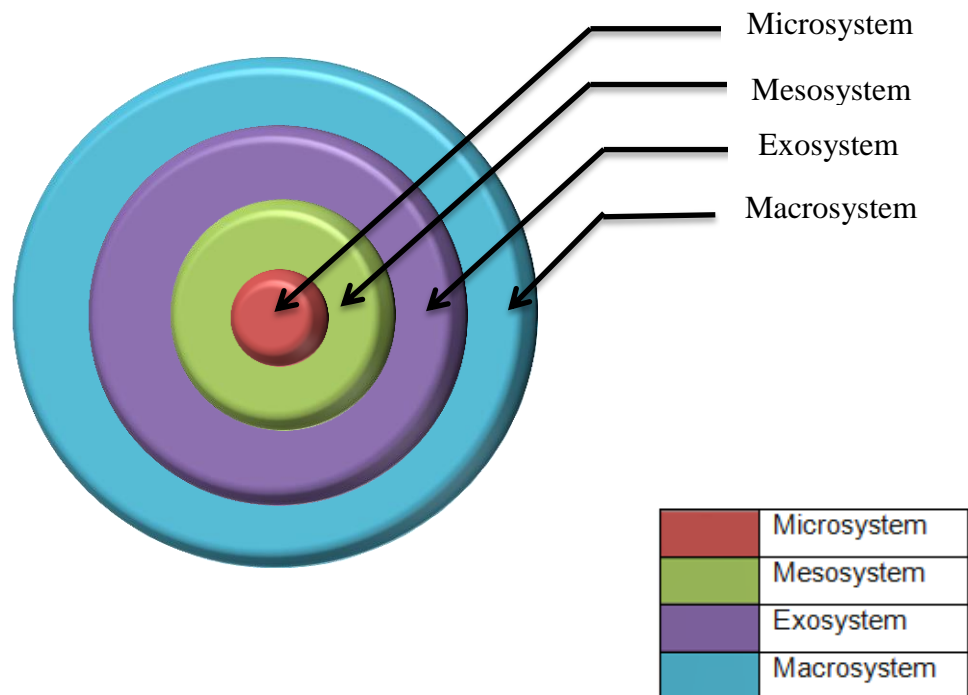


Figure 1.1 Illustration of the different levels of systems in the Ecological Systems Theory
 – [Adapted from Aucamp *et al.* (2014:50)]

Each system is impacted by the individual's context and opportunities for growth (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:11). The most important principle for this theory is the interaction between the individual and the environment, making it holistic in nature (Darling, 2007:207; Harney, 2007:75; Lau & Ng, 2014:4; Pack, 2013:72; Swick & Williams, 2006:371). The boundaries in these systems are not rigid, with the different systems in constant interaction and therefore change in one system will cause change in the other systems (Williams, 2012:37). These systems will be discussed in the following section.

2.1.1 The Microsystem

This system consists of the individual's immediate environment and serves as his point of departure for learning about the world. In this powerful set of relationships the individual learns about trust and mutual caring. The family operates in this microsystem; children develop in this context in terms of the personal characteristics of all individuals in the family as well as the interactions between family members (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:244). Paat

(2013:955) points out that the influence that the different microsystems have on the individual differ depending on the individual's developmental stage and added to the number of microsystems, increases as a person gets older. For the purposes of this study the social work student can be seen as part of the microsystem, where the influence of family now have the potential to be in conflict with other influences. This will be explained in detail in Section 2.3.

2.1.2 The Mesosystem

The Mesosystem consists of the participative relationships that connect two or more systems, for example between family, work and social life. It is a system of Microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977:515; Bronfenbrenner 2005:11; Swick & Williams, 2006:372), consisting of the interaction between the individual and the different systems. The value of Mesosystems is centred in the connection that is provided between the systems of expanding circles (Swick & Williams, 2006:373). This is where the value conflict of personal and professional values are evident and plays itself out in the work environment where decisions are made about how to respond to problems such as child sexual abuse.

2.1.3 Exosystem

The Exosystem includes the social environment that lies outside the individual's experiential field but still has an effect on Macro- and Mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:80-81). It can be described as the system of relations that is not physically inhabited; instead it is function in which we function in a psychological sense (Swick & Williams, 2006:372). This system also includes broader societal structures, such as the judicial system as well as supportive networks (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:57). For social work students this system will contain the level of support (or lack thereof) that they receive in terms of adjusting to professional socialisation as well as the required actions that are prescribed by legislation.

2.1.4 The Macrosystem

This system is constructed from the individual's cultural beliefs, societal values, political trends, and communal gatherings (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:39-40). According to Bronfenbrenner (1977:515, 527) it also includes legislation, regulations and the broader

community. Aucamp *et al.* (2014:49) state that these aspects in the Macrosystem interact and affect the Microsystem while Ahuja (2011:4) claims that the Macrosystem is the underlying system for all the other systems in the environment. In this study the Macrosystem focuses especially on cultural beliefs and societal values as well as legislation and services pertaining to child sexual abuse.

2.1.5 Development of Bronfenbrenner's theory

Rosa and Tudge (2013:243-254) describe Bronfenbrenner's theory as it developed and changed in three phases. The first phase, his earlier writings, is called the Ecological theory of development with the focus on systems of interaction as is discussed in the next paragraph. The second phase, termed in some publications as Process-Person-Context Model, he attended more to the processes of development as well as focusing on time as a factor that is as important as the environment, adding another layer to the interrelated set of systems; the Chronosystem. This culminated in the third phase, named the Bio-ecological Model. The central aspects that this phase of the theory brings, are the proximal process, person characteristics, context and time (both historical and current). These explanations of the development of this theory set the stage for the resistance against academics who reduce the theory as simply dealing with the influence of context on children's development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). Tudge *et al.* (2009:202) stated that the appropriate use of the final phase of Bronfenbrenner's theory would be to use at least proximal process plus two of the other four PPCT concepts. Using the Process-Person-Context-Time model as theoretical framework to study the perceptions of social work students, these perceptions and experiences can be explored and described. Before these four concepts can be applied to the research topic, it is important to give a description of these concepts:

- *Proximal processes*

Bronfenbrenner regards the everyday activities between the individual and his environment as the building blocks of development. He termed this as "proximal processes", referring to the interaction between the individual and the people in his immediate environment and context (Tudge *et al.*, 2009:199). The proximal process is significant in this study as it refers to reciprocal interaction between the social work students within their family of origin context as well as within the context of their training, since these are the arenas in which perceptions about child sexual abuse are formed.

- *Person*

Person in Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time model refers to the individual and his/her characteristics. Three types of person characteristics are described as part of the second P of PPCT, namely *demand*, *resource*, and *force* characteristics (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:253; Tudge *et al.*, 2009:200).

Demand characteristics refer to personal attributes such as age, gender, skin colour and physical appearance. Resource characteristics include mental and emotional resources (past experiences, skills, attitudes, beliefs and intelligence) as well as social and material resources (food, housing, education and opportunities) (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:253; Tudge *et al.*, 2009:200). Force characteristics refer to differences in temperament, motivation and persistence (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:253; Tudge *et al.*, 2009:200). In this study this refers to the personal demographics of social work students which are among the factors that influence perceptions.

- *Context*

Context refers to the four interrelated systems already discussed in 2.1.1 to 2.1.4.

- *Time*

The concept of time in this model expands on what was previously regarded as the Chronosystem, making provision for the experiences that take place over historical time as well as over the course of interaction (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:253-254). In this study this will be seen in the development of social work students' perceptions over time.

The following discussion will focus on Gestalt Field Theory before both the theories will be applied to field of study.

2.2 Gestalt Field Theory

Resnick (2009:2) describes three basic processes that form the basis of Gestalt Theory; Field Theory, Phenomenology and Dialogue. Parlett (2007:71) quotes Levin who states that Field Theory is more a set of principles, a method, a way of thinking than a theory in the true sense

of the word. He further states that the outlook of Field Theory is on the interrelatedness between situations and their settings.

Parlett (1991:71) describes the essence of Gestalt Field Theory as the holistic view of the individual that includes the social environment of the person's social world as well as organisations and culture. Resnick (2007:2) adds to this that fundamental to this is that "*everything is part of the field ... relational, in flux, interrelated, and in process.*" He further explains that the individual can only be understood when the environment as well as the individual's interaction with the environment is also taken into account. Parlett (1991:72) states that field theory places and describes individuals in their contexts and also postulates five principles which characterise perceptions about context, holism and process. Holism refers to the self-regulatory and growth orientated tendency of individuals and points to the fact that the individual cannot be seen as separate from his environment (Blom, 2004:9). These five principles describe how the individual organises information and derives meaning from experiences. The five principles of Parlett will be discussed shortly before applying them to the field of study in 2.3.

- *The principle of organisation*

The motivation for behaviour or the meaning derived from an experience is not determined by one factor only, but by the structure of the field as a complete unit of co-existing facts and the position of the factor relevant to the rest of the field (Burley, 2009:83; Parlett, 1991:72-74; Phillipson, 2001:16). Lives and collective systems overlap and are interdependent and need to be looked as a "*unified field*" (Bowman & Nevis, 2005:10), a term that was borrowed from Parlett. The meaning of an event becomes clear within the bigger context when the total field has been organised in a way that provides meaning (Parlett, 1991:73). The social work student thus forms perceptions based on the totality of his experiences and all aspects in the field.

- *The principle of contemporaneity*

This principle refers to interrelatedness of past, present and future as well as the meaning the individual derives from it. Experiencing the present is important and the past and future is important only in how it influences the current experiences (Burley, 2001:83). The future and past are not ignored, but the focus is on the present (Fodor, 2007:45; Parlett, 2009:73). What

is important therefore are the perceptions of social workers in the present and past perceptions are relevant in terms of how they helped shape the current perceptions.

- *The principle of singularity*

Each individual's field is unique and therefore different individuals have different points of view and perspectives. Meaning is individually constructed and what stands out for one person as interesting is hugely affected by their background, current need, long-term concerns and unfinished business (Burley, 2009:83; Parlett, 1991:73) and the meaning they attach to these situations, based on their perspectives and individual circumstances (Parlett, 2009:73). This will mean that while one student may find a certain influence in his background significant, another student who has been exposed to the same influence may even find it hard to recall the situation.

- *The principle of changing process*

This principle is based on the fact that the field is continuously changing and individuals cannot have the same experience more than once. In this fluid field, perceptions are constantly being created as individuals learn to cope with new ongoing problems, accommodate changes in their environment and adapt to these changes (Parlett, 2009:74). Student social workers are exposed to a field that is exposed to accelerated change due to the information that their training is exposing them to as well as the exposure that they have in terms of practical training.

- *The principle of possible relevance*

No part of the field can be excluded as insignificant. All parts are potentially meaningful and the range of possible relevance is not restricted to only some parts of the field (Parlett, 2009:74). Therefore the focus must be on the whole spectrum of experiences and perceptions that influences social work students' actions. Some parts of the field may appear invisible, but should not be discounted (Parlett, 1991:74). The uniqueness of social work students' perceptions cannot be reduced by ascribing them to a single factor such as culture for example.

In the following discussion, the theoretical framework for this study will applied to the field of study.

2.3 Application to field of study

The theoretical framework discussed needs to be applied to the student social worker whose perceptions are being studied. The focus of the study is specifically on the perceptions of social work students regarding child sexual abuse and therefore it will be applied as such.

The discussion on the theoretical framework indicates clearly that the individual cannot be seen in isolation, the environment must also be taken into account as well as the interaction between individual and environment. In the following figure the factors influencing the perceptions of social work students as well social work services and the specific level that they are aimed at is indicated.

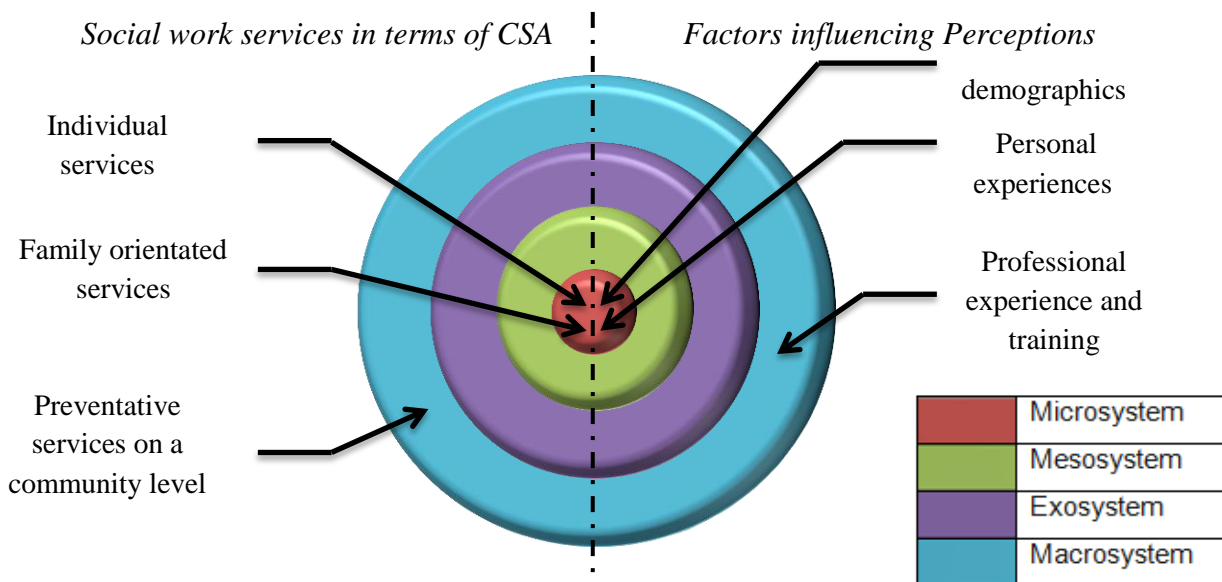


Figure 1.2 Application of conceptual Framework

In the figure the services that social workers render in instances of CSA are indicated within the systems that they are aimed at. This means that services are aimed at two levels, namely the Micro- and Macrosystem. This is juxtaposed with the factors influencing the perceptions of students also indicated within the corresponding systems. In this case as well the factors that influence their perceptions are found in two of the systems, namely the Micro- and Macrosystems. This shows the need for the third phase of Bronfenbrenner's work as is set out in the next discussion.

An Ecological understanding of the person in context demands that the influence of family, community, subculture and culture is examined in order to get an idea of how this has shaped

the individual's development (Harney, 2007:75). In the case of social work students this means that the student is viewed within the context of family, community and culture (see figure 2), and that this context has the potential to change and influence perceptions.

The social worker who is mandated to intervene in cases of CSA also operates within these levels of the Ecological Systems Model (Green & McDermott, 2010:2416), but a more specific description of the inner world and perceptions of a social worker (principle of singularity) is necessary to see how this impacts on service delivery to children exposed to sexual abuse. Among the aspects of the internal operations of a social worker that are of special interest for this specific study are the perceptions of social workers regarding sexual abuse. The target population was social work students since they are in a unique position, being exposed to knowledge about child sexual abuse (the principle of changing process) without any practical experience of handling such cases, providing a view of the possible discrepancy of what they know and what they are taught (the principle of possible relevance). The Ecological Systems Perspective postulates that individuals form their reality from the experiences in their environment (Harney, 2007:75). Gestalt Field Theory concurs and describes that reality is formed (Principle of organization) through contact between the individual and his environment (Blom, 2004:19) and the individual's subjective experience of this.

Social work student's perceptions of child sexual abuse can only be viewed by taking the environment or context into account (Postmus *et al.*, 2011:304). Social workers come from different backgrounds and bring with them the guidelines of their culture or communal beliefs (Perceptual process) about what sexual abuse is as well as the personal characteristics (Person) and experiences over time (Time)

Both Ecological Systems Perspective and Gestalt Field Theory provide a basis for understanding the perceptions of social work students regarding these aspects. In the following section child sexual abuse will be discussed focusing on the extent and definition of this phenomenon as a backdrop for the following discussions.

2.4 Child Sexual Abuse

This study focuses on the perceptions of social work students, specifically their perceptions on child sexual abuse and therefore this will be focused on briefly to provide context to the discussions on social work services and perceptions. Child sexual abuse in South Africa is pervasive. Statistics differ on the exact extent of this, but there is agreement that the physical, psychological, emotional and social effects are devastating and long-lasting (Coates, 2010:391; Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85; Postmus *et al.*, 2011:303; Smith *et al.*, 2010:256). Figures of the extent of CSA are largely dependent on the definition and methods used to collect the data (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85). Both boys and girls are victims of sexual abuse, although girl children are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence such as rape and sexual assault. (CASE, 2005:6). The reason statistics are mostly focus on female victims is a result of what Jewkes *et al.* (2005:1810) call the failure to consider the “*gendered nature of the violation*”. Although a significant number of incidents can be ascribed to male perpetrators and female victims, it is known that in some instances the perpetrator can also be female or children themselves.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse come from all walks of life, but some common characteristics can be identified. Contrary to popular belief, strangers do not pose the greatest threat to children. The majority of perpetrators of child sexual abuse live in the child’s household or in the vicinity. Most perpetrators are known to the child, are trusted and are usually in a position of authority over the child (CASE, 2005:6).

It is important to take a look at the various ways child sexual abuse is defined in order to align it with current legislation on CSA.

2.4.1 Definitions of Child Sexual Abuse

Hestick and Perrino (2009:52) claim that studies have revealed that the general public and professionals working in the area of child welfare have differing perceptions of how child sexual abuse is defined (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1; Hestick & Perrino, 2009:62; Pereda *et al.*, 2009:332; Richter & Dawes, 2008:81). As a result of these differences of opinion, professionals are unsure of whether behavior constitutes sexual abuse and how to deal with the case (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1). Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85) mentions that definitions of child

sexual abuse are not specific enough in terms of what constitutes sexual activity or sexual practise. What these definitions have in common though, is that they involve the abuse of power. Child sexual abuse is therefore a sexual violation perpetrated by a person who holds (or is perceived to hold) power over a child (CASE, 2005:3). This report points out another important aspect of defining child sexual abuse namely, that young children cannot consent to sexual activity because they do not have an understanding of sexuality and cannot conceive of the consequences of sexual activity for themselves.

In contrast to this, the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, defines child sexual abuse in a broad way that makes it clear what sexual behaviour can be classified as abusive. This act makes a distinction between contact and non-contact (article 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22) sexual behaviour, sets the age of consent at 16 years and makes it obligatory for any person with knowledge of about sexual abuse to report it to authorities [article 54(1)], (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:3). The legal aspects prescribing social work services in cases of child sexual abuse will be discussed in section 2.5.1.

These changes in legislation are in line with global transformation in sexual abuse laws. Conaghan and Russell (2014:26) however, says that the problem is these changes have not ensured more convictions globally. That may be seen as widening the gap between the rising number of reported incidents and static number of convictions in court. They postulate that this has to do with the matter of attitudes that move away from the legal framework to cultural norms and popularly held beliefs (myths).

The following discussion will focus on service rendering in cases of child sexual abuse highlighting the specific legislation pertaining to CSA as well the types of child protective services rendered by social workers.

2.5 Service rendering in cases of CSA

Despite the protection intended by South Africa's constitutional, legislative and civic environment to safeguard children's rights, wrongs are perpetrated against a large number of South African children every day (Richter & Dawes, 2008:81). Child sexual abuse is a complex phenomenon and takes place in many forms, child marriage, child prostitution, child trafficking and child pornography amongst others (Sossou & Yogtiba, 2009:1222). CSA also

takes place in a variety of settings, family, school, community, alternative care and on the streets (Richter & Dawes, 2008:82). Because it is a complex issue, social workers need to be able make decisions about interventions strategies that aim to address the specific type of sexual abuse (Chitereka, 2010:36). But before a social worker can make decisions in this regard, cognisance must be taken of what legislation is relevant to the situation and the specific regulations that prescribe what action can be taken.

2.5.1 Legislation pertaining to child sexual abuse

Legislation in South Africa has recently been reformed to increase the level of protection that is provided for children in accordance with the Constitution. The legislation, namely the Sexual Offences Act No 32 of 2007, the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 and the Children's Amendment Act No 41 of 2007 have all had a major impact on the roles and duties of social workers (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:90).

The rights of children are protected in the Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The following sections have special relevance in terms of services to children; sec 28(1)(c) which determines that every child has the right to social work services; section 28(1)(d) which mentions that the right of a child to be protected from neglect and abuse and section 28(2) which centres around the best interests of the child that should be paramount. The Children's Act, 38 of 2005, aims to implement these rights of children and set out principles relevant to the care and protection of children (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:8). The Children's Act (38/2005) sets the standards for the roles and responsibilities of professionals working the sexual abuse field (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1-2) that aims at providing children with protection of their human rights and promoting their overall wellbeing (Aucamp *et.al.*, 2012:8).

2.5.2 Child Protection

While legislation aims at protecting the interests and rights of children, Sossou and Yogtiba (2009:1231) describe the primary mission of social work as to enhance the well-being of individuals and families with special attention to meeting the basic needs of children and other vulnerable groups in society. Two of the aims central to social work interventions are safeguarding and promoting children's welfare (Chitereka, 2010:36). Child protection forms

a major part of social work services in the field and according to Sinanan (2011:661) organisations dealing with child protection tailor their interventions to identify victims of abuse and to protect them from further harm. When a social worker intervenes in a case of CSA the core aim of service rendering is preventing further abuse (Sinanan, 2011:659). Another goal is to establish whether allegations of abuse can be substantiated before planning the intervention strategy necessary to ensure the child's safety.

Child protection organisations are the entry point for the reporting of child abuse and therefore have the duty to investigate and intervene. With the aim of protecting children from harm, social workers are involved in substantiating reports of abuse and referring it to the justice system (Sinanan, 2011:660). Although there is consensus among professionals about the existence of this phenomenon, the diversity of perceptions among the general public and professionals has a critical effect on the identification and treatment of child sexual abuse (Aucamp *et.al.*, 2012:1).

CSA takes place in all cultures and socio-economic circumstances in South Africa, with huge variations in causal factors on an individual, family and community level (CASE, 2005:6). A social worker is expected to intervene on each of these levels and a discussion on the role of social workers in this regard follows.

2.5.3 The role of the social worker in CSA

Intervention in sexual abuse cases aims to stabilise the family and to maintain the family structure by focusing on addressing the risk factors. The goal is to ensure safety for all family members and working on developing new ways of relating to each other (Sinanan, 2011:661). Chitereka (2009:28-30) describes the role of social workers in child sexual abuse according to the following categories:

2.5.3.1 *Primary and Secondary Prevention*

Fouché (2012:77) describes preventative services on four levels; (1) helping children to recognise potential abusers and abusive situations; (2) teaching children about personal boundaries, and coping with abusive situations; (3) encouraging reporting abuse; and (4) encouragement and empowerment of professionals, parents and caregivers to educate and

protect their children regarding sexual child abuse. Preventative services are aimed at addressing the causes of CSA. A short discussion on these causes can highlight how it relates to preventative services.

Richter and Dawes (2008:84) indicate that factors in the social and interpersonal contexts, embedded in the individual's environment that predispose the presence of CSA. In a CASE report (2005:iii) the root causes of CSA are described as: sexuality, power and culture. This report expands on this by mentioning that these factors span from the individual to the family and society including personal experiences, family dysfunction, poverty, unequal gender relations, acceptance of violence, cultural prescription and substance abuse. Jewkes *et al.* (2005: 1810) claim that a discussion on causal factors demonstrates how limited the research base is in terms of this aspect, with the result that there is not enough information available to inform preventative and supportive services.

It is necessary to take a look at these factors in order to understand what can be done to prevent CSA. A distinction will be made in terms of the following causal factors; individual factors (micro level), factors in the family environment (micro level) as well as factors within the wider community (meso level).

A report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011:21-22) mentions some *individual* factors that render children vulnerable to sexual abuse: (1) Age and developmental stage; (2) Gender; and (3) Disability. Children who are very young, female and disabled (physically or mentally) cannot fend for themselves, are dependent on adult carers and are therefore especially vulnerable.

Factors within the family also contribute to CSA. Jewkes *et al.* (2005:1810) states that abuse is more likely in families which suffer from poverty, lack of social support and are situated in communities that have few resources. That is, however, not the full picture and the following factors were identified by a range of researchers: (1) Substance abuse and addiction of adults increases the risk of sexual abuse of children and other problematic behaviour (Chitereka, 2010:33); (2) Quality of parenting indicates issues such as parental neglect as well as absentee parents who either have to travel long distances to get to work (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:86; Richter & Dawes, 2008:86; Smith *et al.*, 2010:258); (3) Socio-economic status, such as poverty and the effects of poverty that can make a child especially vulnerable (WHO,

2011:21) to abusive practices such as child prostitution, child pornography and child trafficking (CASE, 2005:4; Sossou & Yogtiba, 2009:19).

Richter and Dawes (2008:32), suggests that *factors in the community*, such as culture, superstitions, and religious beliefs play a significant role in exposing children to sexual abuse (Chitereka, 2010:31). Some of these factors are: (1) Gender roles such as unequal power relations between men and women as prescribed by the patriarchal nature of South African society (CASE, 2005:31; Jewkes *et al.*, 2005:1810; Mathews *et al.*, 2012:84); (2) Respect for elders that demands unquestioning obedience from children (Mathews *et al.*, 2012: 87); (3) A culture of violence that is fuelled by poverty, notions of masculinity, inadequate parenting, toxic parenting, substance abuse and deficiencies in the law enforcement system (CASE, 2005:31; Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85; Richter & Dawes, 2008:85); and (4) Breakdown of family structure (WHO, 2011:21).

These causal factors form part of the perceptions that individuals hold on the phenomenon of CSA and this is closely related to how individuals, in the case of this study, social work students perceive what can be done about it.

2.5.3.2 Tertiary Intervention

Berliner (2003:12) describes intervention with sexually abused children as assessment; establishment of a safe environment; identifying possible suspects to ensure accountability; protection of the community; and to help children to cope with the psychological consequences in order to promote healthy development. In order to decide where tertiary services should be aimed, it is helpful to look at the impact of CSA. The effects of child sexual abuse affect the child and the broader system they are a part of (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Chiteraka, 2010:33) and therefore affects the child, the family, the community and the perpetrator. In the following section attention will be given to each of these parts of the system.

Sexual abuse is likely to impact the child by causing psychological harm in all areas of functioning (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Chitereka, 2010:34; Coates, 2010: 392; Postmus *et al.*, 2011:303) with wide ranging effects. These effects also differ from one child to the next depending on several factors such as the age of the victim, duration of abuse, frequency of

abuse, number of perpetrators, severity of the abuse as well as relationship with the perpetrator (Chitereka, 2010:33). Aucamp *et al.* (2014:49), Coates (2010:392) and Chitereka (2010:34) describe the impact on various levels. The impact of child sexual abuse is profound with immediate as well as long-term consequences (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:53; Coates, 2010:392; Mathews, *et al.*, 2012:86; WHO, 2011:12). These consequences can be devastating as they include the possibility of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:86). Coates (2010:392) quotes research that found a relationship between child sexual abuse and mental as well as physical health concerns later in life, including depression, sexual disorders, addiction and eating disorders, amongst others. These authors also claim that what may be most damaging is that early childhood relationships are internalised and therefore influence self-image and self-worth, inform future relationships and therefore influence attachments styles in adult life.

All these factors place a huge demand on social work services in the form of the need for therapeutic intervention. This intervention should include an understanding of all these underlying factors that have brought about and affected the child's current situation in order to plan and implement intervention (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:57). Child protection agencies are tasked with the responsibility to assist victims of maltreatment and protect them from further victimisation. Social workers working for these agencies are involved in determining whether the allegations of abuse can be substantiated and what further action is required (Sinanan, 2011:660). This can take the form of therapeutic services to the child and family (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:55) on the one end of the scale and removing the child from the family and placing the child in alternative care on the other side of the spectrum (Matthias, 2010:57).

CSA has a specific impact on the family. When a child is sexually abused within a family context, the whole family is affected by the disclosure of this abuse. This impact first of all centres on appropriations of blame which is informed by the specific cultural context. When the perpetrator is the breadwinner, family member may choose to side against the child in the fear of losing their livelihood should the perpetrator be incarcerated. Mothers especially, might feel caught in the middle, not knowing whether to believe the child or the family member. Should the event become public knowledge, the family may experience shame or be ostracised by the community. In the long-term family relationships will be affected negatively (Chitereka, 2010:34; Soussa & Yogtiba, 2012:1220).

The community is also impacted by CSA. Child sexual abuse also affects the society/community as a whole. One of the biggest factors in this is that many perpetrators are never arrested with the result that offenders are free to repeat their offences, putting more children at risk (Chitereka, 2010:35).

2.5.3.3 Forensic services

According to Streak and Poggenpoel (2005:23) the White Paper on Welfare does not include forensic social work as a specific field, but includes these services under victim empowerment, while Botha (2010:3) claims that forensic social work focuses on services regarding child sexual abuse. Social workers in the forensic field intervene with individuals on a personal as well as on a legal level, such as representing a youth in court, preparing the child for court, acting as an expert witness, assessing child sexual abuse and providing court reports (Chitereka, 2009: 25; Iffley, 2012:38; Scheepers, 2008:29). This is also the case when services are rendered to children who have been sexually abused.

The perceptual process as it relates to the development of social work students' perceptions will be discussed in the following sections.

2.6 Perceptual process and Attitudes

The previous discussion indicated the different types of services for which social workers are responsible. These services may be negatively impacted by student social workers' perceptions of CSA and therefore it is important to get an idea of how perceptions develop so that the possible factors that influence perception can be identified. Wood (2007:73) defines perception as an active process of creating meaning by selecting, organising and interpreting events, people, and situations in the world around us. It also refers to the way information about the environment acquired through the senses is organised into experiences. This means that the formation of perceptions entails the analytical, introspective and investigative process where meaning is created of what was observed or experienced through the senses. This forms the basis of conscious experience and allows us to interact with the world around us. Included in this process are the cognitive processes required to process information, building up hypotheses or theories of phenomena in the world (Eysenck, 2002:291).

This perceptual process that is formed through the senses, is further influenced by perception hypotheses, which are expectations, informed guesses and assumptions about the stimuli as well as their meaning (Eysenck, 2002:299). Raftopolous (2009:xviii) describes this perception hypothesis as an individual's personal theory that informs all incoming information and on which interpretation is based. This is closely related to constructivism and in a practical sense this means that an individual believes information that fits in with his or her personal theory.

Raftopolous (2009: xvix) describes perception as cognitively penetrable. This means that what you perceive can be influenced by cognitive processes such as learning, reading and thinking. Thinking is an intellectual power that is influenced to a large extent by social knowledge structures and social beliefs and this in turn affects behaviour.

This indicates that perception forms a frame of reference in which information about the world is organised, consisting of what an individual thinks and feels about a phenomenon. The following section contains a broad discussion on training and development of social workers as an aspect that informs perceptions.

2.7 Possible factors influencing social work students' perceptions of CSA

The validity of sexual abuse allegations are often called into question and what is of concern, is that the professionals involved in evaluating these allegations, have differing opinions in this regard. These disagreements cannot be explained unless factors such as differences in training and experience, personal bias and other subjective personal factors are taken into account (Everson & Sandoval, 2011:288). The specific factors informing perceptions of child sexual abuse are not clear (Hestick & Perrino, 2009:62), but when this is applied to the field of study, it is clear that there are factors that influence social work students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours regarding violence against women and children and these are based on social identity, past life experiences, and the current environment (Postmus *et al.*, 2011:304). The following discussion is on possible relevant factors that can influence perceptions; personal experiences, personal demographics, myth acceptance as well as training and education.

2.7.1 Personal experiences

Van Breda (2011:vi) claims that anecdotal evidence from within the Department of Social Work at the University of Johannesburg agrees with a limited number of recent studies (Alpaslan:2010) and (Wade:2009) that students face the same psychosocial challenges and vulnerabilities as their prospective client base. Since they are then forced to work with the same issues that they have experienced, it increases their vulnerability, especially since some of them have “*a long history of trauma*” (Van Breda, 2011:vi). Aggias (2012:259) warns that students who have experienced trauma may have adverse reactions to working with trauma.

Wade (2009:388-392) administered a questionnaire with 61 specific traumatic events to a sample of 124 fourth-year social work students at UNISA. On average, students reported having experienced 13 traumas, with 64 per cent of students experiencing from six to 16 traumas. Traumas that were reported are the following; (1) the death of a parent or significant other; (2) witnessing verbal abuse, rape, physical abuse or an accident; (3) being beaten at school; (4) family addictions; (5) being emotionally abused as a child; (6) extreme poverty; and (7) unwanted pregnancy.

This correlates with Van Breda’s (2011:20-26) research regarding students personal experiences of life challenges. Through a detailed analysis of 22 life challenges, four central themes emerged:

- **Loss.** The loss or death of parents and other significant persons, including students’ own children.
- **Poverty.** More than half of the participants reported growing up in poverty or struggling financially at present as life challenges.
- **Abuse.** Abuse-related life challenges (including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, mostly reported as occurring during childhood) emerged as prevalent.
- **Termination of Pregnancy.** Students reported having terminated a pregnancy, nearly half of which occurred while they were students.

It is clear that these experiences, especially ones which included abuse, may affect social work students’ perceptions of CSA. Kaufman *et al.* (2011:912) pleads for a better understanding of social work students’ perceptions of social problems on a cognitive as well

as emotional level. In order to develop this understanding the personal experiences of social work students need to be taken into account as it has a major effect on their motivation to intervene.

Rosa and Tudge (2013:242) state clearly that the individual cannot be seen as separate from his environment. The personal experiences as discussed lie within this environment and form the context of the social work student. Personal demographics also influence perceptions as described in the following section.

2.7.2 Personal demographics

Hestick and Perrino (2009:64) argue that gender role stereotypes influence perceptions of the specific gender combinations in terms of child sexual abuse. They offer several hypotheses to explain the effect of gender combinations on perceptions of CSA. These differences in perceptions of “gender” of relationships reflect a societal belief that it is more normative and less abusive for a male adolescent to be involved with a woman than it is for a female adolescent to be involved with a man. Sexual interaction between a woman and a male adolescent may be perceived by some as a means of sex education or rite of passage, while sexual contact between a man and a female adolescent may be viewed as more damaging (Hestick & Perrino, 2009:65). This also refers to same-sex encounters. Aiken (2002:124) points to a wide array of research that indicates that there is a difference between male and female perceptions on domestic and sexual violence. Postmus *et al.* (2011:307) claims that female professionals are more likely to detect domestic violence. Two other variables that are related to attitudes towards sexual violence are ethnicity and socio-economic status (Aiken, 2002:124).

2.7.3 Myth acceptance

Research has shown that professionals working in this field have differing perceptions about this phenomenon (Kaufman *et al.*, 2011:912). Cromer and Goldsmith (2010:619) mention that despite accurate knowledge regarding child sexual abuse among many professionals and other individuals, child sexual abuse myths persist and may influence perceptions. Conaghan and Russell (2014:26) claim that research over the past three decades indicates that myths about sexual offences are widely held and propagated by the media, affecting amongst other

things, the behaviour of perpetrators and victims, decision making in the justice system as well as apportioning of blame and assumptions of guilt. Cromer and Goldsmith (2010:618) agree that incorrect beliefs (myths) about sexual abuse are prevalent in societies across the globe. There is remarkable variety in terms of acceptance of these myths that informs responses to disclosure, legal decisions, and victims' subsequent psychological and health outcomes.

Despite accurate knowledge regarding child sexual abuse among many professional and other individuals, child sexual abuse myths persist and influence perceptions. These myths were divided into four categories: (a) minimisation or exaggeration of the extent of harm child sexual abuse poses; (b) denials of the extent of child sexual abuse; (c) diffusions of perpetrator blame; and (d) perpetrator stereotypes (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010:620). Understanding how child sexual abuse can be defined, has been found to reflect culturally mediated myths and stereotypes which serve to mitigate offender blame, to deny the abusiveness of CSA, and/or to deny the reality of most abuse incidents (Sulliman & Collings, 2005:1). In a study conducted by Sulliman and Collings (2005:4) about myth acceptance among helping professionals, they found high levels of myth acceptance. Across all levels of the independent measures considered in the study (i.e., gender and professional status), over 90 per cent of respondents reported some degree of CSA myth acceptance. The implications of this are clear and necessitate research such as the current study.

2.7.4 Training and development of social workers

In order to graduate as a social worker, an individual needs to master the exit level outcomes set for the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree in South Africa, as stipulated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (SAQA, 2006). An exit level outcome refers to the outcomes a qualifying learner needs to achieve by the time of leaving the learning programme for the successful achievement of a specific qualification (SAQA, 2006). These exit level outcomes for the BSW degree apply to theoretical as well as practical training and therefore various exit levels have practical components, with regard to which students need to demonstrate and apply professional skills, intervention strategies, and values (SAQA, 2006). The professional standards and exit level outcomes allow some leeway for a University to compile the curriculum in line with own preference, especially in terms of theoretical framework (Burgess, 2004:167). The different universities involved in training social work

students in South Africa will therefore adjust their curricula based on their specific approach and theoretical framework, but it will include a practical component as part of the exit level outcomes (Kaufman *et al.*, 2011:913).

Agglias (2012:259) claims that social work curricula should equip students with the knowledge and skills to work with clients who have experienced trauma. Social work students do not have adequate opportunities to gain practical experience about the emotional effect that encounters with social problems bring (Kaufman *et al.*, 2011:913). Wade (2008:383) mentions a need to manage the anxiety and emotions through emotional processing of social work students undergoing field work as crucial. Misha and Bogo (2007:531) also stress the need for time for students to reflect on field work and process the emotional content thereof. Postmus *et al.* (2011:305) suggests that professional experience develops when a social worker is rendering services to survivors of sexual violence and findings on whether this exposure influences attitudes, beliefs and behaviour is scarce. According to these authors, some studies did find for example that the more a professional is exposed to sexual trauma, the less likely they are to blame the victim and also that social workers with longer professional careers are less likely to remove a child from an abusive family than those with shorter careers

Students enrolled in the university system have a diverse and often complicated range of life experiences (Van Breda, 2011:3). Social work students have to use the learning process to learn how to develop their own personal theories to implement in practice. This entails learning how to cope with the own personal issues and use these experiences to give meaning to the theories they develop (Trotter & Leech, 2003:203). These researchers have found that students can face specific challenges in conceptualising and integrating their own personal theories regarding aspects of social work, especially if they are consciously or unconsciously avoiding their own personal issues. They have also found that these challenges also extend to professionals, especially in relation to gender and sexuality issues.

Trotter and Leech (2003:204) further describe 'personal theory' as student's unique personal perspectives that they bring to their views and meanings of social work theory and practice. These perspectives could possibly originate from differing sources of knowledge, for instance accepted wisdom, more conventional social work theory, personal experience, discussion and

reflection, as well as origins that we are less consciously aware of. This is closely related to how Eysenck (2002:291) describes the development of perceptions (see par 2.5).

The personal and professional contexts are interrelated and as highlighted by Healy (2007:173), in social work, as in other disciplines, there can be “an uncomfortable fit” between theory and practice. These organisations and theories fail to address the concerns of practicing social workers, thereby ignoring the interpersonal context of social work services as well as the many influences shaping human action, including institutional pressures and unique individual perceptions.

The discussion on the perceptual process and the factors influencing the perceptions of student social workers indicate that factors on various levels of the students’ context can influence their perceptions of CSA and hold the potential to negatively impact service rendering.

3. SUMMARY

In part one of this section, the introduction to the study was discussed to provide an overview to the study and the specific research question that is being addressed. The research methodology applicable to this study was described in a clear, detailed manner and special attention was given to ethical aspects as well as trustworthiness.

Part two serves as an overview in terms of the Ecological Systems Perspective as Gestalt Field Theory to serve as a theoretical framework on which information regarding child sexual abuse can be presented. Child protection services by social workers in cases of child sexual abuse as well as legislation pertaining to these services were discussed. Attention was also given to how perceptions are formed and the factors that can influence a social worker’s perceptions regarding child sexual abuse.

In Section B the research findings will be presented in the form of an article that was written according to the guidelines of the scientific journal *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*.

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SECTION B

SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of social work students regarding child sexual abuse (CSA). Unstructured interviews with fourth-year students yielded six perceptions in this qualitative study. These perceptions were the following: (1) CSA is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment; (2) Descriptions of the sexually abused child; (3) Descriptions of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse; (4) CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects; (5) Child abuse affects the child in specific ways; and (6) Children do not disclose sexual abuse.

STUDENT SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Frieda Tanton, Carlien van Wyk

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a country with an alarming number of children who are being sexually abused. Child sexual abuse (CSA) has serious repercussions for individuals, families and society (Koehn, 2007:38). Attempts to address this have been strengthened by providing legislative frameworks to enable the protection of children and their rights. Unfortunately the legislation does not necessarily translate into action that ensures that less children are abused (CASE, 2005:2) or that children who are abused receive the necessary services to address the wrong that has been done to them (Richter & Dawes, 2008:79). Several authors (Pereda *et al.*, 2009:331; Richter & Dawes, 2008:81; Smith *et al.*, 2010:255) have referred to the possibility that social workers responsible for a significant section of the service delivery in cases of CSA do not view child sexual abuse in a uniform way. This prompts speculation into whether professionals working in the field of CSA share the same perceptions and how a possible difference may influence services to sexually abused children. This research study explores the perceptions of social work students regarding child sexual abuse.

ORIENTATION TO STUDY

Sexual abuse has been exposed as a pervasive problem (Pereda *et al.*, 2009:331; Smith *et al.*, 2010:255), although the exact extent is difficult to estimate due to the fact that different

methods of data collection, research methods and definitions are used to collate statistics on the incidence of CSA (Kisinga *et al.*, 2010:291; Richter & Dawes, 2008:81). In South Africa the description of CSA is defined by the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (Act 32 of 2007). In this act, sexual abuse is defined as any sexual act with a child under 18 without the child's consent. Sexual offences are defined in specific terms, making provision for the underlying dynamics of sexual grooming and making a distinction between contact and non-contact sexual acts (Aucamp *et al.*, 2010:2). In practice, however, it is clear that clear definition in the law does not necessarily mean that the reporting and handling of sexual offences against children became any easier (Aucamp *et al.*, 2010:1).

Recent changes in the Sexual Offences Act No 32 of 2007, the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 and the Children's Amendment Act No 41 of 2007, have all had a major impact on the roles and duties of social workers (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:90). The Children's Act aims to implement these rights of children and sets out principles relevant to the care and protection of children (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:8). The Children's Act sets the standards for the roles and responsibilities of professionals working the sexual abuse field (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1-2). It is therefore necessary to determine whether the perceptions that social workers have regarding CSA are in line with legislation, since the opposite will have a negative impact on how they define CSA and intervene in cases of CSA.

Social workers are crucial role players in dealing with CSA (Chitereka, 2009:28). Child protection agencies are the first point of contact in terms of defining, reporting and planning intervention in cases of CSA (Sinanan, 2011:659-660). Services are rendered on either a preventative, forensic, supportive or therapeutic level (Chitereka, 2009:29; Scheepers 2008:19, Sossou & Yogtiba, 2010:1227). A problem is encountered, however, when social workers have disparate opinions on whether abuse took place. Despite legal prescriptions

that health and social service professionals should report abuse and neglect, many incidents of suspected abuse are not reported; moreover, there is often disagreement as to what constitutes maltreatment (Ashton, 2010:129). Social workers and other professionals often have a variety of misconceptions and opinions regarding what constitute sexual abuse. The result of these misconceptions is a failure to report cases of alleged sexual abuse (Walker-Descartes *et al.*, 2011: 438) and uncertainty about when to report or how to act (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:1; Everson & Sandelovski, 2011: 297).

When these disagreements cannot be explained in terms of differences in training, consideration must be given to the presence of subjective factors such as personal aspects for example; gender (Hestick & Perrino, 2009:65), culture (Fontes & Plummer, 2010: 493), training (Harrington *et al.*, 2008:65), experience and other subjective factors (Everson & Sandoval, 2011:288) as well as personal bias (Everson & Sandoval, 2011:288). These differences in perceptions can be ascribed to differences in perception that come about through the personal bias of social workers and how they define a specific form of maltreatment and its severity (Everson & Sandoval, 2011:288; Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85).

How complex this issue is, can be seen when legal requirements are applied to service delivery in terms of CSA. The process of responding to CSA involves at least three phases which are filtered through the frame of reference of the social worker: Observing/investigating the situation; assessing and labelling the behaviour of the significant others; and responding to that behaviour. This frame of reference includes attitudes and opinions which direct behaviour and is influenced by perceptions. Ashton (2010:129) and Everson and Sandoval (2011:288) agree that there are differences in what is considered as maltreatment of children, and while one professional is convinced that sexual abuse has taken place, another might be convinced of the opposite.

These differences can already be detected during the training of social work students. Social work training enables social workers to legally protect certain vulnerable populations such as children who are victims of violence (Chitereka, 2009:30; Sossou & Yogtiba, 2010:1227). Social work training programs go beyond theory and knowledge; consisting of three different dimensions of equal importance: knowledge, attitude (including values) and skills, based on the understanding that a lack of knowledge or a negative attitude will have a negative impact on the skills involved in rendering services (Eack & Newhill, 2008:81), making it necessary to look at the aspects that influence undergraduate students' attitudes and perceptions.

The factors that influence social work students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding violence against women and children are based on social identity, past life experiences, and the current environment (Postmus *et al.*, 2011:304). Students enrolled in the university system have a diverse and often complicated range of life experiences (Van Breda, 2011:3). During the process of social work education, students are required to walk the tightrope between acquiring knowledge and skills while at the same time reflecting on their own personal values and the fit between these two worlds (Eack & Newhill, 2008:79). Students need to integrate their professional and personal identities (Batchelor, 2003:791; Calderwood *et al.*, 2009:112; Holtshauzen, 2010:197) to achieve the outcomes of social work education. This means that they should be able to adhere to professional values while at the same time be aware of how their own values (Ahston, 2010:130) and cultural background (Bender *et al.*, 2010:35) influence their decision making.

Social work students undergo a process that can be termed “professional socialization” during the course of their studies and some challenges could arise when social work principles are applied (Calderwood *et al.*, 2009:112) while students are still inexperienced and more likely

to lean on their own frame of reference to help with decision-making in terms of particular cases. Baretta in Ashton (2010:130) describes the process of professional socialization as acquiring specific knowledge, skills and values through the course of social work education. Through this process, social workers' personal attitudes and opinions that influence professional behaviour and decision making are shaped (Calderwood *et al.*, 2009:112). Kaufman *et al.* (2011:912) plead for a better understanding of how students perceive social problems on a cognitive and emotional level to assist training programs.

In the USA a great deal of research has been conducted regarding the need for social workers to recognise own bias and also be able to integrate knowledge and reflection with practice skills (Bender *et al.*, 2010:34-36; Calderwood *et al.*, 2009:111; O'Neal, 2012:27), but local research in this regard is limited. Social workers in South Africa come from differing backgrounds in terms of culture, religion, race and socio-economic background (Earle, 2008:46). These differences in background have the potential to impact social workers on whom the responsibility for rendering treatment services and implementing legislation regarding sexual abuse rests (Smith *et al.*, 2010:266). The personal values, attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs of social workers are revealed to clients in a direct or indirect way and affect how helpful they are to their clients. Walker-Descartes *et al.* (2011:446) claim that the response to a disclosure of CSA has a significant impact on successful therapeutic outcomes for the child involved. Social work students are budding social workers, at the beginning of a process of integrating their training with their personal values, attitudes and beliefs in a way that will enable them to have effective helping relationships as social workers (O'Neal, 2012:39). If social workers are aware of how their own beliefs, perceptions, and behaviours impact on their helping behaviour, they might be able to minimise the influence on their service delivery (Heydt & Sherman, 2005:161).

In terms of this study it would mean that a difference in attitudes/perceptions regarding sexual abuse will influence a social worker's intervention methods and interpretation of legislation in instances of sexual abuse. According to Hestick and Perrino (2009:62) these perceptions determine whether a social worker believes that what happened to a child is sexual abuse. Awareness and understanding of biases of student social workers as well as how they relate their own background to their work with clients will enhance consciousness of issues that may impede effective service rendering in cases of sexual abuse (Bender *et al.*, 2010:36-37).

The problem statement for this study is: Social work students in South Africa come from differing backgrounds and this may have an influence on their perceptions of sexual abuse, one of the most prevalent problems they will encounter in practice. This could have an impact on the way these students will view cases involving child sexual abuse, which might then impact the services rendered to these children.

This discussion leads to the following question for this study:

- What are a group of social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse?

Differences in social worker's perceptions of child sexual abuse can affect service delivery negatively. A description of these perceptions, using the views of the fourth-year social work students, could assist in making recommendations which can benefit training institutions to make provision for these differences in perceptions in order to limit it from negatively impacting on service delivery. This may promote self-reflections amongst the students that can assist them in linking their perceptions with service delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Model (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Bronfenbrenner, 1994:39-43; Darling, 2007:203; Lewthwaite, 2011:10; Rosa & Tudge, 2013: 243; Swick & Williams, 2006:371;) as well as Gestalt Field Theory (Blom, 2004:19; Resnick, 2009:2; Parlett, 2005:44-45; Phillipson, 2001:6) serve as the theoretical framework for the study. Both these approaches describe the individual holistically in a unique context and are interested in the meaning that they derive from their environment. Burley (2009:83) mentions a fundamental likeness between Gestalt Field Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory. Both these approaches provide useful means for depicting complex phenomena holistically; based on the context in which they take place.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory organises the world of an individual into five systems of interaction; (a) Microsystem, (b) Mesosystem, (c) Exosystem, (d) Macrosystem, and (e) Chronosystem (Aucamp *et al.*, 2014:49; Pack, 2013:72-73; Swick & Williams, 2006:371). Each system is impacted by the individual's context and opportunities for growth (Bronfenbrenner, 2005:11). This model evolved over time and Rosa and Tudge (2013:243) divided the development of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Model into three phases that grew from focusing on the child's development within his context to focusing on the individual's development within the set of interrelated systems, making provision for proximal process, person characteristics, context and time (both historical and current). An ecological understanding of the person in context demands that the influence of family, community, subculture and culture is examined in order to get an idea of how this has shaped the individual's development (Harney, 2007:75) and for the purpose of this study the social work student should be viewed within the context of family, community, culture as well as personal characteristics, taking the proximal process and development over time into account.

The social worker intervening in cases of CSA also operates within these levels of the Ecological Systems Model, but a more specific description of the perceptions held by a social worker is necessary to see how this impacts on service delivery to children exposed to sexual abuse.

Gestalt Field Theory depicts the territory of humans in their contexts which include their relationships as well as their sense of community. This forms a holistic perspective of persons that includes their environment, their social world, organisations and cultures (Parlett, 2009:71). The way individuals organise their lives is affected by how their perceptions are shaped and how this in turn shapes them. Field Theory indicates that perceptions formed in interaction with the individual's own phenomenological field cannot be separated from their work with others and it becomes part of the field that is co-created when assisting a client (Parlett, 2009:79). Therefore when social workers deal with CSA, their perceptions will influence how they plan to intervene based not only on legal prescriptions, but also by their whole field which consists of the background, religion, culture, experiences and values.

In terms of this study these approaches are useful as a framework for exploring social work students' perceptions. Awareness of the perceptions impacts the helping relationships that social workers form on a Micro, Macro as well a Meso level of service delivery (O'Neal, 2012:29). The social worker who is mandated to intervene in cases of CSA operates within these levels of the Ecological Systems Model, but a more specific description of the perceptions of a social worker is necessary to see how this could potentially impact on service delivery to children exposed to sexual abuse. The Ecological Systems Perspective postulates that individuals form their reality from the experiences in their environment (Harney, 2007:75).

RESEARCH AIM

The research aim is to explore and describe a group of social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse through the use of a qualitative descriptive design.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative approach (Botma *et al.*, 2010:182; Creswell, 2009:26; Fouché & Delport, 2011:65; Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006:273) was followed in this study. Qualitative research is more interested in understanding than explaining and focusses on the way people make sense of their experiences and the world they live in (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:308). The basis of qualitative research lies in the description of the experiences of individuals, groups or communities and focuses on generating participants' views of meaning, experience or perceptions of the phenomena in their world (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:1). The qualitative descriptive design described by Sandelowski (2010:81) as well as Botma *et al.* (2010:194) focuses on providing a comprehensive summary of a phenomenon and not in the interpretation thereof. This approach is especially useful for analysing and obtaining facts (Sandelowski, 2000:335) in a specific situation and does not rely on the researcher's interpretation (Sandelowski, 2010:78) and it therefore the appropriate design to use for this study.

Participants

Participants were identified according to the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling (Green & Thorogood, 2011:138; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). The participants

were fourth-year social work students at a higher learning institution. Permission was obtained by the Department of Social Work and a lecturer was approached to provide an opportunity for the researcher to invite students to participate at a case work workshop for fourth year students. At this workshop students were informed about the goal of the study and students were encouraged to volunteer their participation. The following criteria were set for inclusion in the sample; (1) Fourth-year social work students; (2) at a specific higher education institution; (3) who are able to speak and understand English or Afrikaans; (4) who agreed to voluntary participation; and (5) who agreed that their interviews be recorded. Students who formed part of the researcher's fourth-year group were excluded from the study. Twelve students volunteered at the workshop, but only ten arrived for the in-depth interviews.

Research procedures

Ethical approval to conduct the research was received from the Ethics Committee at the North West University (Ethics Number: NWU-00060-12-A1). Written permission was also received from the Department of Social Work of the relevant university. An informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation as well as giving permission for the interviews to be recorded and transcribed were signed by participants at the onset of the interviews. This form also indicated the confidential nature of the information and that they could withdraw at any stage of the process.

The guidelines for ethical practice in research (King, 2010:98-118; Mouton, 2005:238-246; Strydom, 2011:113-29; Wassenaar, 2006:61-77) were adhered to in the research process. This included ensuring the participants' right to remain anonymous by not publishing any identifiable details and they had to give permission for the interviews to be recorded and

transcribed (Mouton, 2005: 243). The participants were fully informed about all aspects of the study as well as that the information would be stored in a secure, locked location. They were also informed about the scope and aim of the study and whether there are any risks (King, 2010:100) to being a participant such as negative sanction in the case of withdrawal. These aspects were included in the informed consent that was signed by all the participants. The boundaries were clearly indicated to the participants at the time of recruiting to prevent role confusion and dual relationships, making sure that participants understand the limitation of the role of the researcher.

Data collection

In-depth, unstructured, individual interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013:29; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010: 64; Greeff, 2012:349) were conducted with ten social work students lasting between 30 – 45 minutes each. The first interview served as a pilot study. Participants fit the criteria set out and were chosen based on availability. The interviews were conducted in a pre-arranged room at the university campus and started with a single question: *“How do you see and understand child sexual abuse?”* and subsequent questions were asked based on the participants’ responses. By discussing how they see CSA, an understanding of how they perceive CSA can be developed as well as what meaning they attach to it. Social work skills were used to facilitate the discussions during the interviews by posing questions in a neutral manner, listening attentively to their responses, and asking follow-up questions and probes based on those responses. Further skills, such as reflection, clarification, qualitative observations (Delpont & Roestenburg, 2011:182; Doody & Noonan, 2013:29) as well as summaries were used.

Data analysis

Several authors (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:397; Kelly, 2006:287) discuss the procedure of translating the data collected in interviews into findings. The procedure discussed by Shaw (2010:183-197) was used for the purposes of this study. Firstly the researcher familiarised herself with the data in the transcribed interviews by working sequentially through the transcripts, searching for and clustering initial themes, making notes of information that is repeated. Main themes, subthemes and categories were identified and formalised by naming them and grouping them as perceptions before extracts from the transcripts were identified which represents these themes. Literature control as described by Holloway and Wheeler (2010:38) was done by comparing the themes with existing literature to either confirm or challenge these themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved by using certain strategies. Lincoln and Guba (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:304) developed and systemised these in their writings as credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. *Credibility* refers to the trustworthiness and plausibility of the findings (Tracy, 2010:842). To ensure the credibility of the data, member checking as described by Holloway and Wheeler (2010:304) was done during the interviews. They were also given the opportunity via email to respond to the initial findings to ensure the data is a true reflection of their perceptions. *Transferability* for this study was ensured by providing a thick description of the process, context and people in the research to provide a basis for the evaluation of quality (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010:310). *Dependability* was ensured by a detailed description of data collections as well as a logical breakdown of the

processing of data. A literature control as described by Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) was used to verify the findings of this study. This was done to ensure *confirmability*.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following perceptions with regard to child sexual abuse were identified in this study: (1) Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment; (2) Descriptions of the sexually abused child; (3) Descriptions of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse; (4) CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects; (5) Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways; and (6) Children do not disclose sexual abuse. The following is an elaboration on these themes corroborated by narratives from the transcribed interviews and discussing it in terms of available literature.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Theory as well as Gestalt Field Theory served as the framework through which these findings are viewed, approaching the findings from the point of view of the person within his environment. This means that the perceptions of the social work students will be described through the lens of this framework where possible.

PERCEPTION 1: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IS CAUSED BY FACTORS WITHIN THE CHILD'S ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

The first perception is that child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment. The factors that increase the risk of CSA for a child, are embedded in a combination of personal, familial, community and societal factors. Based on the participant's responses these factors were divided into those causes that operate on a Micro level as identified by Swick and Williams (2006:372) and those on a Macro level

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994:39; Darling, 2007:204; Swick & Williams, 2006:372) as portrayed in Figure 1.

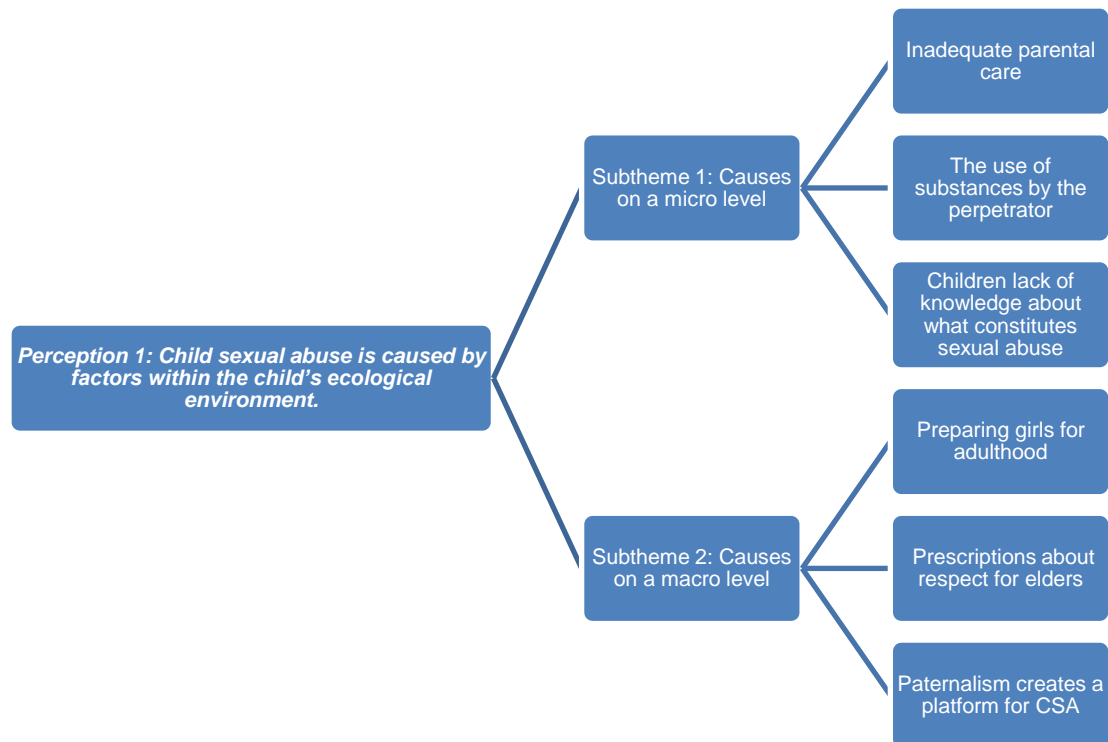


Figure 1: Participants' perceptions that CSA is caused by factors in the child's ecological environment

Causes on a Micro level

Most of the causes identified can be found within the personal and family context. The family is regarded by Bronfenbrenner (1994:39) as one of the contexts of a microsystem and Ecological Theory suggests that the presence of certain characteristics in the family unit could increase the vulnerability of children to abuse (Harrington *et al.*, 2008:53).

Inadequate parental care as a cause of sexual abuse came to the fore as a cause of CSA.

This was described as the absence of parents especially mothers, leaving the children

vulnerable for abuse. It is significant that several authors (CASE, 2005:31; Mathews *et al.*, 2012:86; Smith *et al.*, 2010:258; Jewkes *et al.*, 2005: 334) indicate that the hardships associated with low socio-economic status and single parenting can contribute to issues such as insufficient access to reliable and affordable childcare leaving children vulnerable to abuse while their caregivers are out at work.

Another factor is the quality of care that was found inadequate: *“The children that are mostly raped ... communities where the parents are not like taking good care of their kids”*. Reference was made to the fact that white children are safer than black children due to more structural support in white communities. Literature is careful not describe distinctions like this along racial lines, although reference is made of the inequality of poverty leaving some children more vulnerable than others (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:85; Richter & Dawes, 2008:85).

Certain aspects that influence the perpetrator’s behavior were mentioned. The use of substances by the perpetrator were seen to contribute to CSA, creating the impression that it could be seen as a mitigating factor, minimising the blame placed on the offender: *“Maybe the behaviour, the thing of abusing or sexually harassing the person may be influenced by alcohol or something else...”*. In line with this other mitigating factors, such as the possibility that the offender was abused at a prior stage as well as the presence of mental illnesses were mentioned. What is significant is that this points to myth acceptance as described by Sulliman and Collings (2005:1) indicating the diffusion of blame of the perpetrator. The use of substances by perpetrators of CSA is confirmed in literature (Smith *et al.*, 2010:257; CASE, 2005:33; WHO, 2011:20) that states that is not unusual for perpetrators to use substances before the sexual abuse takes place (Smith *et al.*, 2010:257; CASE, 2005:33; WHO, 2011:20). The CASE report (2006:33) contains the results of a study by the Department of Correctional Services, in conjunction with the Human Sciences Research

Council (HSRC), in which offenders serving a sentence for sexual assault confirmed that they took substances like alcohol and drugs prior to committing the sexual assault.

When children are sexually abused, they are not aware that what is happening is a crime and can be defined as abuse and therefore **children have a lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexual abuse:** “ ... so some children they have been abused sexually but they are not aware because they do not have any information that what they are doing it is an abuse.”

One participant even felt that the lack of information is intentional in order to maintain the unequal power relationships that leave children vulnerable to advances of older adults in their community.

When prevention of CSA is discussed in literature (CASE, 2005:23; Fouché, 2012:75; Jewkes et al., 2005: 1810; Mathews *et al.*, 2012, Smith *et. al*, 2010; WHO, 2011) the need for more information about recognising abuse is indicated as critical. The inference that can be made from this is that children do not know how to recognise abuse. Participants surmised that this does not diminish the harmful effect of CSA and it adds to self-blame as discussed in perception 5.

Causes on a Macro level

The macro system consists of the collective pattern of the Micro-, Meso- and Exosystems which form part of a specific culture. This refers to the aspects such as belief system, bodies of knowledge, customs, life styles that form part of the systems of said culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:40; Swick & Williams, 2006:372). Causes of CSA within the macro system can therefore be seen is aspects such as the sexualisation of children (Tishelman &

Geffner, 2010: 615) in the media as well as general beliefs about the position of children in society (Harrington *et al.*, 2008:55).

A perception that one of the cultural issues which play a role in child sexual abuse is the abuser's claim that it is done **to prepare girls for adulthood** was shared. Although it was indicated as having a cultural undertone, some participants described it as an excuse that is used by men to minimise the harmfulness of CSA: "... *this is what we do in our family or this is what I need to do with you so that I can see that you are grown or this will make you a better woman in future.*" Jewkes *et al.* (2005:1812, 1815) concluded in their study that there is an ambiguity in the sexual tensions between older males and female relatives that blurs the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable practices. They also refer to the issue of entitlement by older men, especially in terms of using sex as a way to control female children.

In South African society, children are expected to respect their elders (Lalor, 2003:453; Matthews *et al.*, 2012:84). This means that they would have to obey a request by an older person without question. This means that a child must respect each adult as if it is their parent and therefore implies issues of acquiescence: "... *because we teach them [children] that every person you see is your mother and every other person you see is your father. He is your uncle you must respect. ... you must not say no, So they [children] do not even know, even if you are talking about the strangers, ... he does not know it's a stranger - my mom says he is also a father if he sends you, so they become confused and then being raped.*"

Participants felt that these **prescriptions about respect for elders** leave children vulnerable to the advances of perpetrators: "... *in my culture we respect older people. When an older person tells you something you have to do it. Even if you don't want you cannot say "no I don't like this". Whatever that an older person says it's yes. You accept it. There's no no.*"

Unwavering respect for elders is mentioned by several authors as creating a platform for these

acts to occur without resistance from children (Chitereka, 2010:34; Jewkes *et al.*, 2005: 1811; Lalor, 2003:453; Matthews *et al.*, 2012:84; WHO, 2011:14). Respect for elders was an issue that was described by almost all participants and it elicited strong emotional responses from the participants. They also linked this to cultural beliefs about not talking about sexual matters as discussed in perception 6 as well as children's lack of knowledge about sexual abuse and perceive this as creating a culture of silence that leave children vulnerable.

Participants contended that **paternalism** creates a platform for child sexual abuse. On the one hand it hinges on the belief that men "own" woman, especially the females in his immediate family: "*They [women] depend on men. Like the man will feel like he owns them [women], you understand? He owns them [women], so he can do whatever he wants ...*" It was also linked to incest: "*... incest whereby the men thinks they have a right to do that to a child because they raised them and they are entitled to just oversee everything else that takes place in the child's life.*" Jewkes *et al.* (2005:1810), Lalor (2003:452) and Matthews *et al.* (2012:84) describe the social context of child sexual abuse in South Africa as patriarchal where inequality reinforces male dominance and a sense of entitlement that lead to abuse without fear of consequences, supporting the perceptions of the participants in this regard. It is significant that the majority of participants as well as the literature are very vocal about this subject, although Chitereka (2009:21) debates that information that increasingly shows women as the perpetrators of sexual abuse questions the argument that paternalism is at the root of CSA.

PERCEPTION 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD

When discussing perceptions on how the sexually abused child can be described, participants focused on age and gender (see Figure 2) and made no mention of other personal

characteristics. Although the specific **age** differed between participants, the general trend is that the sexually abused child is a minor (under the age of 18) Smith *et al.* (2010:256) claims that at least 15 per cent of child sexual abuse victims in South Africa are below the age of 12 while a CASE report (2005:ii) claims that the average age of victims is decreasing. There was consensus that the sexually abused child is not of a specific **gender**. Research confirms that there is sufficient evidence to confirm that both male and female children across all ages endure child sexual abuse (Hestick & Perino, 2009:63) and in 40 per cent of all sexual assault cases in South Africa the victim is female and under 18 years (Smith *et al.*, 2010:256).

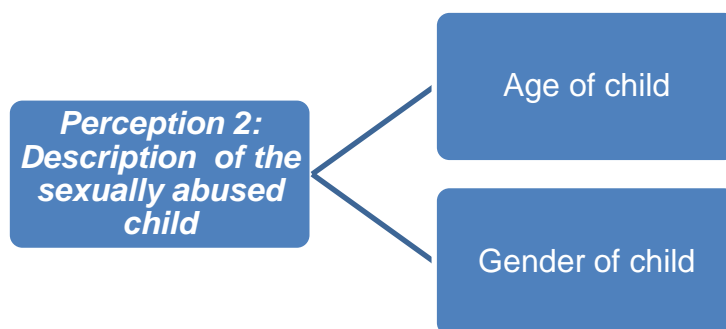


Figure 2: Theme Two: Participants' perceptions of the description of the sexually abused child

PERCEPTION 3: DESCRIPTION OF THE PERPETRATOR OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Participants agreed with regard to how they perceive the perpetrators and mainly focused on gender, age and the fact that the perpetrator is often related to the victim as is seen in Figure 3.

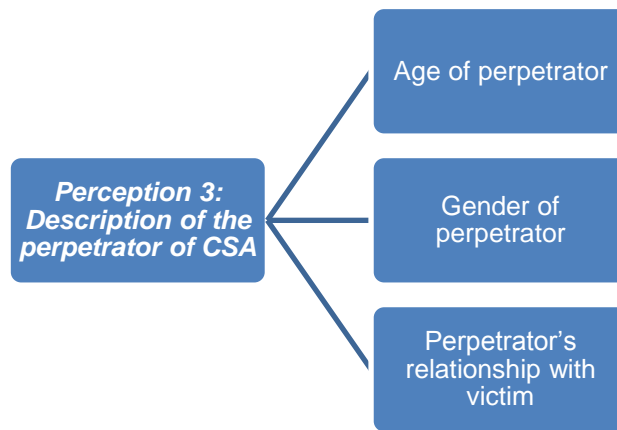


Figure 3: Participant’s perceptions of the description of the perpetrator of CSA

There was consensus amongst the participants about the fact that the perpetrator could be of **both genders** and are generally adults of **older than 18 years**. Some participants also indicated that children themselves could be perpetrators, but claim that these instances have different dynamics and that this has to do with intent versus experimentation. They also link this to lack of information on what constitutes sexual abuse. If children have been exposed to sexual abuse and do not know what happened to them is wrong, they are likely to repeat the behaviour.

Definitions of child sexual abuse have centred on the age difference between perpetrator and victim and there is a general sense of agreement that the perpetrator is over the age of 18 years (Jewkes *et al.* 2005:1813; Pereda *et al.*, 2009:332). Reports of child sexual abuse indicates that 95 per cent of all reported sexual abuse cases are perpetrated against girls and 80 per cent of cases involving boys identify the perpetrator as male, but female perpetrators are gaining interest from research (Hestick & Perino, 2009:64). These aspects were loosely mentioned, however, and not expressed in a comprehensive way, more attentions was given to the pre-existing relationship between the perpetrator and the sexually abused child.

In many cases there is a **pre-existing relationship** between the perpetrator and the child involved: “*Could be a father... an uncle... a grandpa... I mean people that are abused they are abused by someone that they know. ... in most cases it is someone that you [the victim] know.*” This illustrated the perception that this pre-existing relationship lies mainly within a family context or microsystem, although some respondents also referred to school teachers as perpetrators. Several sources in literature concur that the home is a common setting for the occurrence of child sexual abuse, indicating a familial relationship between perpetrator and victim (CASE, 2005:iii, Hestick & Perino, 2009:64; Lalor, 2003:456). Smith *et al.* (2010:256) quotes a study that indicated that in sexual abuse cases of children under 15 the majority of perpetrators were school teachers, followed by relatives, referring to a pre-existing relationship between perpetrator and victim.

PERCEPTION 4: CSA IS PERVASIVE AND CAN BE CHARACTERISED BY THE PRESENCE OF SPECIFIC ASPECTS

The fourth perception focuses on the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse and points out the different aspects that characterises this phenomenon. This is reflected in Figure 4 which precedes a discussion of these perceptions.

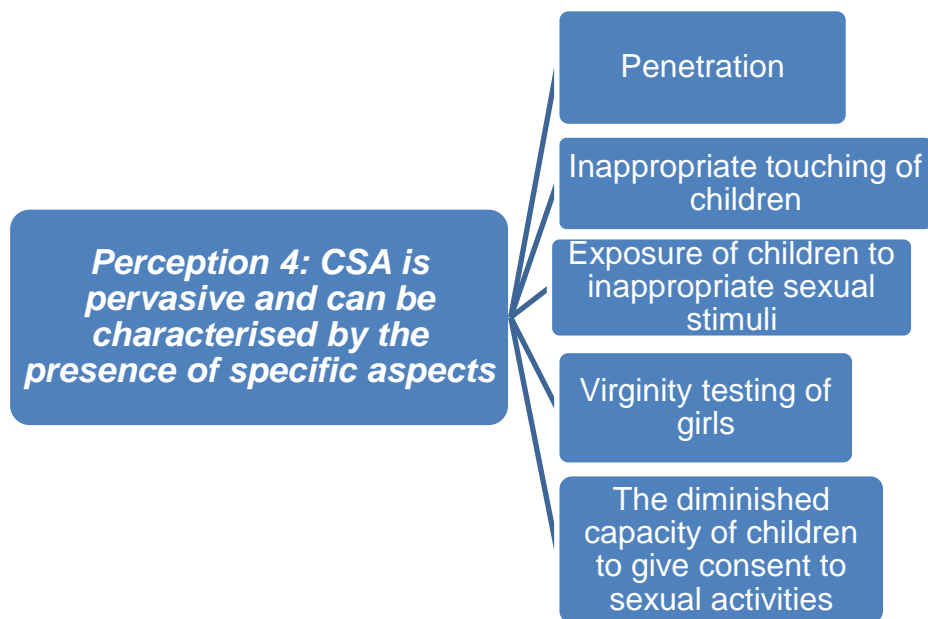


Figure 4: Participant’s perceptions that CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects

Child sexual abuse in South Africa is prevalent and participants described it as such: “ ... *it happens to a lot of children. I think it happens every day, every minute.*” and “*It happens more than people think or want to think, you know.*” One of the participants disclosed her own exposure to child sexual abuse during the interview, and all participants had knowledge of at least one person in their immediate environment that was sexually abused as a child. This indicates the presence of proximal processes (the P in Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model) that may have influenced the participant’s perceptions in this regard and supports theory that child sexual abuse is prevalent in all societies (Smith *et al.*, 2010:254; Lalor, 2003, 1810; CASE, 2005: iii; WHO, 2011:16). At the same time the students described that not all cases are reported and that it would be impossible to estimate the exact **extent of CSA**. Child sexual abuse in South Africa has reached alarming proportions and occurs across all sectors of society (CASE, 2006:ii; Pereda *et al.*, 2009:331 Richter & Dawes, 2008:81). South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual abuse in the world (Smith *et al.*, 2010:255). Reasons that were given for this high incidence of CSA were that there is no proper service delivery

and prevention and one participant mentioned that CSA will never stop. They also lamented the lack of protection from the SAPS to prosecute cases in a way that could serve as a deterrent for perpetrators.

There was a view amongst participants that there are certain aspects that need to be present when deciding whether certain behavior can be described as child sexual abuse. The participants had very definite perceptions on what constitutes child sexual abuse. Some of these aspects can almost be described as types of sexual abuse. Penetration was described as the act of insertion, either with a penis, another body part or a foreign subject, showing a perception that is line with the description in legislation.

Some participants perceived **inappropriate touching** as a one of the sexual actions that characterises child sexual abuse. This can take either the form of a perpetrator touching the child inappropriately or forcing a child to touch them: *“To me, child sexual abuse, is when you’re an adult person make a child to feel uncomfortable in a way that is touching a child’s private parts or making the child to do that to you.”* These issues mentioned by the participants are not only reflected in literature, it is also included in current legislation such as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Bill (Act 32 of 2007) which is very specific in defining the different types of child sexual abuse with the exception of virginity testing. Aucamp *et al.* (2012:2-4) mentions that there is a wide spectrum of activities that are defined as child sexual abuse and that professionals do not always agree on what these acts are. Sexual abuse is not limited to contact sexual behaviour and many of these behaviours maybe described as noncontact sexual abuse (Gomez, 2012:337; Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:3). The responses of the participants indicate that they agree with these matters in The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Bill, although there is a whole range of behaviours included in the act that were not mentioned by participants.

Another perception that came to the fore was that children can also be **exposed to inappropriate stimuli** in various ways, creating a context (the C in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model) that creates opportunities for CSA. Some of the participants focused on exposure to visual pornographic material, some to indecent exposure, some on watching TV programming that is not age appropriate, while others focused on the overcrowding in homes that exposes children to the sexual activities of adults: *"They sometimes saw those sexual activities through the media like maybe watching some clips from TV. Sometimes they also, some of the children they also saw it from their parents, because you find that maybe they are staying in one shack home or one single room where sometimes parents forget that children can observe such things [sexual actions]."* According to this view, this exposure leads to experimentation and it is linked to a lack of information about sexual abuse. A view that the use of language can also be seen as CSA was shared, and this was explained as using words and language that are not age appropriate. This normally happens when adults engage in discussions in front of children, ignoring their presence. One participant described a traditional practice present in certain cultures where grandparents are allowed to make remarks about body parts when a child enters puberty and equated it to CSA since the children always felt exposed and humiliated when that happens. The Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) includes the following as forms of CSA: Exposure of a child to pornography, a sexual offence, sexual activity, self-masturbation as well as genital organs. Aucamp *et al.* (2012:3) describe the following non- contact behaviours that can also be considered abusive: sexual comments to a child, fetishism and voyeurism.

The perception of the cultural practice of **virginity testing** as a form of sexual abuse stimulated a lot of discussion: *"... It is painful because sometimes they do not lose their virginity because of sex. ... to me I think it is still sexual abuse because you are having sex*

without being willing to.” Behrens (2014:18) shares this outrage about the practice, lamenting the fact that provision for this has been made in the Children’s Act (Act 38 of 2005). This author also claims that, despite the fact that the act made certain provisions in order to minimise the traumatic effect of virginity testing, these provisions are based on the myth that being violated by a female instead of a male would be less traumatising for a child. For example the act makes provision for voluntary testing and girls to be tested by females only, and as is seen in the quote above participant still perceives this as a violation despite the fact that it was done by females. Vincent (2006:20) adds that these girls cannot freely choose to have their virginity tested due to influence by an oppressive cultural context or are minors who are not in a position to make such decisions for themselves. The participants who initiated this discussion were passionate in their condemnation of this practice, claiming that it is a ruse for men to have an opportunity to abuse adolescent girls. Two respondents shared information about their own involvement in these rituals, condemning it as a violation as well as an opportunity for men to prowl: “... *it [virginity testing] goes with more of raping girls, of sexual things. Because even the other mens they take turns ...*” Virginity testing is not only common throughout the world, but also traumatic for the child. It is considered to be a violation of international human rights (Fontes & Plummer, 2010:500). These cultural practices also form part of the context within which CSA occurs.

The other aspect of child sexual abuse that formed part of this perception is the view that **children do not** have the cognitive ability to **consent** to sexual activities based on their developmental stage and inability to foresee the consequences of this kind of an activity. Children do not understand what sex is and cannot give consent. The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Bill, Act 32 of 2007 addresses the issue of consent by excluding children under the age of twelve from being able to give consent to any sexual contact (Aucamp *et al.*, 2012:5). Several other authors refer to the child’s inability to comprehend sexual abuse as

well as coercion being used by the perpetrator (WHO, 2011:16; Gomez, 2012:337). It was even described as “... *overpowering the mind of a child* ...” indicating their inability to comprehend sexual activity. Children’s inability to give consent was linked with their lack of knowledge of what sexual abuse is as well as the need for prevention and these personal characteristics (the other P in Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model).

PERCEPTION 5: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AFFECTS THE CHILD IN SPECIFIC WAYS

Sexual abuse is likely to cause psychological harm to a child in all areas of functioning (Aucamp *et al*, 2014:49; Chitereka, 2010:34; Coates, 2010: 392; Postmus *et al.*, 2011:303) with wide ranging effects. The participants were vocal and passionate in their discussion about the impact of child abuse on the child. The ways in which CSA affects the child is illustrated in figure 5.

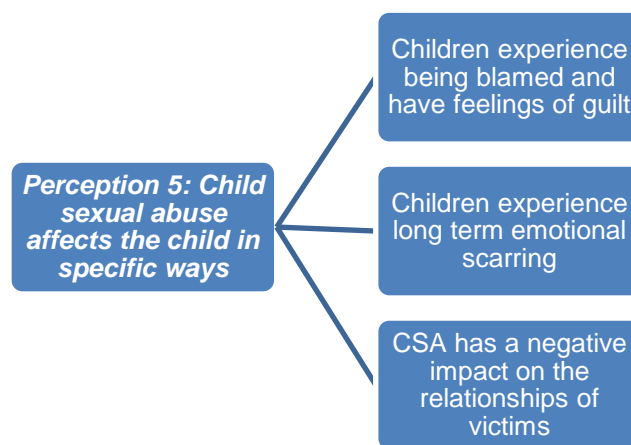


Figure 5: The perception that child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways

Students discussed that the child that has been sexually abused experiences **being blamed** by close family members: “... [family members] *blame the child "it's your fault" they don't see the effect* [it has on the child] ...” and other role players for disclosing the sexual abuse due to

the consequences for the family and the perpetrator. Jewkes *et al.* (2005:1817) mention that while children often feel blamed by others, they also have a tendency to blame themselves. Smith (2010:265) agrees that the blame can result in stigmatisation which impacts on the whole family. A child that has been sexually abused is riddled with feelings of shame, guilt, powerlessness, embarrassment and inadequacy (Fontes & Plummer, 2010:496). Students saw shame and guilt as going hand in hand with the potential to make children withdraw from others or act in ways that isolate them socially: Participants felt that this leads to **feelings of guilt** for being involved in sexual abuse and also for disclosing the sexual abuse immediately or even regret for disclosing the abuse at all: “... *and then they feel like if I had just kept quiet it would have been better.*” When these feelings are experienced in isolation, they end up assuming responsibility for the abuse which intensifies their feelings of shame and guilt (Walker-Descartes *et al.*, 2011:439). This shows a need for therapeutic services to the child, a view participants shared. There was also a perception of a link between receiving counselling and the long lasting effects of the abuse.

There was a perception that children experience **long-term scarring** as a result of sexual abuse. This could take the form of emotional trauma: “...*because the child doesn't know anything, and if you abuse a child that means you are killing some part, important part to the child. You are killing like a future of the child.*” and this trauma also contains long-term memories about the abuse that affects them on a daily basis: “*And even for a child, it would take, for the rest of her life ... she will know that I was, robbed of my, what do they call it? Childhood. So it would be difficult for the child. I know they say “Time heals”, but you'll never forget that ... you were raped.*” Smith *et al.* (2010:257) Mathews *et al.* (2012:86), and the WHO (2011:12) concur that the long-term effects of CSA can be devastating and can result in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, substance abuse and anxiety disorders. These authors also add reproductive problems and revictimisation as part of the long term

effects. Revictimisation (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:86; Smith *et al.*, 2010:257; WHO, 2011:12) and the recurrence of sexual abuse (Sinanan, 2011:658) is an issue that widely described in literature but not mentioned by any of the participants. The long-term impact of child abuse is far reaching, with some studies highlighting that the effects of childhood abuse can last a lifetime (Coates, 2010:391) as mentioned by a participant: *"I can say it [sexual abuse] affects the entire life of a person. ... she'll go through puberty at this stage knowing that "I was once abused" ... They can try to deal with the emotions. But I don't think they will fix it. They will not fix the knowing part. ... it's a thing that will keep recurring. ... It will stay in the memory ..."*

CSA does not affect only the child, but also the broader system of which the child is part. It **affects various relationships** of the abused child in a variety of ways over a lifetime. One of the relationships affected that students shared their views about is between the child and mother: *"... eventually the child will grow up ... and then she will blame you [the mother] for this [being abused]. And that will ruin the relationship ... between you and your child, forever. The child won't ever, ever forgive you for that."* Future relationships were also perceived to be affected and the participants described how intrusive memories of the abuse will affect them when entering into romantic relationships and also the possibility that as parent they will be overprotective of their children. Although the participants expressed their perceptions about the impact of CSA eloquently and passionately, not all factors as identified in literature formed part of the perceptions. It might be useful to compare it with the following composite list collated from current literature. Aucamp *et al.* (2014:49), Coates, (2010:392) and Chitereka (2010:34) describe the impact of CSA on various levels. These levels are: (a) Developmental effect; (b) neurological effect; (c) behavioural effect; and (d) relational effect. As can be seen from the aforementioned discussion the participants included the relational effect in their discussions while the neurological and developmental

effects were overlooked. The behavioural effect was partly included in their discussion on the emotional effect.

Participants also described their perceptions that children experience **long-term scarring** as a result of sexual abuse. This could take the form of emotional trauma as described by the following quotes from participants, and this trauma also contains long-term memories about the abuse that affects them on a daily basis. It affects the entire life of a person, going through all the significant life events with intrusive and recurring memories and participants also mentioned that counselling cannot take away the knowledge that you were once abused. It was even equated to: “... *killing the future of a child* ...” The feeling of loss was described: “*And even for a child, it would take, for the rest of her life ... she will know that I was, robbed of my, what do they call it? Childhood. So it would be difficult for the child. I know they say “Time heals”, but you’ll never forget that ... you were raped.*” Smith *et al.* (2010:257) Mathews *et al.* (2012:86), and the WHO (2011:12) concur that the long-term effects of CSA can be devastating and can result in PTSD, depression, substance abuse and anxiety disorders. These authors also add reproductive problems and revictimisation as being part of the long term effects. Revictimisation (Mathews *et al.*, 2012:86; Smith *et al.*, 2010:257; WHO, 2011:12) and the recurrence of sexual abuse (Sinanan, 2011:658) are issues that are widely described in literature but not mentioned by any of the participants. The long-term impact of child abuse is far reaching, with some studies highlighting that the effects of childhood abuse can last a lifetime (Coates, 2010:391) as mentioned by the participants.

PERCEPTION 6: CHILDREN DO NOT DISCLOSE SEXUAL ABUSE

There are sociocultural, economic, personal, and structural reasons why children do not disclose sexual abuse in South Africa (Smith *et al.*, 2010:261). In line with this, the

participants shared the view that children do not disclose sexual abuse due to a range of reasons mostly found in their microsystem. These reasons are represented in figure 6.

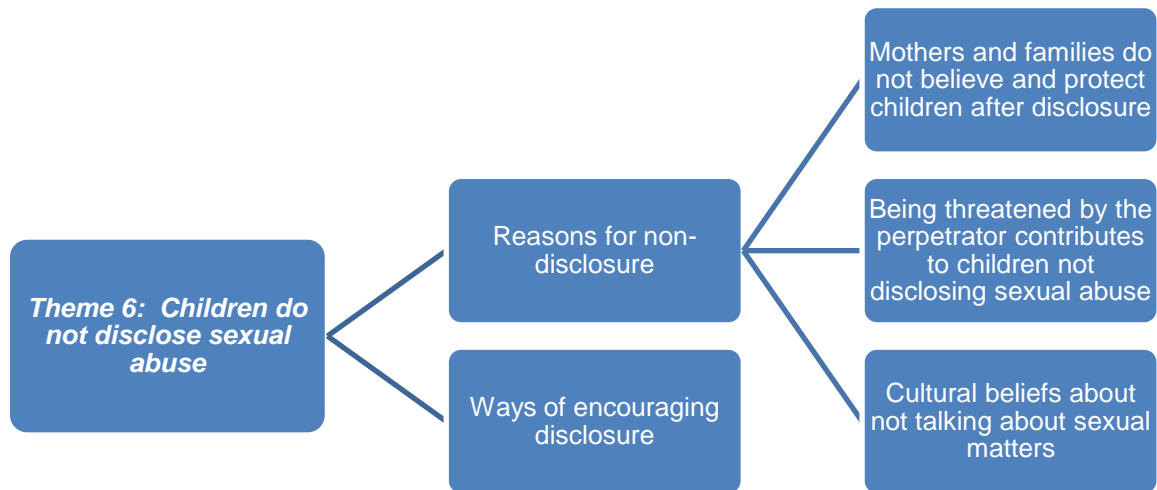


Figure 6: Participants’ perceptions that children do not disclose sexual abuse

The responses that children experience when they disclose sexual abuse lead to children staying silent about abuse. Children will sometimes reach out to their mothers to disclose the abuse, but when they find the initial reaction discouraging, will keep quiet: *“And then sometimes the children, like they tell, they will tell the mother and the mother, they don’t believe when the child is telling the truth.”* Disclosure in itself is important for the victim, but the response to the disclosure as well as whether they reach out to authorities is imperative in terms of putting an end to the abuse (Smith *et al.*, 2010:262; Van Niekerk, 2003:11; Walker-Descartes *et al.*, 2011:438). Walker-Descartes *et al.* (2011:438) quoted a study that claims that less than half of sexually abused children never disclose sexual abuse. Fontes and Plummer (2010:493) agree and add that when they do disclose the majority disclose to a parent or parental figure. These adults do not always respond in a way that supports the children due to lack of information, fear or their own emotional and social issues. This

results in parents either minimizing or exaggerating the significance of the abuse, upsetting the child and possibly leading to the child retracting the disclosure (Fontes & Plummer, 2010, 594), secondary trauma (Smith *et al.*, 2010:264) and revictimisation (Smith *et al.*, 2010:257).

Participants mention threats by the perpetrator as one of the reasons that children do not disclose sexual abuse. In the words of one of the participants: “...*normally when these people do this things [child abuse], they threaten the child saying if you do not allow this, I’m going to do it to your little brother or your little sister or should you tell your parents I’m going to kill you...*” Child sexual abuse is often associated with being threatened by the perpetrator which leaves children too afraid to disclose the abuse. Both the child and the family may be intimidated by the perpetrator, leading to a fear of reporting the abuse (Smith *et al.*, 2010:256; Van Niekerk, 2003:11). One participant described it as children having to “*die in their pain in order to protect the family*”.

There was a perception amongst the participants that there are cultural beliefs that discourage children from talking about sexual matters to adults: “...*with us black people it’s wrong [for a child] to talk to an adult about sex.* Fontes and Plummer (2010:497) as well as Sossou and Yogtiba, (2010:1228) mentioned that disclosure in a cultural context that does not encourage any conversations on sexuality is a complex issue. Participants also unwittingly supported the cultural norm of not talking about sexual activities by using euphemisms such as “*sleeping with*” instead of having sex as well as “*such things*” and “*these things*” instead of sexual abuse or sexual activity. This showed a degree of discomfort with the subject. It can, however, be seen as part of cultural norm of respecting your elders as discussed in perception

1.

The participants also shared a view that more preventative services are needed and children need to be more educated in terms of what sexual abuse and how to access help when it has happened: “ ... *but what is important, it is an education and to promise that if you go and report such things the law will protect you ...* .” Participants expressed a need for more effective policing and judiciary services to serve as a deterrent for perpetrators to commit abuse. They also expressed the perception that preventative services should aim at younger children and be presented on a level that they can understand. They also include the fact that parents need to be included in preventative services. Chitereka (2009:28) as well as Fouché (2012:77) also describes the need for preventative services on a variety levels in order to address the issue of CSA sufficiently.

Based on the aforementioned elaboration on the findings, the following discussion and recommendations can be made.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions that a group of fourth-year social work students have about CSA. This was seen through the lens of the theoretical framework which enabled the researcher to understand and interpret the findings according the interrelated systems of Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-ecological Theory as well as in terms of person, proximal process, context and time. When these perceptions are applied to the theoretical framework for this study, it is clear that the individual cannot be seen in isolation and that the environment must also be taken into account. In terms of this study, students perceived child sexual abuse as having an impact on all levels within the ecological framework.

The ecological approach sees child abuse as occurring within the child's environment and this perspective is seen as the most inclusive and holistic means available for understanding child sexual abuse and all the aspects surrounding it (Williams, 2012:37). The causes and impact of child sexual abuse were discussed as part of the context of child's environment and a distinction could be made between those on micro and macro level. Many of the different perceptions were interlinked, for example children's inability to give consent with their lack of knowledge of what sexual abuse is as well as the need for prevention, creating a culture of silence on the subject.

In terms of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological model it was clear that the perceptions of participants were based on the interaction and experiences that they have with those in their immediate environment. This is in line with the proximal processes as described in Bronfenbrenner's later work. This did not only include their families and immediate circle, but also their training which can be seen as a reciprocal process influencing their professional development. The participants all claimed that their perceptions were influenced by their studies as well as the reading of relevant material.

It is clear that to a large degree social work training has influenced the way the participants see child sexual abuse and the fact that their perception changed over time was pointed out (Time) by the participants. These changes in some instances have been significant, not only in terms of what actions can be defined as sexual abuse, but also in terms of the factors in the broader community that play a role in promoting CSA and maintaining the silence about CSA in general.

Another factor influencing the perceptions of social work students was related to past experiences and personal demographics (Person characteristics). Students related how own

exposure, as well as knowledge of family members' exposure have changed their perceptions, not only on what CSA is, but also about the harmful, long term effects on a child.

It was, however, interesting that when describing the actions that constitute child sexual abuse not one of them could describe the full spectrum as contained in The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Bill (Act 32 of 2007) and certain non-contact sexual activities such as grooming, amongst others were not mentioned. This shows the possible effect on service delivery, creating the potential for social workers not to take certain disclosures by children seriously, since they do not define the actions described as abuse.

There was a remarkable similarity in their perceptions about sexual abuse, revealing the possibility that child sexual abuse in the broad sense is seen the same way across cultures and races in South Africa. Previous studies on the incidence of CSA (Lalor, 2003:456) and perceptions regarding CSA (Petzer, 1999:67) also did not find significant differences. In a similar study done in Alaska (Hestick & Perino, 2009:74) found the main difference between participants in the differences between male and female participants; males were likely to attribute more responsibility for the sexual abuse to the perpetrator than did females.

This study had limitations in terms of the number of students that were interviewed. Although the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise, having more participants might have yielded a wider range of perceptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the case of social work students this means that when the student is viewed within the context of family, community and culture, it would be possible to get a clearer indication of

how this had the potential to change and influence perceptions. It is important that social work students are exposed from first year level to child sexual abuse and especially the legislation that criminalises such behaviour. Awareness programmes should provide a platform for social workers (both for students and in practice) to recognise their own personal bias and how it potentially could impact service rendering. Clear, descriptive policies and standard operating procedures would minimise the possible effect of personal bias.

The purpose of this study was not to identify the differences between the various participants or to focus on diversity, but to provide a valuable construct on which to focus in further studies in this regard. Research in this regard should be continued on a wider scale, involving students from different learning institutions. Research regarding the factors influencing social workers' perceptions as well as the intervention in cases of child sexual abuse should be undertaken.

SUMMARY

Exploring social work students' perceptions of CSA yielded rich, descriptive data. Social work students' perceptions are varied and to a degree in line with the existing body of knowledge reflected in literature. Their perceptions also indicated how exposure to more detailed knowledge will benefit them in terms of aligning their perceptions with legislation so that service delivery will not be impacted negatively.

The implications of this study are that social work students should be exposed to information on child sexual abuse throughout their training to prevent own bias and personal demographics from impacting on their service delivery when dealing with sexual abuse cases.

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SECTION C

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In Section B the findings of this study were discussed in an article format. In this section a summarised overview of the study, conclusions and recommendations will be given. Firstly a discussion on whether the research question was answered, followed by a discussion on the research aim achievement. Finally, conclusion and recommendations will be made based on the research findings as discussed in Section B.

2. ACHIEVEMENT OF AIM OF STUDY

The research aim is to explore and describe a group of social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse through a qualitative descriptive design.

The following research question was formulated: What are a group of social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse? The qualitative descriptive research design was used to answer this question.

This aim was achieved by undertaking a literature study (Section A: Part 2) that enabled the researcher to have a broad basis of information on which to build a theoretical framework. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with ten participants who fit the criteria for inclusion. Detailed qualitative data was collected from the participants who were identified in a non-probability technique of purposive sampling. After the data was collected in one-on-one interviews; these interviews were transcribed and initial findings were generating by working systematically through the transcribed interviews. An e-mail was sent to participants with the initial findings to allow them the chance to comment and add information if necessary. This enabled the researcher to confirm the initial findings and it added to a rich description of the data. This data was then documented into 6 perceptions with categories

After completing the study it would appear that the research questions was answered. The findings reflect the social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse. The responses from the participants are reflected in the following perceptions identified in analysing the data.

Perception 1: Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment

Perception 2: Description of the sexually abused child

Perception 3: Description of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse

Perception 4: CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects

Perception 5: Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways

Perception 6: Children do not disclose sexual abuse

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions and recommendations can be made according to the research findings and this will dicussed within the framework of the identified perceptions and categories identified in data analysis. These conclusions and recommendations are only applicable to this study and cannot be generalised to other similar studies.

3.1 Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment

The following conclusions can be made: Social work students have specific perceptions regarding the causal factors of child sexual abuse. Perceptions on causes in the micro environment included; inadequate parental care, substance abuse by perpetrators as well as children's lack of knowledge of what constitutes sexual abuse. All these factors open up the scope for preventative services, giving direction in terms of education of parents as well as establishing structures that can assist in the care of children when parents have to travel long distances to work or go out at night. Perceptions on causes in the macro environment were related to some cultural practices, such as preparing girls for adulthood and prescriptions about respect for elders as well as on paternalism that creates a platform for child sexual abuse. Participants were adamant that they do not share these cultural beliefs due to the influence of their studies as well as other personal exposure to cases of child sexual abuse in their communities, although their discussions on substance abuse by perpetrators also include

other factors of possible mitigation of perpetrators' responsibility, alluding to some myth acceptance influencing their perceptions.

The following recommendations can be made:

- Self-awareness should be encouraged and space for self-reflection should be included in the training regime, establishing a habit for social workers to recognise the effect of service rendering on them. Space should be provided for social work students to access counselling in this regard if necessary.
- More attention should be given to including cultural issues in the training syllabus of social work students. Students should be aware of all the cultures in South Africa and what specific cultural practices have an influence in a social work context.
- Training material regarding child sexual abuse should include information on existing myths regarding CSA and students should be made aware of the effects thereof on their own perceptions.
- The opportunity should be given to students to use self-reflection as a way of uncovering bias regarding issues of sexual abuse.
- Students should be allowed to engage in discussions on the possible disparity between what is expected from them in practice and what they experience in their communities.
- Information on cultural issues informing CSA should be included in supervision and in-service training opportunities for social workers in order to uncover and address their possible bias.

3.2 Description of the sexually abused child

The following conclusions can be made: The participants shared the perception of what the sexually abused child looks like and they discussed it on two levels. The first one was age; the participants were in agreement that a child is someone under the age of 16 to 18 years, which is in line with legislation. In terms of the gender of the victim, the participants viewed the victim as either male or female, although it is interesting to point out that for the rest of the discussions, the participants referred to the victims as being female.

The following recommendations can be made:

- Training material should include clear information on the definition of child sexual abuse, including the age difference between perpetrator and victim.
- Students should be exposed to case studies to make them aware of the gendered nature and dynamics of child sexual abuse.
- Training sessions with social workers practising in the field of CSA should also include discussions on clear definitions of CSA.

3.3 Description of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse

The following conclusions can be made: The participants agreed that the perpetrator can be either male or female. They also discussed a pattern of abuse outside the male-female dyad and mentioned male on male abuse as well as female on female abuse. In terms of the age of the perpetrator they all agreed that the perpetrator can be an adult or a child, although they viewed the former as more frequent than the latter. The participants also shared the view that in many instances the perpetrator has an existing relationship with the victim, either as a parent, step-parent, uncle, grandfather, brother or school teacher.

The following recommendations can be made:

- The syllabus for social work training in terms of CSA should include information on the descriptions of the perpetrator.
- Students should be exposed to information on the power imbalance underlying CSA so that they would be able to recognise possible risk factors in practice.
- Social workers should be involved in discussions on the family dynamics underlying cases of CSA to sensitise them to recognising unhealthy patterns of interaction between family members.

3.4 CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects

The following conclusions can be made: All the participants viewed the extent of child sexual abuse as pervasive and touching on all sectors of society. One respondent went as far as saying “*it is happens every day, every minute*”. They also perceive that certain factors need to be present for sexual activity to be classified as child sexual abuse. The participants see penetration as one of the aspects present during sexual abuse. A discussion on the subject

indicated a perception of the fact that penetration could be with a sexual organ or any other body part. Another perception was that inappropriate touching is also child sexual abuse. This included touching children on private or other body parts that are normally covered with clothes; while some felt any touch without the child's consent is child sexual abuse. Exposing children to inappropriate sexual stimuli was also one of the characteristics perceived by the participants as inherent to child sexual abuse. This was explained as either inappropriate conversations, use of language; exposure to pornographic pictures and movies/television programmes; as well as the fact that overcrowded living conditions expose children to their parents' sexual activities. The discussions did not include all the aspects included in legislation.

Participants perceive other characteristics to be virginity testing of girls, a cultural practice that is still prevalent in the 21st century. Participants were vocal about this issue and shared in great detail what they knew or have experienced in terms of this characteristic. The last aspect that the participants perceived as a characteristic of child sexual abuse is the fact that due to the developmental stage children are unable to give consent to sexual activity.

The following recommendations can be made:

- The legal aspects of CSA as set out in legislation should be included in training material to ensure that students have the necessary exposure to all possibilities of CSA in order to raise their awareness.
- Discussion on cultural aspects such as virginity testing should be encouraged during social work training.
- In-depth training on legislation regarding CSA will benefit social workers and empower them to recognise CSA as well as assist them in planning intervention strategies.
- Frequent training on aspects regarding child sexual abuse will ensure compliance with legislation and benefit service rendering.
- A platform should be created for social workers practising in the field of CSA to enable them to engage in issues such as virginity testing and the possible dichotomy between practice and cultural prescriptions as well as how it will influence service delivery.
- Opportunities should be provided for social workers to examine the own cultural background and identify possible areas where there are discrepancies with legislation

and other policies. Open discussion around these issues should be encouraged and handled in a sensitive way.

- Awareness should be raised in the workplace about the issue of personal bias informing perceptions which could have a negative impact on service rendering. This way social workers will be able to recognise own bias before it intrudes on decision making.

3.5 Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways

The following conclusions can be made: Participants expressed a perception that CSA affects the child in specific ways. They see children as feeling blamed for the abuse and also having feelings of guilt. Children feel blamed when they disclose abuse to either their parent or authorities by being questioned extensively to ascertain whether the allegation of abuse is true or not. Feelings of guilt stem from the consequences of disclosure or even from remarks made by the perpetrator. The participants also perceived the effects of CSA as long-term emotional scarring, mostly based on the fact that the memory cannot be erased and will form part of how a child sees him or herself. Participants also perceive that CSA affects the child relationships, not only in the short term, but also well into future relationships by destroying trust.

The following recommendations can be made:

- Extensive information about sexual abuse and the effects of trauma should be included in the curriculum.
- Regular supervision would provide social workers with the a platform to discuss their own emotional reactions to cases of child sexual abuse, especially in the event of exposure triggering a social worker's own sexual abuse history. This can only happen in an atmosphere of acceptance and reciprocal respect.
- Social workers receive training of legislation pertaining to child protection from first-year level to ensure that they align themselves with the application of the necessary laws and regulations.
- Students should be exposed to open dialogue where they can question and deliberate on issues surrounding their own culture and also recognise how studying has influenced them.

3.6 Children do not disclose sexual abuse

The following conclusions can be made: Participants were clear in their perception that children are hesitant to disclose sexual abuse. They see the reasons for this non-disclosure as a lack of maternal and familial support as well as the fear of not being believed. In instances where sexual abuse is happening within the family, it is their view mothers are disempowered by the socio-economic realities in South Africa with the result that they would rather protect the perpetrator and maintain the family's livelihood than protect the child. They also see the child's refusal to disclose as due to threats by the perpetrator. The issue of coercion was also touched on by explaining that sometimes the perpetrator will provide the child with gifts, making it hard for the child to disclose without feelings of complicity.

Another specific perception that participants shared is that cultural sexual prescripts prohibit children from talking about sexual matters to adults, making it hard for a child to approach an adult to tell them what has happened to them.

The participants also had specific views on how sexual abuse can be prevented. This perception centred around more frequent and specific education for children and a more accessible justice system that focuses on the best interests of the child.

The following recommendations can be made:

- First time social workers should be made cognisant of the effect of their own personal history, exposure or lack of exposure to child sexual abuse on their perceptions of child sexual abuse. Exposure to CSA by discussing case studies can help prepare social workers for practice.
- Clear and descriptive policies with standard operating procedures in terms of dealing with disclosure should be available to all social workers working in the child protection field and will provide the necessary structure to minimise bias.

4. POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Although the participants were able to speak English, their pronunciation of certain words rendered the transcriptions of the interviews challenging. Their ability to use English limited

them from expressing themselves on a deeper level. The participants also used euphemisms for certain words that they were uncomfortable with as well as leaving sentences unfinished. This left some of the information open to interpretation.

The in-depth interviews were done in August when the students were at a point where they had almost completed their practical training. Doing the interviews earlier in the year, before professional socialisation started taking place, might have given responses that are less influenced by their exposure to a practice setting.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following recommendations can be made regarding further research.

- This study focused on social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse. It is recommended that a similar study be undertaken with students from different learning institutions in order to have a more diverse group of participants.
- Diversity as a construct and how it affects the perceptions of social work students is a topic that needs to be explored.
- It is also recommended that a study be undertaken regarding the factors that influence the perceptions of social workers.
- It is further recommended that a study be undertaken regarding social workers' perceptions of child sexual abuse and how it influences service delivery in terms of cases reported to child protection agencies.

6. CLOSING COMMENTS

In this study the focus was on social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse. These perceptions have the potential to affect service rendering, especially if it is not in line with current legislation. Knowledge about these perceptions and the diversity thereof can be utilised to inform the social work curriculum and ensure that service delivery is not affected in a negative way.

The data collected in this study showed a substantial amount of agreement between the social work students' perceptions and current definitions of CSA and legislation pertaining to CSA, but also a remarkable gap in knowledge in terms of some of the details contained in

defining sexual abuse, its causes, impact and issues of disclosure. It was also clear that their perceptions were initially influenced by their cultural context, but these perceptions changed when they were exposed to study material, personal experiences and the media.

SECTION D

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent

North West University Potchefstroom Campus

Researcher: Frieda Tanton

CONSENT FORM

Social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in this research study because you were identified as a fourth-year UNISA student that complies with the set criteria.

Purpose of the research project:

The researcher intends to explore a group of fourth-year social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse. Social workers render services to the children who have been sexually abused on a variety of levels, from implementing legislation to the long term therapeutic treatment. By exploring and describing these perceptions, recommendations can be made to training institutions to make provision for differences in order to assist students with linking their perceptions to service delivery.

Possible Risks:

Some of the questions in the interview may cause sensitivity due to the specific area of study. However, every effort will be made by the researcher to minimise your discomfort. If at any time you feel you would like to withdraw from the research study, you will be free to do so.

Interviews:

All interviews will be recorded. These recordings will be kept in a safe place for a period of five years and will only be viewed by the researcher. The recordings will not be made public.

Costs of participation:

Participation in the research will not involve any direct costs. Interviews will be held at the campus on scheduled training dates to exclude additional travelling.

Benefits and Compensation:

There is no guarantee that you will benefit directly from the study. You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

Alternatives:

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. Nonparticipation will not lead to any negative sanction.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will make every attempt to keep all information collected in this research project strictly confidential, except as may be required by court order or by law. Should any publication result from this research, all names will be kept anonymous.

Additional information:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary, and you are free to choose not to participate. Participation may be discontinued at any stage without prejudice. In the event of discontinuation of participation in the research, you may request that the researcher do not use any of the information already provided. You are encouraged to ask questions concerning the study at any time as they occur to you. Any significant new findings obtained during the course of the study that may influence your willingness for further participation will be provided.

Feedback:

You hereby give consent that the feedback on the research may be provided via email. A feedback session will be arranged in order to provide feedback about the research as well as to give the participants the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

Disclaimer/Withdrawal:

You agree that your participation in this study is voluntary and that you understand that you are allowed to withdraw at any time.

Subject rights:

If you have any questions pertaining to your participation in this research study, you are welcome to contact the researcher (Frieda Tanton – 082 075 4771) or her study leader (Dr Carlien van Wyk - 082 940 6690) .

Conclusion:

By signing this document, you are indicating that you have read and understood the consent form and that you agree to participate in this research study.

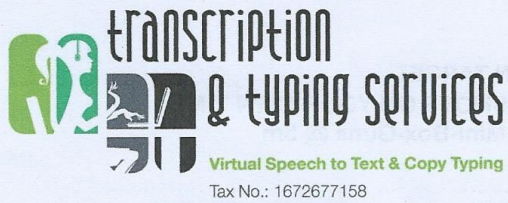
Participant's signature

Date:

Researcher's signature

Date:

ANNEXURE 2: CONFIDENTIALITY UNDERTAKING OF TRANSCRIBER



C: 083 227 5966
F: 086 647 6813
P: PO Box 7827, Centurion, 0046
E: juliamb1@mweb.co.za

12 January 2015

To whom it may concern:

I hereby declare that I was responsible for transcribing all audio recordings for the interviews conducted by Frieda Tanton as part of her research for a Master's degree in Social Work at North West University.

Confidentiality undertaking:

I, Julia Martinelli agree to hold all information contained in any audio recording relating to this Research in confidence. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informants' right to privacy.

Sincerely,

Julia Martinelli

Transcription & Typing Services



ANNEXURE 3: EXAMPLE OF A TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

NAME OF AUDIO : **S**

DATE OF AUDIO : **28 August 2013**

LENGTH OF AUDIO : **33:20**

TRANSCRIBER NAME : **JULIA MARTINELLI**

TRANSCRIPTION LEGEND : **RESEARCHER R**

: **INTERVIEWEE I**

R S, thank you so much for being willing to do this research interview. I am going to just repeat that remember if at any point during the conversation you feel uncomfortable and you want to stop you are welcome to, okay?

I Okay.

R S, I was wondering, how do you see and understand child sexual abuse?

I My understanding about child sexual abuse I think is very broad, because I think there are abuse that people focus the most like the issue of sexual penetration, where maybe you find that an adult has said having a sexual intercourse with a child. That is what I can understand. And I also understand that there are other child sexual abuse that are happening between children and children or amongst children, where there are no adults involved. Or maybe children of different age, sometimes you find that there is a child of a year or two years being sexually abused by a child of fourteen or fifteen, yes. And the third one it will be like the adult who are abusing those children, by applying an inappropriate touching.

R Inappropriate touching?

I Yes.

R Okay. Okay so I understand from you what you said here, it is adult on child and it involves penetration or it can be amongst children themselves or it could be an adult with a child still, but it doesn't necessarily have to be penetration, it can also be inappropriate touching?

I Yes that is what I was trying to explain.

R Okay. So can you tell me a little bit more about this, in terms of, what more do you think, children on children? Give me an example of how you think that happens?

I With children, these children it occurs the most when there are no adult supervision, where you find that the children are playing and some of the children they want to practice or display or act what they saw. They sometimes saw those sexual activities through the media like maybe watching some clips from TV. Sometimes they also, some of the children they also saw it from their parents, because you find that maybe they are staying in one shack home or one single room where sometimes parents forget that children can observe such things. And when they are all alone by themselves they want to do this, then just to feel how the adults feel or why the people from the TV feel when they do such thing. To them they don't see any wrong about doing such things. And sometimes they agree amongst themselves sometimes the older one can forcefully do it with the small one, because of a quarrel.

R Okay, sjoe. There is a quite a mouthful now. I want to follow up quickly, in terms of what you said that children trying to act out what they saw, they don't realize it is wrong, the children themselves?

I Yes.

R Do you think in terms of that, that for younger children to watch TV and be exposed to what their parents are doing, can you tell me something about that, how you perceive that, how do you, how you feel about that?

I I don't think watching TV is wrong. But I think parents must be, must take their position as parent, they must supervise their children. When they saw such act they must explain to their children the good and the bad part of it so that when they go out that they must know that as children we are not suppose

to do such things. So and even with the parents whilst staying maybe in a single room when they sleep in the same room with their children, I think they must be cautious when they do the adult things. They must make sure that the children are fast asleep or maybe they must take the children to visit their granny sometimes, so that they can have such privacy instead of assuming that children are fast asleep because I think nowadays children are more advanced than in the previous generation. So they got this information from everywhere. Sometimes when people go out and get some awareness that in schools, they go to those small grades and teach about the sexual abuse awareness but sometimes you find that those people they don't dwell much, they give you the basics. So children, they left children without proper information. They just say you mustn't sleep or you mustn't put your finger in your private part. They don't give them detail and the consequences of those things. So children when they go out of school, they want to make sure and try what we are (inaudible). So maybe the awareness in school they must, those people who are going there, they must be trained enough to deal with small children because the children's mind is different from adults mind. So our understanding as adults is different from the way children are understanding these things.

R When you talk about adult things, what do you mean?

I It's having sex.

R What I hear from you and I just want to make sure I hear you correctly, is that all these things make children actually curious about sex, giving them information that is like half baked, that just enough to say 'don't do this, don't do this' without showing them the bigger picture and being exposed to what parents are doing and seeing things in the media. It makes them curious about sexual activity instead of giving them the ability to make healthy decisions?

I This is just my perception, because I am thinking that sometimes when children maybe have sexual intercourse, it is not about that they are feeling to do such thing. It is just that they are doing it because they saw somebody else doing such things. So I don't think with children to children sex, it is always the issue where they did it just to harm the other person. They just want to

experiment something that they saw. So there is no feelings involved in most cases. It is not like adults where maybe grandfather will feel like he want to have such thing and then take advantage of a small baby. So with children I think it is lack of education and sometimes when they saw this thing on TV, they are, or parental them that they must not do that, they just want to experiment because children they learn by experimenting. So sometimes if you tell them that don't do this, when you are not there, they want to do it and feel what will happen next.

R So I get the impression from you that they do this without really knowing what it is that they are doing, they just experiment to find out what it is?

I Yes that is what I am saying, because I don't think most of the children who were involved in sexually abusing other children, they did it for the sake of benefiting themselves in terms of enjoying what they were doing, like what the adults do. I think it was just an issue of playing sometimes. To them they didn't see the bad part of it, after they did that activity. So it is like they are just doing it as they are children but with the children who are above the age of fourteen, I think there is a benefit of doubt whether it is about experiencing or not.

R Oh experimenting?

I Experimenting yes. Because I think with the children who are above fourteen there is also, they can reason better than children who are ten and so for them I think in turn, possibly classify it with the things that are done by the adults. So maybe they did it purposefully, they knew what they were doing.

R Okay, so you make a very clear distinction between children doing it for the sake for experimentation, but over fourteen says. But when you speak to adults, it sounds like you are quite convinced from what you said now that it is purposeful?

I Ja, I think with adults there is no way of just experimenting. Because we are, as I am also an adult I think all adults they think, they know what is wrong and what is right. And I don't think there is an adult who will say he didn't know that what he did with the child it was wrong.

R Okay.

I It is different from children and even with children it also differ with age groups. Because I don't think a teenager of sixteen will say raping or sleeping with a four year old child is, he didn't realize that whatever he is doing is not right.

R Okay. I want to ask you something else, earlier you talked about a grandfather doing it with a little baby. Is it the baby's grandfather or is it just grandfather, the general term because it is an older man?

I It is just an older man, because most of the cases that we hear and sometimes we heard about them, you will find that if the older people who are staying in the community who knows about these children but they are not related sometimes, eventhough in some cases people are related, so it is older people whom maybe to me it is not like a grandfather, but whereby I can say the age of that older person rectulance, can be a grandchild or a grandfather to the child.

R Okay.

I So it is either related or not related.

R Okay and that is, actually where I was trying to understand from you, whether you see them as related or it only happens when people are related or it happens when people are not related. So thank you for answering that for me. I was wondering, in terms of, you were talking earlier on a little bit about the older one is overpowering the younger one, can you unpack that a little bit for me?

I I said where children?

R Yes you said where the children are seeing the wrong when they do it, because they are experimenting, but when there is an adult present it is different, because the adult overpowers the young child. So can you explain to me a little bit what you meant there with overpowering?

I Ja because I think children or small children from the age of ten downwards, they are powerless. So when somebody is fifteen and he always have an

advantage or take an advantage on the small ones. Like even if when they are playing, I don't think a boy or for example or a boy of five years will take an advantage of having sex with a girl of ten years. But to me I think it will be vice versa, the adult boy will go with a small girl and the small girl will always be a victim to the adult.

R What does taken advantage mean to you?

I Taken advantage to me I think it means like doing something that that particular person is vulnerable or protecting herself from.

R So the age gap leaves the children vulnerable and, is that what you are saying, so it is because of the age gap that the child is more vulnerable?

I Yes, but even with information, sorry for interrupting. Even with information I think the older ones can maybe manipulate the small ones. Because I think most of the small babies, like five years downwards, they don't have any, some of them they don't even take note of what they saw on media or see what is happening. But the older ones maybe they will take an advantage and manipulate the small ones. So in by so doing they (inaudible) because their knowledge and understanding of things is still small, just an advantage too.

R You are making it very clear for me, like taking advantage and the children are vulnerable. I am just, because when I hear the word manipulate I've got a very specific picture in my head and I just want to hear what is the picture in your head, when you talk about manipulation.

I Manipulation?

R Yes.

I Manipulation to me is like when somebody comes and try to converse your understanding. Like maybe let's, I don't want to go with you maybe to town and you are telling me that in town I will buy you this and you know that you are not going to do such things, you just promise things that are not there, so that I can convince, so I think doing that is manipulation.

R Okay it is doing things to make people change their minds?

I Yes-yes.

R I am wondering about something else now and I don't want to come out and change how you think about stuff, by asking questions about new information. But I am just thinking, do you think there are circumstances that make it harder for children, when an adult comes and try to manipulate a child, do you think there are things that makes it hard for the child to say no?

I Ja I think maybe the first thing is the trust, because children always have trust on adults. That is the first thing that I think maybe makes children, makes it hard for children to say no.

R Okay.

I And the second thing, for those who are related, when we talk about adults who are using the small ones, I think it is difficult because they regard them as their parents or their grandparent and they don't want to disappoint. So as children they think whatever that the adult want they must provide if they have something, so that is when they also fall under, they end up being victims of abuse; because sometimes children think that as long as my grandfather or my stepdad or my daddy want this, it mean that is the right thing to do.

R Okay, so it almost sounds like children are brought up to not question what adults want. Or is that what I just, is it my own things that I am thinking?

I I think it also goes back to the issue of our lack of information because some children they don't know anything about the issue of abuse. So even from the family side, parents are not talking about that. Some families they still believe on the issue of taboo that you cannot talk about adult things in front of children. So in by so doing they end up frustrating their children, because the children they don't get this information and when the parents approach them they always think this is good to do, but they don't know whether it is wrong and they don't want to disappoint the people that they trust the most.

R Okay and tell me a little bit, do all parents do this do you think?

I No I think it is not all the parents who are doing such things because families are different. Some families they raise their children in a proper manner,

where they share with their children everything, like the information and some families they indicate they don't know anything about these things. They are still relying on the old age information where they said this topic you cannot discuss it in front of people. And some families is the issue of poverty, whereby even if a child can end up realizing that whatever that is happening, that is when she reports maybe to the mother, it is an abuse that is happening, is he a member of the family, the mother will always protect the male person maybe because he is a provider in the house.

R So they protect the source of income, instead of protecting the child?

I The child yes and that is the problem in most of those cases of abuse. Because you find that maybe at the end, the person will report, it will be the neighbour, not the person who stays with the child in that house.

R That is quite something. Can you think of other instances like that, that has the effect on, because I am just thinking in my mind now, if that is the case then, it is not going to be easy for children to talk about what is happening to them?

I Ja it is not easy and again it is frustrating because sometimes even if they talk, no one is listening. Like I remember one story where a child was taken from Eastern Cape to Pretoria to stay with the relatives because the family at home was not, she was from a poverty background and those family in Pretoria decided to go and take that child where they are related to the parents of that child. And when they come to Pretoria the husband started abusing the child [and then the mother, the wife of that husband knew about the abuse] and the child reported to that woman but she was always beating that child, saying 'stop accusing this person, this is my husband and if he goes to jail I will suffer' and all those things. And the poor child end up to social workers to report the matter but at the end the case was withdrawn because they said there are lack of evidence. But to me it was painful, because a fourteen year old child, I don't think she can come away from Eastern Cape just to accuse somebody about the issue of this. Such thing has happened that the families are too protective to themselves, even if they see that there is a rape or there is abuse on the child, they just don't care about the abuse, they care about the income and the way the husband or the man is providing.

R I am just thinking a little bit I mean, I am a social worker, you are studying social work, so and when one thinks about that child, one gets a bit upset. But I am also wondering, because for me it almost sounds if nobody believes the child. It is not only about the case, it is also about helping afterwards a little bit?

I Ja that has affected me a lot, because I felt like if maybe the law can social workers seriously, because I think social worker is a profession and social workers they are specializing in their deed of work. Maybe they can because there are social workers who are working with children, they can be able to understand more about what the child say and maybe they can write a report that will explain to court and the court or the justice system must also take the social workers profession seriously, instead of only focusing on the issue of the legal, the attorneys and the other parts of legal. Because at the end it seems as if the law against the, who knows the law better, instead of who knows the background of the child better. So the child was failed by different professions there. So I feel like it was bad, because at the end that child was never helped and we don't know if the abuse will stop or should she be abused physically, this time she will be beaten that they took us to court for nothing. So it was painful for me, but as a student I didn't have anything to do to that case.

R I want to find out from you a little bit, you said she didn't get help. What do you think what kind of help does a child need that has been abused?

I I think with that one because she reported the matter that was regarding itself, it was not the one thinks of, she never got the custody and she stood by herself, going out and look for social workers. And she walked a very long distance, that is why I was frustrated to hear that there was lack of evidence, that she was raped because she walks for more than two kilometers to get the social workers. And at the end of the day I felt like she didn't get the counseling, she only went to court and I didn't get all the information or the processes that they do, but at the end I met with the investigating officer, he told me that the case was withdrawn. So it is like if maybe the first day when she reported the rape, she was taken for counseling to or maybe when they took her to a doctor, to observe whatever, they should have include counseling there. And even

after or during the court day, maybe they should have involved social workers, so that they can intermediate, instead of her talking because sometimes children are intimidated by the lawyers. So you might find that they said there is no evidence, because she was hiding data. Because that was the only family that she know from Gauteng and it also depend, because the person who was accused of the rape, he is working for an army. So my assumption was that maybe she, he told the child that if you talk about this, I will shoot you and because she is still fourteen she must be very intimidated.

R Okay, so a few things that came out here. The one is that the perpetrator threatens the child at times?

I I think they always threatens, because with me I am lucky because where I am currently working it also helps me with my studies because I come across people who are coming to see the social workers there. So in most cases when children talk to the social workers, it is where they start to open up and talk as open. Most of the cases like those I heard or I was sitting in the social worker during a conversation with a client, I heard children saying he gave me ten rand and said I mustn't tell anyone. He told me that if I talk about this, he will kill me. He told me that he will kill my mother and my brother when I talk about it. So there are always victims who are also threatened that if you come out with this information, then it is over with. So children, I believe there are a lot of children who are staying there with those abuse because they are afraid that if they talk then they will be killed.

R You said now a lot of children, I was thinking about asking you the question of this girl from the Eastern Cape, do you think that is unique?

I I think each and every case it is unique. Even though all cases maybe they will be classified under sexual abuse and stuff. But each and every experience that a person experience during rape or of sexual abuse, it is unique.

R Maybe the right question that I wanted to ask, do you think it is an isolated case, or do you think it is like a once off thing that happened or do you think there are more cases like that?

I Oh okay, no I think there are more cases like that. As I am saying that maybe, some children I feel they don't want to come out, because they've been threatened and in some cases parents they also support the perpetrators. And not because they don't trust their children, they do trust but they find that maybe a poor woman has six children and she is not working. And the husband who is a perpetrator on the other side, he is the one who is working. So they think if he goes to jail then they would suffer, so they sacrifice by keeping it quiet like saying, as if there is nothing happening in the house. So in such cases we only, or children only get helped if the neighbours or the teachers at school identifies certain abnormality and they confront that child and sometimes where the child starts speaking. But some children I still believe that they are dying in their pain, they don't want to talk about this, because they are trying to protect their families.

R So that is a big statement, dying with their pain. How do you feel about what the parents or the mothers are doing to say that, we sacrifice because we need the income, how does that make you feel?

I I feel very bad. It is just that sometimes it is, it all goes back to the issue of educating people because I haven't seen any grade in South Africa where they said it is possible, (inaudible). So I don't think if they report such things, at the end of the day all the people will die. Because there are social welfares, there are other organizations, those who are against those abused people. So I think they will help. They will know that this family, this happened to this family and then you must look forward, that they don't suffer because that guy went to jail. And I think if one family can get help from such organization, the other families will also come out and explain or share their stories. Because if they don't come out everybody feeling better, they will better sleep, full than sleeping an empty stomach, because they are afraid of something that is unknown to them. They are being tested whether they will die of hunger if the husband goes to jail, but they are just afraid because they haven't seen the future without the husband. Whereby if maybe one family can be strong enough and go out there and say no we are tired of this, this man have been doing this or this, he has been doing this for this period, then they want him to go to, or we report the matter. The court will, the justice system will take its

course. At the end of the day if that person gets a sentence or any kind of punishment, then the organizations in the community they must come and support such families. I think when the process starts all the relevant stakeholders must be involved, or maybe there will be a committee that can be formed to support families like that. Because at the end of the day it will also promote people, the education to say you mustn't die with this kind of problem, you must come out and talk about this and children will be safe from the (inaudible).

R So for you the benefit of talking about it, is that children will be safe?

I Ja the children will be safe and the children will have a voice to say, because if now they talk and the parents they say no stop talking about this, we will chase you out of the house if you continue talking about. Then they will have no voice, because they don't see themselves surviving without this man. So but if at the end of the day the sisters and the brother or the mother they are coming to support the child and say this will never happen again to you, the matter must be taken to court and on the justice system we will decide from there. Then at the end of the day they realize that they don't sleep on an empty stomach. I think children will start telling other children in school. Because children they are also communicating in school. She will maybe share with her friend and the friend might find that she was also in the same situation that she knew another friend in this same situation, so by so doing the message would be conveyed in different people. Or maybe they will even make children do, warn the perpetrators before they commit such things that maybe I will report you like what my colleague, my friend said. So maybe the perpetrator will realize that even if you threaten those children, at the end of the day they have power, have a voice to speak with.

R I wonder S if there is anything else you want to say regarding child sexual abuse that is?

I Ja what I want to say is, that is a very big concern to me. And I don't think it is only doing to the community out there, even those parents who are hiding this thing. I think it is a very big concern, but what is important, it is an education and to promise that if you go and report such things the law will

protect you, sometimes people they are very afraid of reporting such things and when you go back to the issue of children and children again, because sometimes you find that those children they are doing it as the fun, or for fun. But the parents sometimes they are the ones who go out and report that my child has been raped and such things and those things starts fights and stuff like that. So I think the parents must also get some, where maybe they meet once a month to get some parenting skills so that they can assist each other, where they can share their parenting experiences because without such things, some parents they are advanced because they are educated. They (inaudible) they Google all those things, but there are parents who stay there with no information. So it is difficult for such parents to know what to do and at the end of the day their children are the ones who are being victims of rape and at the end of the day just face like that. They don't, the matters are not even reported.

R Sjoie. Thank you S. I really appreciate the time you have spent in answering my questions.

I I thank you.

R Thank you very much S.

[End of Recording]

ANNEXURE 4: THEMES AND NARRATIVES FROM UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

THEMES AND NARRATIVES FROM UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Research question: What are social work students' perceptions of child sexual abuse?

SUMMARY OF THEMES, SUBTHEMES & CATEGORIES:

THEME	SUBTHEME	CATEGORIES
<i>Theme 1: Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment.</i>	1.1 Causes on a micro level	1.1.1 Inadequate parental care 1.1.2 The use of substance abuse by the perpetrator 1.1.3 Children lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexual abuse
	1.2 Causes on a macro level	1.2.1 Preparing girls for adulthood 1.2.2 Prescriptions about respect for elders 1.2.3 Paternalism creates a platform for CSA
<i>Theme 2: Description of the sexually abused child</i>	2.1 Age of child	
	2.2 Gender of child	
<i>Theme 3: Description of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse</i>	3.1 Age of perpetrator	
	3.2 Gender of perpetrator	
	3.3 Perpetrator's relationship with victim	
<i>Theme 4: CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific</i>	4.1 Penetration	

<i>aspects</i>		
	4.2 Inappropriate touching of children	
	4.3 Exposure of children to inappropriate sexual stimuli	
	4.4 Virginity testing of girls	
	4.5 The diminished capacity of children to give consent to sexual activities	
<i>Theme 5: Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways.</i>	5.1 Children experience being blamed and have feelings of guilt	
	5.2 Children experience long term emotional scarring	
	5.3 CSA has a negative impact on the relationships of victims	
<i>Theme 6: Children do not disclose sexual abuse</i>	6.1 Reasons for non-disclosure	6.1.1 Mothers and families do not believe and protect children after disclosure 6.1.2 Being threatened by the perpetrator contributes to children not disclosing sexual abuse 6.1.3 Cultural beliefs about not talking about sexual matters
	6.2 Ways of encouraging disclosure	

THEMES WITH SUBSTANTIATING NARRATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Following is a schema indicating what themes could be identified from the information that was gathered in the interviews. Ten interviews were conducted. Narratives from the interviews are quoted to substantiate the identification of the themes, subthemes and categories.

Theme 1: Child sexual abuse is caused by factors within the child's ecological environment

<p>1. Causes on a micro level</p>	<p>1.1 Inadequate parental care</p>	<p><i>“The children that are mostly raped, I think are from black communities where the <u>parents are not like taking good care of their kids</u>, ... “</i></p> <p><i>“... <u>maybe the mother is always outside, maybe the mother is always away</u>. The uncle takes advantage of that child then they sexually abuse the child...”</i></p> <p><i>“You know because sometimes not that I blame those single mothers or aunties, <u>but sometimes they like leave the children with men</u> and then these men take advantage of those children. So if they have knowledge, I mean maybe they'll find, maybe they'll take the children to creché or to be with somebody else because I think most people, or most children that are being abused it's <u>because maybe their mother is not there.</u>”</i></p>
	<p>1.2 The use of substances by the perpetrator</p>	<p><i>“...and others are <u>just being influenced by these things that they are smoking</u>. The nyaope [a kind of drug] and all the drugs...”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe the behaviour, the thing of abusing or sexually harassing the <u>person may be influenced by alcohol</u> or something else, maybe anger.”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... what could happen to a child who can come inside this house, I mean he's smoked those things and he's now watching porn movies ...”</i></p>
	<p>1.3 Children lack knowledge about what constitutes sexual abuse</p>	<p><i>More children are still being abused and then nobody is playing that role to help this children, you know or to educate people like</i></p>

		<p><i>"hi guys this is abuse when men, an old man touches you like this it's abuse, or forces you to have sex with him it's abuse". So I think that most black people should be educated about abuse and different types of abuse. So that they can understand <u>because I think they lack knowledge.</u>"</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes when people go out and get some awareness in schools, they go to those small grades and teach about the sexual abuse awareness but sometimes you find that those people they don't dwell much, they give you the basics. So children, <u>they left children without proper information.</u>"</i></p> <p><i>" ... so some children they have been abused sexually but <u>they are not aware because they do not have any information</u> that what they are doing it is an abuse."</i></p>
<p>2. Causes on a macro level</p>	<p>2.1 Preparing girls for adulthood</p>	<p><i>"... or they tell the children that this is normal this is what we do in our family or this is what I need to do with you so that I can see that you are grown or <u>this will make you a better woman in future.</u>"</i></p> <p><i>"Like I think its last month there was an incident happened a father abuses her own daughter, sixteen year old daughter. And he uses a means of her value that he is doing this <u>because he's preparing the girl for marriage...</u> I can say a sixteen year old understand but if you involve a culture and say "I'm preparing you, and each and every household they doing this" You are wrong. You are misinterpreting the idea because you just want to fulfill your</i></p>

		<p><i>needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“I know there are these cultures, values. I don't know if its values or culture but it's the thing that goes with culture. Like the girls when they are fourteen upwards so that they are in their puberty stage, then there's this ritual thing they perform. They take them and put them aside away in a room maybe for a month or two months. Then there will be an older person who will be like give them, will teach them about the adulthood. When they get married something like this will happen. When you give birth something like this will happen. When you have a man...They teach you stuff, general stuff. But this other people they, they, the mans they taking advantage of that culture. When they want <u>to fulfill their needs at the time they will use that time and say "I'm preparing you"</u>. And the others, other men they are doing them to their children. It's just that they will not mention it. That is where they do. They abuse the children more especially daughters.”</i></p>
	<p>2.2 Prescriptions about respect for elders</p>	<p><i>Children are just innocent creatures because sometimes with our black our children [unclear] they do things because we teach them that <u>every person you see is your mother and every other person you see is your father. He is your uncle you must respect. Whenever they want to send you somewhere you must not say no, you must go. So they [children] do not even know, even if you are talking about the strangers, do not talk to strangers he does not know it's a stranger - my mom says he is also a father if he sends you, so they become confused</u></i></p>

		<p><i>and then being raped by someone who they know the child does not think that that child is...he is my uncle mos and then afterwards he gave me sweets now he is treating me with nice things. Which mean what I did was good.</i></p> <p><i>“But you know the values of other, other, other people they just take the respect in most, in most circumstances <u>they say its respect even if you see that this is not respect, its abuse.</u> Like the women there they are still using the words “I’m respecting my husband. I’m respecting my induhna. I’m respecting my chief. Even though when you see no, no this is not respect its abuse, because even those people if they want to come to your house and do whatever they want you can still say its respect. No I don’t think so. I don’t think I will say respect it’s just abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“... in my culture we respect older people. When an older person tells you something you have to do it. Even if you don't want you cannot say "no I don't like this". <u>Whatever that an older person says it's yes. You accept it. There's no no.</u> So that's why I think it's difficult when a child is being abused they cannot report because they think maybe, maybe even my family, the parent doing this to them and so... “</i></p> <p><i>“ ... maybe the first thing is the trust, because children always have trust on adults. That is the first thing that I think maybe makes children, makes it <u>hard for children to say no.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“ So as children they think whatever that the adult want they must provide ... they end being victims of abuse; because sometimes children</i></p>
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		<p><i>think <u>as long as my grandfather or my stepdad or my daddy want this, it means it is right thing to do.</u></i></p>
	<p>2.3 Paternalism creates a platform for CSA</p>	<p><i>“So it’s where actually these things like rape may happen, <u>because the man will take an advantage, to say “I’m the head of the house. I provide,” and all that. They [women] depend on men. Like the man will feel like he owns them [women], you understand? He owns them[women], so he can do whatever he wants. ... I mean, for them [women] to eat it’s because of him. I mean, he’s providing, so he believes that he controls everyone. Ja, they think they can do whatever. And another thing is that they know that the child cannot defend herself, ... So it’s easy for them to rape a child”</u></i></p> <p><i>“And I would also say in terms of, incest whereby <u>the adults thinks they have a right to do that to a child because they raised them</u> and they are entitled to just oversee everything else that takes place in the child’s life.”</i></p> <p><i>“So me what I understand correctly is that, <u>in order for you as a women to keep attention you must give pleasure to men, there is my explanation. ”</u></i></p> <p><i>“... because as I was saying, in black communities, <u>like most of black communities are not independent ... especially women ... so they depend too much on, on men. Most black women, they depend too much on men. And from our, should I say, from our culture ... we believe that a man should provide ...</u>”</i></p>

Theme 2: Description of the sexually abused child

2.1 Age of child	<p><i>“For me child sexual abuse is someone having intercourse with any <u>person under the age of fifteen...</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... if a child is under 18 ... ”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... even, even maybe it could be the child was three years old, being sexually abused by someone... ”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... a small children from the age of ten downwards ... ”</i></p>
2.2 Gender of child	<p><i>“ But to me I think it will be vice versa, the adult boy will go with <u>a small girl and the small girl</u> will always be a victim to the adult.”</i></p> <p><i>“...it happens with children maybe it’s <u>a boy child and a girl child...</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“...even the <u>boys</u> can be sexually abused.”</i></p>

Theme 3: Description of the perpetrator of child sexual abuse

<p>3.1 Age of perpetrator</p>	<p><i>“It is a older man ... “</i> <i>“ ... the man is above 18 ...”</i> <i>“ Because I think with the children who are above fourteen there is also, they can reason better than children who are ten and so for them I think in turn, it can possibly be classified with the things that are done by adults. ”</i></p>
<p>3.2 Gender of perpetrator</p>	<p><i>“... I mean <u>male adults</u> can also abuse boy children. “</i> <i>“...a <u>male adult</u> can do it with a girl”.</i> <i>“Even <u>female parents or female adults</u> can do it to a little boy”</i></p>
<p>3.3 Perpetrator’s relationship with victim</p>	<p><i>“I think child sexual abuse mostly is done by <u>stepfathers</u>”</i> <i>“... and it can be even in a family whereby the <u>parents</u> are abusing the children.”</i> <i>“I think I've mentioned the parents who are abusing children... Other it's just the guiltiness of <u>the fathers</u>. They just abuse children, innocent children. I don't know what came into their minds but you just abuse the children and even the other children that are in danger are the girls that come to their mothers and are abused because the father they take advantages, they say “my child I’m just doing this because I'm taking your mom and I must train you” or stuff like that.”</i> <i>“Could be a <u>father... an uncle... a grandpa...</u> I mean people that are abused they are abused by someone that they know. Normally. It can also be a stranger. But in most cases it is someone that you [the victim] know.”</i></p>

Theme 4: CSA is pervasive and can be characterised by the presence of specific aspects

Participants were in agreement about the alarming extent of CSA. A few of them can be quotes as saying the following:

“ ... it happens to a lot of children. I think it happens every day, every minute. ”

“Mostly it happens to girls, even to boys it is happening. But mostly it happens to girls.”

“But then you realized that it happens more frequently, even if it is not talked about as often as we would like to, but it happens a lot. ”

“I just find it shocking when I look at statistics of how many children actually get sexually abused. It happens more than people think or want to think, you know. It is in the news, just look at the statistics. People prefer to turn a blind eye to these things, but it is the truth, it is out there. One can see it happen.”

“Dit is net vir my skokkend jy weet as ek na statistieke ook kyk van hoeveel kinders actually gemishandel word, seksueel. Dit gebeur meer as wat mense dink of wil dink dit gebeur, jy weet. Dit is op die nuus, kyk net na die statistieke. Mense verkies om ‘n blinde oog te gee tot hierdie dinge, maar dit is die waarheid, dit is daarso. ‘n Mens kan dit sien gebeur.”

Specific aspects that characterises CSA:

<p>4.1 Penetration</p>	<p>“My understanding of sexual abuse I think is very broad, because I think there are abuse that people focus the most on like the issue of <u>sexual penetration</u>, where maybe you find that an adult has said having a sexual intercourse with a child.”</p> <p>“<u>Penetration</u>, yes and then there is this one called...I forgot the name but this one where there is no penis that penetrate but you find the men putting in fingers.”</p> <p>“It can be girls or boys because there is thing called molestation whereby the, the other men may, <u>they do penetrate</u> younger boys”.</p>
<p>4.2 Inappropriate touching of children</p>	<p>“... when people just fondle kids and people just <u>touch [them] where they are not supposed to ...</u>”</p> <p>“... will be like an adult who are abusing those children by <u>applying inappropriate touching</u>”</p> <p>“To me, child sexual abuse, is when you’re an adult person make a child to feel uncomfortable in a way that is <u>touching a child’s private parts</u> or making the child to do that to you”</p> <p>“... and even, what do they call it? Sexual harassment. ... if the</p>

	<i>person is <u>touching private parts</u> and all that.”</i>
4.3 Exposure of children to inappropriate sexual stimuli	<p><i>“This is just my perception, because I am thinking that sometimes when children maybe have sexual intercourse, it is not about that they are feeling to do such thing. It is just that they are doing it because <u>they saw somebody else doing such things.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“, I don’t know whether they thought it [mother and father having sexual intercourse] was right, they thought it was fun or whatever the reasons were but they felt the need to do it [sexual intercourse] to other kids as well, because they did it to other kids.”</i></p> <p><i>“When some families where they do <u>... in front of young children watching pornographic movies</u>, I think that is also sexual abuse to the children. It affects them. Sometimes they will try to experience it without knowing.”</i></p> <p><i>“If maybe the uncle says to the child, <u>maybe showing, I mean, his [private] parts</u> to the child ...”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe even the language...the language that the older person will be speaking with the child. ... and then maybe <u>asking the child to say something about ... his private part.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“With children, these children it occurs the most when there are no adult supervision, where you find that the children are playing and some of the children they want to practice or display or act what they saw. <u>They sometimes saw those sexual activities through the media like maybe watching some clips from TV. Sometimes they also, some of the children they also saw it from their parents</u>, because you find that maybe they are staying in one shack home or one single room where sometimes parents forget that <u>children can observe such things [sexual actions].</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“I can say even <u>the parents exposing ourselves</u> to our children is also sexual abuse to our children.”</i></p> <p><i>“So I don’t know whether we should say if a <u>parent exposes the child to that</u>, even if they didn’t rape them or anything but the child was able to see them doing it [having sexual intercourse], should that also constitute as rape, I mean as abuse?”</i></p>
4.4 Virginity testing	<i>“... for those who went for [virginity] testing ... and then they went</i>

of girls

there you stay in that kraal [traditional communal dwelling still found in rural areas] but now they no longer using the kraal because you were in a suburb but older men telling you who to have sex with the man. ... and after some few days being there, it is when they are going to check you [to see if you are a virgin] after they teach you the lesson how to make love and so on, then you open your legs wide and then they will check, if they see there is a certain skin [hymen] and that skin is no longer there then it means they have broken your virginity and if it is there before you come out of the room they shout she is still a virgin. It is painful because sometimes they do not lose their virginity because of sex. ... to me I think it is still sexual abuse because you are having sex without being willing to.

“In Swaziland there was a time in September, I think you know about this ritual of Umcwasho [virginity testing ceremony where girls are presented to King Mswati and he is allowed to choose a bride]. Where the girls they go to the riverside to pick up the reeds and they go make bands for clothes and stuff. And most abuse, sexual abuse are happening there, because they are half naked. They wear izinculuba [a G-string like piece of underwear made of animal skin]. They wore stuff like a piece of thing. It just cover this [indicating pubic area], but this side [indicating posterior area] it's outside. And its small pieces. You, you take out that reeds... .And they say they test you if you are a virgin or what. In that process when you take that reeds you go in front, there are so many girls there. They go in front of the king. They say “dance with it”, after that. When you are not a virgin they say your reeds will wither before you go before the king. And even before that there are older women who test you. They put fingers in your vagina to see if that thing the hymen is still there or what. And if they find that it's not there they'll say “you are no longer a virgin ... it goes with more of raping girls, of sexual things. Because even the other mens they take turns to say "no I just want to see if I can get her, her first in there."

“ So when it was my turn, my father said “no, not my children”. I'm the firstborn girl child ... my father said “I must protect this child”. Because maybe he knew what was happening around. So even myself

	<p><i>by that time he said “not my children they not going to that thing. I’m not signing my name that my children go to that thing”, I was clueless because I was a child. ... but I experienced that it is painful just to be touched there and there all that ... ugly, ugly wives, women. It is an abuse.”</i></p>
<p>4.5 The diminished capacity of children to give consent to sexual activities</p>	<p><i>“Ja, say for an example someone comes to a little child and says lets have sex, I mean <u>children cannot understand</u> or do not really know what sex is, then you can never said the child agreed to do it with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“In most cases I think it’s overpowering the children’s minds and everything, you just tell the person that we need to this [and abusive action], this is how it is done, you’ve got to do this and now I’m going to do this. So like the <u>child has never, did not say yes we can do it or no I cannot do it with you.</u> She just go with the flow.”</i></p> <p><i>“So according to my understanding the process or the action put by an older person performed to a child without the child knowing what it is actually this person is doing to her or him.”</i></p> <p><i>“<u>because the child, obviously, is not mature to, to make a decision</u> like to have sex ...”</i></p>

Theme 5: Child sexual abuse affects the child in specific ways

<p>5.1 Children experience being blamed and have feelings of guilt</p>	<p>“They'll like "oh you are like this because of this because you have been abused by your uncle or something". Like if they [family members] <u>blame the child "it's your fault"</u> they don't see the effect ...”</p> <p>“You know, sometimes it is very disruptive to the whole family, not just the child. The child is trying to protect the whole family, the whole family is trying to protect the child. The cop comes there and then they want what they want, they don't care who gets exposed to what, they want what they want. And sometimes it is hard. It could be handled differently I think, ja. In order for, even after the perpetrator, even if the perpetrator is a family member, for the family to still find a way to continue forward, because after the cops have gotten there they taken whatever it is what they want, people start fighting, people hate each other. Families are disrupted, the father goes away. The mothers cry, and then it is like the poor <u>child starts feeling maybe I shouldn't have said anything</u>. Because now daddy has been gone, now uncle is going to be arrested, now my mommy would hate aunty so and so, stuff like that.”</p> <p>“Because most children go through that [negative effects of disclosure and reporting] and then they sort of like after a <u>while feel it is their fault</u> now that everybody is not talking to somebody, it is their fault now that so and so is not, doesn't like this other person anymore and then they feel like if I had just kept quiet it would have been better because I know of a family that now, it is just disrupted.”</p> <p>“But everybody who has been abused in some way, they <u>carry the guilt that comes with it</u>. Like perhaps it was me, perhaps mommy is right I shouldn't have worn that skirt. Perhaps mommy was right I shouldn't have used that route to the shop, you know you always live thinking I could have done something better, I could have done something. So the consequences they might be with you if you don't talk about it, it is the <u>guilt that comes with it</u>.”</p>
<p>5.2 Children experience long term</p>	<p>“<u>I can say it [sexual abuse] affects the entire life of a person</u>. Because if like, let me say if the person, the child is let's say eight years, he'll go through puberty at this stage knowing that " I was once abused",</p>

<p>emotional scarring</p>	<p><i>because after a child has been abused she'll go the processes, to the doctors, to court, maybe sometimes to testifying against the man. When she reaches puberty she'll know that something like this happened. She will be a teenager knowing that at an earlier stage something like this happened. She will get married knowing, can even need counseling and stuff. They can try to deal with the emotions. But I don't think they will fix it. They will not fix the knowing part. But they will just something like easing the pain and making it for a short while when I'm with you. Like when I'm with you now I'm dealing with it. It's an abuse the child will... We can do this, we can do that, you can do that, you can...But I don't know this happening to me or to... Before you go to sleep every day you reflect some of the things you did during the day. I can relate abuse to the entire life of a person like, it's a thing that will keep recurring. It will come like a feeling like just passing. Even though it will not affect you in a way that it will make you cry and scream or do things like that, but it will come just pass. It will stay in the memory that is why we sometimes say until you remember until you die. Abuse like I can equalize it like you are killing, you are a murderer if you abuse somebody”</i></p> <p><i>“And even for a child, <u>it would take, for the rest of her life</u> she will know that I was, robbed of my, what do they call it? Childhood. So it would be difficult for the child. I know they say “Time heals”, but you’ll never forget that ... you were raped.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think what’s bad about child sexual abuse, it happens at an early stage ... with a child ... And then maybe the child can get over it sometimes, ... maybe put it at the back of your mind, grow up. But sometimes I think it comes back at a later stage ... and remain. And I think when it comes back, <u>it’s going to affect their lives.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“...because the child doesn't know anything, and if you abuse a child that means you are killing some part, important part to the child. You are <u>killing like a future of the child.</u>”</i></p>
<p>5.3 CSA has a negative impact on the</p>	<p><i>“Once you are abused it is over. You will deal with that until ... <u>you will never forget.</u> You can even go to counseling, they will help you to deal with the pain but in your mind you will know until you die that</i></p>

<p>relationships of victims</p>	<p><i>there was an incidence happened to me when I was young, and I'm going to deal with it. I will take it [the memory] to the end”.</i></p> <p><i>“So you'll find that maybe this child, maybe she was abused, maybe she was six years old and then during her teenage life she'll like maybe she, <u>I mean she won't be herself.</u> This will really affect her. Maybe she'll <u>date more men trying to you know close that...ja</u> or maybe she'll be naughty. She'll be naughty herself even more. It will be like... It will have destroyed her life this thing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because even sometimes when you like, like if you want to ... you in a relationship <u>before you enter into a relationship you will start thinking about it</u> [the memory of sexual abuse]. “But how, how will I deal it? How can I forget?” Like you will ask “how can I forget? How am I going to be there fulltime not thinking about what happened?” It is something that you go with, like its part of your heart. You just never your heart forgets to pump. It will do its work but you will know that the scratch is always there of abuse. I can say, and ja it will always be there. Even if, it affects you the whole life, the entire life. You will sit with your husband and remember it, “when I was twelve I was abused”. You will sit with your grandchild and when you sit, I think maybe it also goes with the, when you see a young child. When you were young you were abused. You will say “when I was young I was abused. I was this age”. And when you are a grandfather or a grandmother you see a young, your grandchildren you will think “when I was”. And you, sometimes other people they start being overprotective because they know that when the children are at this age they are more likely to be abused. They are protecting him, the child that was abused...to protect the children, but the thing is there. It affects you every day. Every day you think, not even you think and you become emotional or you just... “</i></p> <p><i>“Both of you ... have to protect the child. So I don't understand, because anyway eventually the child will grow up ... and then she will blame you for this [being abused]. And <u>that will ruin the relationship</u> ... between you and your child, forever. The child won't ever, ever forgive you for that.”</i></p>
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Theme 6: Children do not disclose sexual abuse

<p>6.1 Reasons for non-disclosure</p>	<p>6.1.1 Mothers and families do not believe and protect children after disclosure</p>	<p><i>“... And I, that is when I realized that the parents probably didn’t handle it [the reported sexual abuse], because <u>they were trying to protect themselves.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“And then sometimes the children, like they tell, they will tell the mother and the mother, <u>they don’t believe when the child is telling the truth.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“In most cases you find that the father of the family is the only one who is working and then again doing this things to the children, so the mother would think “if I expose him who would put bread on our table”. <u>So they will just keep quiet for the sake of the income in their family.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“So they don't report it. If it's the father, maybe it's the stepfather and maybe the mother is not working that is why she won't report the abuse. Maybe the stepfather is abusing sexually abusing the little girl or something, so she will <u>protect the abuse because she's afraid that she won't be able to provide for the family.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“And there are even some women who, who, who <u>don’t have a problem ... with the fact that their husband’s sleeping with a child, especially where the father’s not biological, ja.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... some families is the issue of poverty, whereby even if a child can end up realizing that whatever that is happening, that is when she reports maybe to the</i></p>
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		<p><i>mother, it is an abuse that is happening, is he a member of the family, <u>the mother will always protect the male person maybe because he is a provider in the house.</u></i></p> <p><i>“I wouldn’t know for sure, but I would say it [parents not believing their children] might happen. Based on how some parents, how I see some parents react when they hear their own child telling them that mommy uncle so and so raped me. I would think it is possible for a child to not say anything. If they think this is how mommy is going to react, then I would rather not say anything... <u>Mommy’s reaction would be, I would say protecting the perpetrator than their own child.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“I think child sexual abuse mostly is done by stepfathers, ja, and in most cases it’s in the families where the mother depends on the stepfather. And in some cases, <u>the mother knows about the abuse, but because of, they don’t want to lose their marriage, then they, they, they keep quiet</u>”.</i></p> <p><i>“I think it happens often. It’s just that they don’t open it up. What we mean is, they keep quiet. They are afraid to report ... the rape to, to the police.”</i></p> <p><i>“... like in black society, or black communities or in my culture, they don’t really like see sexual abuse as the way the white people see it. Like when a child is being sexually abused they don't like, they won't go and report it. They will talk amongst themselves and they will discuss it,</i></p>
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		<p><i>then maybe the uncle will be given a warning that he shouldn't do that.”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... the family knows whoever is victimizing their child, it is usually a case between the two families and they do not go to the police or anybody like that. They try to sort it out themselves.”</i></p>
	<p>6.1.2 Being threatened by the perpetrator contributes to children not disclosing sexual abuse</p>	<p><i>“...normally when these people do this things, they threaten the child saying if you do not allow this, I'm going to do it to your little brother or your little sister or should you tell your parents I'm going to kill you...”</i></p> <p><i>“...the first thing those people that abuse the children they tell them "you don't have to tell nobody because I will kill you or". Yes and the child will use this. They believe anything that an adult will tell them.”</i></p> <p><i>“... So there are always victims who are also threatened that if you come out with this information, then it is over with. So children, I believe there are a lot of children who are staying there with those abuse because they are afraid that if they talk then they will be killed.”</i></p>
]	<p>6.1.3 Cultural sexual beliefs about not talking about sexual matters</p>	<p><i>“...with us <u>black people</u> it's wrong [for a child] to talk to an adult about sex.</i></p> <p><i><u>“Black people are considering it wrong or a taboo to talk about sex to a child and I think even if you can go to an older person tell her or tell him that so and so is doing this to you. You cannot talk about this, just keep quiet we can deal about it as a family. They [adults] do not allow these things to</u></i></p>

		<p><i>go out. They [adults] normally keep it as a secret within the family, so I think that is the wrong path to take.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think it, it’s something that culture expects ... of us, our culture as <u>black people</u>. Ja, because really you don’t, especially your <u>father ... you don’t speak about those things [sexual matters], never.</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“So I think in the <u>white society</u> the parents do tell their children that "you know what when somebody does this to you they abusing you". So in <u>black communities</u> they don't. There's <u>some of the things they won't discuss with you, such like relationships...</u>”</i></p> <p><i>“Some families they still believe on <u>the issue of taboo that you cannot talk about adult things in front of children. So in by so doing they end up frustrating their children, because the children they don’t get this information and when the parents approach them they always think this is good to do, but they don’t know whether it is wrong and they don’t want to disappoint the people that they trust the most.</u>”</i></p>
6.2 Ways to encourage disclosure		<p><i>“Unless if we teach our children at a young age, you know, if someone start telling you or doing this to you that is a crime and you need to tell an elder person immediately.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because at the end of the day it will also promote people, the education to say you mustn’t die with this kind of problem, you must come out and talk about this and children will be safe from the problem.”</i></p> <p><i>“ think it is a very big concern, but what is important, it is an education and to promise that if you go and report such things the law will protect you, sometimes people they are very afraid of</i></p>

reporting such things.”

Explanations on how these perceptions were formed

<p>i) Perceptions are formed in a process and changes over time</p>	<p><i>“I grew up knowing that there is sexual abuse but for me child sexual abuse is when an adult having a sex penetration that is sexual abuse but touching and inserting fingers I did not feel that it can major impact your child. It was just like it was touching it is no big deal ... it was sexual abuse and I wish I had knowledge before.”</i></p> <p><i>“...because at first when I was not a university student I think I didn't know what was abuse. I knew that abuse is when you hit somebody or...But then I didn't know all the different types of abuse. So now that, that I'm surrounded by students and lecturers and everything, I have information.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because I always used to think only young sexy people get raped because they have short skirts on, but only to find that I have been exposed to it, even the elderly people who cover up, they have three skirts on and everything, they do get raped.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let's say that when I was small I thought: “wow, only men do it, you know. But the older I got and yes, I can say that the more I read and the more I had information about this, I will say I have seen it can go both ways.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kom ons sê toe ek klein was het ek gedink wow net mans doen dit, jy weet. Maar hoe ouer ek geword het en ja dan kan ek sê hoe meer ek geles het en hoe meer informasie ek gekry het oor hierdie, sal ek sê het ek gesien dat dit kan al twee kante toe gaan.”</i></p>	
<p>1. Factors that influence perceptions</p>	<p>i) Studies</p>	<p><i>“Because I was doing psychology, sexual trauma they deal more about sex issues and then the trauma they experience after being raped and abused - I think that is where I got the information [about what CSA is] from.”</i></p> <p><i>“... when this thing [CSA] happened</i></p>

		<p><i>before you get exposed to studies and something like that you do not see anything wrong with that but immediately when you start studying and have knowledge, to me I think it is still sexual abuse because you are having sex without being willing to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just like us black children maybe students, maybe we didn't know what was abuse because our parents did not discuss these things with us, but when we came to school we heard about it, Googled, or talked about it and then we know oh this is abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would say exposure, or maybe more knowledge or more information, if I may put it that way because as a woman I had always been very aware of the fact that women get raped. But nevertheless as I got involved and maybe studied more about that, I realized that even men do get raped, little boys do get raped, older people do get raped and that is when I see that maybe if the information I had was limited at the time and maybe I got exposed to know.”</i></p>
	<p>ii) Reading</p>	<p><i>“... maybe it's because I read a lot of books. Then I liked social work when I was a student in high school I really wanted to be a social worker. Then I always watched movies that are related to abuse, violence, I was like how can someone allow these things to happen in their families.”</i></p> <p><i>“For me child sexual abuse is...okay firstly I would say, before I used to think</i></p>

		<p><i>child sexual abuse was more of a person was raping someone but there was this book a read it was written by NG MacKolo [a local feminist writer] ... so even for me then I look back. When I look back at my growing up, there was some things that I would symbolize after reading that novel, I understand now this was rape and that was rape that was happening.</i></p>
	<p>iii) Personal exposure</p>	<p><i>”Yes <u>a little bit to my family background before there was this relative of us</u> who was not liked by other relatives because he believes that whenever you have a child a girl child; when she starts her menstruation, no matter the age he must sleep with her and then when you grow up we are not sure of when they are talking until when these kids grow up and become like a relationship with them and then that is when I got the idea their father was sleeping with them so the other one when she saw him as bad because she wants to escape this sexual thing so to me I grew up knowing that there is sexual abuse but for me child sexual abuse is when an adult having a sex penetration that is sexual abuse but touching and inserting fingers I did not feel that it can major impact your child. It was just like it was touching it is no big deal.”</i></p> <p><i>“ ... <u>I have experienced so many things for my age</u> because all that experiences I was like in grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, grade 4 and [unclear] because I was staying with</i></p>

		<p><i>my grandfather. I know it is hurting. ... like for example I never knew what was sexual because after that incident with those guys.”</i></p>
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ANNEXURE 5: LETTER OF CONSENT FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 05 April 2013 11:25 AM
To: frieda.tanton@gmail.com
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Research for Master's degree

Good day Frieda

Your emailed request refers.

I do not foresee that the proposed interviews with students from this community project will pose a problem if you are not going to use the name of the institution in your research report. You are welcome to use one of the group training workshops to inform students about your research in order to find volunteers. Please let [REDACTED] know on which of these days you will be attending so that the necessary arrangement can be made and the agenda for the day adjusted.

Good luck with your studies.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

ANNEXURE 6: EDITORIAL POLICY OF SOCIAL WORK/ MAATSKAPLIKE WERK

EDITORIAL POLICY/REDAKSIONELE BELEID

The Journal publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 100 words. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Articles of less than 2,000 words or more than 10,000 words are normally not considered for publication. Submit the manuscript as a Microsoft Word document in 12 pt Times New Roman, double line spacing. Use font Arial in charts and diagrams. The manuscript should be sent electronically to hsu@sun.ac.za. Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12). More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors. Note the use of capitals and punctuation

marks in the following examples. In terms of SANSO-014 our journal is classified as an approved research journal for the purpose of subsidy by the State. The Editorial Board has therefore decided that an amount of R100.00 (hundred Rand) per page is to be paid for published articles by authors who are lecturing or doing research at Universities in the RSA.

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