

Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents

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Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Social Work* in Child Protection at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof WJH Roestenburg

November 2016

DECLARATION

Declaration of originality of research:

I, Daniëlle Murray, hereby state that the manuscript titled: “***Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents***” is my own work.

I further declare that the content of this research study will not be handed in for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.



.....

D. Murray

November 2016

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Date

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I declare that I have edited the dissertation of D. Murray, titled:

Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

Sections A, B, D according to the Harvard style.

Section C (article) according to the SAGE publication style.



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Date

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APPROVAL



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10 March 2016

Prof WJH Roestenburg
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Dear Prof Roestenburg

HREC APPROVAL OF YOUR APPLICATION

Ethics number: NWU-00012-16-S1

Kindly use the ethics reference number provided above in all correspondence or documents submitted to the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) secretariat.

Project title: Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents

Project leader/supervisor: Prof WJH Roestenburg

Student: D Murray

Application type: Full Single

Risk level descriptor: Minimal

You are kindly informed that at the meeting held on 10/03/2016 of the HREC, Faculty of Health Sciences, the aforementioned was approved.

The period of approval for this project is from 10/05/2016 to 09/05/2017.

After ethical review:

Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the HREC (if applicable).

The HREC requires immediate reporting of any aspects that warrants a change of ethical approval. Any amendments, extensions or other modifications to the protocol or other associated documentation must be submitted to the HREC prior to implementing these changes. Any adverse/unexpected/unforeseen events or incidents must be reported on either an adverse event report form or incident report form.

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Yours sincerely



Dr Wayne Towers
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SUMMARY

TITLE: Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents

Key words: Procedures; methods; foster care selection process; prospective foster parents; social work; Gauteng

Within the context of South Africa, literature is limited and no standardised process with regard to the screening of prospective foster parents could be found. Inconsistency within foster care related services rendered by social workers results in the lack of standardisation. Foster care related decisions were found to be based on the intuition, experience and expertise of the social workers.

The aim of the research study was to compile a critical review of assessment procedures and methods that are being utilised by social workers within the Gauteng Province of South Africa during the screening process of prospective foster parents.

A qualitative research approach was utilised in the study, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers rendering foster care services. A self-designed interview schedule was utilised during the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed from an audio-recorder and analysed through making use of the ATLAS.ti software. Prior to the abovementioned, the research participants had to compile a portfolio containing their screening method, procedure or manual. Furthermore, an anonymous case study had to be presented to reflect how the manual was used, which information was recorded as well as how this was used during decision-making.

Section A represents the introduction to the research study, where the following aspects are discussed: research problem, research questions, rationale for the study, theoretical framework, aim and objectives, methodology and ethical matters. Section B presents the literature review that focuses on foster care within the South African context. This is followed by a discussion of the role of assessment during the foster care investigation phase, and the role of assessment procedures, measures and tools that contribute to the systematising of the foster care assessment process. The study explores the relevance of “Ecometrics” and assessment, and lastly presents a comparison between another study and the study of the researcher. Section C represents the research article that forms the outcome of the dissertation. The identified themes represent the proposed phases (steps) to be implemented during the screening process of prospective foster parents. The following themes are discussed in Section C: Theme 1: Office interview; Theme 2:

Prospective foster parent training; Theme 3: Investigation; Theme 4: Foster committee and canalisation of reports; Theme 5: Children's Court.

Section D comprises the final conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research study. Section E includes addenda that were relevant to the research study.

OPSOMMING

TITEL: Prosedures en metodes benut deur maatskaplike werkers in Gauteng gedurende die keuringsproses van voornemende pleegouers.

Sleutelwoorde: Prosedures; metodes; pleegsorgkeuringsproses; voornemende pleegouers; maatskaplike werk; Gauteng

Binne die konteks van Suid-Afrika is literatuur beperk en kon daar geen gestandaardiseerde proses met betrekking tot die keuring van voornemende pleegsorgouers opgespoor word nie. Weens die gebrek aan gestandaardiseerde prosedures ontstaan daar teenstrydighede binne pleegsorgdienste wat gelewer word deur maatskaplike werkers. Daar is bevind dat besluite rakende pleegsorg gegrond is op die intuïsie, ervaring en kundigheid van die maatskaplike werker.

Die doel van die navorsingstudie is om 'n kritiese resensie saam te stel wat fokus op die assesseringsprosedures en -metodes wat deur maatskaplike werkers in Gauteng, Suid-Afrika, benut word gedurende die keuringsproses van voornemende pleegsorgouers.

'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is benut in hierdie studie, waar semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gevoer is met maatskaplike werkers wat pleegsorgdienste lewer. 'n Self-ontwerpte onderhoudskedule het hierdie semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gerig. Na elke onderhoud is die inligting getranskribeer vanaf 'n klank-bandopnemer en daarna is die data geanaliseer deur gebruik te maak van die ATLAS.ti sagteware. Voor die onderhoudvoering kon geskied, was daar van die navorsingsdeelnemers verwag om 'n portefeulje saam te stel wat die volgende inligting bevat het: die keuringsmetode, prosedure of handleiding, asook 'n anonieme gevallestudie om aan te dui hoe hierdie handleiding benut word, hoe inligting deurgegee word asook hoe bogenoemde benut was met die neem van besluite.

Afdeling A vervat die inleiding tot die navorsingstudie en die volgende aspekte word gedek: navorsingsprobleem, navorsingsvrae, die rasionaal van die studie, teoretiese raamwerk, doel en doelwitte, die metodologie asook die etiese aspekte. Afdeling B behels die literatuurstudie wat fokus op pleegsorg binne die konteks van Suid-Afrika, gevolg deur die rol van assessering gedurende die pleegsorg-ondersoekfase. Dit is gevolg deur 'n bespreking van die rol van assesseringsprosedures, maatreëls en hulpmiddels wat uiteindelik bydra tot die sistematisering van die pleegsorgproses, asook 'n verduideliking aangaande die relevansie van "Ekometrika" en assessering. Laastens word 'n vergelyking getref tussen 'n ander studie en die studie van die navorser. Afdeling C bevat die navorsingsartikel, wat die uiteindelijke doel van die verhandeling is. Die volgende geïdentifiseerde temas dien as die voorgestelde fases (stappe) om

geïmplementeer te word gedurende die keuringsproses van voornemende pleegouers, en word bespreek onder Afdeling C: Tema 1: Kantooronderhoud; Tema 2: Voornemende pleegsorgopleiding; Tema 3: Ondersoek; Tema 4: Pleegsorgkomitee en die kanalisering van verslae; Tema 5: Kinderhof.

Afdeling D gee 'n uiteensetting van die finale gevolgtrekkings, beperkings asook aanbevelings aangaande die navorsingstudie. Afdeling E bevat verskeie addendums wat relevant was tot die navorsingstudie.

FOREWORD

This article format was chosen in accordance with Regulation A.7.2.3 for the Degree MSW in Child Protection. The article will comply with the requirements of the journal *International Social Work*

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AUTHORS

International Social Work

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DEFINITIONS

ECOMETRICS

Ecometrics is a scientific process where procedure and method are being utilised by the social worker to produce valid and reliable assessment results. It also refers to the utilisation of either quantitative or qualitative research related methods in conducting client assessments (Roestenburg, 2011:21).

FOSTER CARE APPLICATION FORM

The South African Government (2016:1) describes that if an individual has the desire to foster a child, then he or she needs to approach any accredited child protection organisation or the Department of Social Development in order to apply with the completion of relevant documentation.

FORM 30

The Children's Act (38 of 2005) defines Form 30 as an inquiry made by an individual to determine if their name appears in Part B of the National Child Protection Register.

POLICE CLEARANCE

According to the South African Police Service Department (2014:1) a police clearance certificate is available to any person applying for it. A police clearance certificate will confirm if there is any criminal status or if any criminal offences have been recorded against the person applying for the certificate. The abovementioned can only be rendered by the Criminal Record Centre of the South African Police Department.

SCREENING REPORT

The South African Government (2016:1) states that a report needs to be compiled by a social worker after the screening of prospective foster parents. The report will be presented to the Children's Court with the included recommendations, stating the reasons for the positive screen.

FORM 38

This is a provided form within the Children's Act (38 of 2005) stating information of the specific foster child to be placed in temporary safe care. A court order will be received based on the abovementioned to legalise the foster care placement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS (HEADING 0)

DECLARATION	I
DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
APPROVAL	IV
SUMMARY	VI
OPSOMMING	VIII
FOREWORD	X
INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AUTHORS	XI
DEFINITIONS	XIII
SECTION A: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 ORIENTATION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM	1
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	2
1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	2
1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
1.5 AIM	5
1.6 OBJECTIVES	5
1.7 METHODOLOGY	5
1.7.1 Research approach and research design	5
1.7.2 Population and sampling method	6
1.7.3 Recruitment process	7
1.7.4 Sampling method	8
1.7.5 Data collection method	8
1.7.6 Data analysis methods	10
1.7.7 Trustworthiness	10

1.8	ETHICAL MATTERS	11
1.9	PROVISIONAL CHAPTER DEVISION	12
1.10	REFERENCES	13
SECTION B: LITERATURE REVIEW		15
2.1	FOSTER CARE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT	15
2.2	ROLE OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE FOSTER CARE INVESTIGATION PROCESS	17
2.3	ROLE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS, MEASURES AND PROCEDURES THAT FORMALISE AND SYSTEMATISE THE FOSTER CARE ASSESSMENT PROCESS.....	18
2.4	ECOMETRICS AND ASSESSMENT	20
2.5	COMPARISON BETWEEN THE STUDY OF CARTER AND VAN BRED (2016) AND THE STUDY OF THE RESEARCHER RELATED TO FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	21
2.6	CONCLUSION	21
2.7	REFERENCES	24
SECTION C: RESEARCH ARTICLE		27
PROCEDURES AND METHODS UTILISED BY SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN GAUTENG DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER PARENTS		27
3.1	INTRODUCTION	27
3.2	RESEARCH PROBLEM.....	28
3.3	MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY	29
3.4	RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	29
3.5	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	29
3.5.1	Research approach	29

3.5.2	Research design.....	30
3.5.3	Research population.....	30
3.6	METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION	31
3.7	METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS	31
3.8	ETHICAL APPROVAL	31
3.9	RESULTS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS	31
3.10	DISCUSSION	32
3.10.1	Theme 1: Office interview	32
3.10.2	Theme 2: Prospective foster parent training	34
3.10.3	Theme 3: Investigation	36
3.10.4	Theme 4: Foster committee or the canalisation of reports	40
3.10.5	Theme 5: Children's Court proceedings.....	41
3.11	CONCLUSION	44
3.12	RECOMMENDATIONS	45
3.13	FUNDING	45
3.14	REFERENCES	45
	SECTION D: FINAL CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	50
4.1	FINAL CONCLUSION	50
4.2	LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARH STUDY	51
4.3	RECOMMENDATIONS	52
4.3.1	Recommendations for practice	52
4.3.2	Recommendations for further research studies.....	52
4.4	REFERENCES	53

SECTION E: ANNEXURES.....	54
ANNEXURE 1: PROOF OF ATTENDANCE OF ETHICS TRAINING	54
ANNEXURE 2: WRITTEN CONSENT FORMS	55
ANNEXURE 3: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH THE INDEPENDENT MEDIATOR.....	62
ANNEXURE 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	63
ANNEXURE 5: DESCRIPTIVE FRAMEWORK (INVITATION).....	64
ANNEXURE 6: CO-CODER REVIEW	66
ANNEXURE 7: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH CO-CODER.....	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Aspects ensuring trustworthiness and validity	11
Table 3.1	Population.....	31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	Five broad themes that emerged after analysing the data	32
Figure 3.2	Proposed screening process	44
Figure 4.1	Proposed screening process of prospective foster parents	51

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

1.1 ORIENTATION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Skelton (2012) the number of foster children has increased dramatically since the year 2010, due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as the high number of orphans requiring placement. According to the South African Department of Social Development (2013/2014:66) there has been an increase from 39 586 in 2013/2014 to 43 545 foster children in 2014/2015 receiving social work services, with a predicted increase to 47 899 for 2015/2016. According to Carter (2013:3) the increased number of vulnerable and orphaned children has resulted in higher numbers of caseloads for social workers, of which many are foster care related. Increased caseloads, combined with the lack of time, can be seen as stumbling blocks for social workers in systematically assessing foster parents. This calls for the introduction of standardised assessment procedures, methods and instruments to enhance the quality of such assessments. Social workers in the study of Carter (2013:67) were concerned about the high rates of foster care breakdowns and stated that they did not receive any training over and above their undergraduate training. They also reported that they did not have comprehensive criteria according to which they could assess prospective foster parents. According to a study conducted by Khoza (2011:1) the increasing numbers of foster care cases indicate a rising need for foster care services. Luke and Sebba (2013:7) argue that standardised assessments will assist social workers in effectively identifying characteristics of prospective foster parents, matching these with foster child characteristics, and this should eventually contribute to placement stability and improved knowledge about needs that will require support during the placement.

Yunong and Fengzhi (2009:178) as well as Huang, Bory, Caron, Tebes and Connell (2014:87) indicate that the effectiveness of child placement is dependent on careful consideration of multiple child and familial risk factors, in contrast with the protective ability of the foster placement setting. They found that demographic characteristics such as age, gender and severity of the child's background are factors contributing to the nature of the environment a child is placed in. They concluded that child behavioural factors were more likely associated with placement in more restrictive environments, while the presence of family risk factors in the child's family of origin was associated with less intense placement options. They concluded that differences in placement choice could be attributed as much to the ability or skill of the social worker to become familiar with the client's situation, as to his/her familiarity with the standard risk assessment procedures, methods and instruments in use by the organisation. Effective foster care placement is thus dependent on factors such as the skill or ability of the social worker, his/her knowledge and understanding of the client's context, as well as the use of an appropriate assessment procedure, method and instrument. As a result, it is argued that the use of several risk assessment procedures and methods may contribute to more accurate placement and should minimise bias in placement choices. Therefore, it is contended that while the use of a single procedure or method and a single instrument would do better than no procedure and method at all, multiple procedures and methods would be even better.

The standardisation of assessment methods and procedures would be beneficial for social workers when rendering foster care services, in particular for the screening of prospective foster parents. The researcher

could not find literature indicating the different types of assessment instruments, methods and procedures utilised by social workers in South Africa during the screening process of prospective foster parents.

Taking the above information into consideration, it can be concluded that a need exists to fill the gap in literature by exploring and describing assessment practices, methods and instruments utilised by social workers during the screening of prospective foster parents in order to make recommendations on the design of a standardised process.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions introduce the research study:

- Firstly, to discover “what” procedures, methods and instruments are being utilised by social workers in the assessment of foster care services. This question indicates a broad, exploratory study discovering procedures applied during all stages of foster care services, not limited to for example the selection process of prospective foster parents. Consistent with Ecometrics-based thinking, such exploration will of necessity focus upon underpinning theory as well.
- In follow-up to the first question, the researcher asks in what categories of foster care service delivery these procedures and methods (protocols) are being used.
- Thirdly, in the case of each participant, the question is asked how these assessment procedures and methods are integrated and used accurately and meaningfully for foster care decision-making purposes.

Answering these questions enabled the researcher to select and recommend a suitable assessment procedure and method for local use, and to embark upon the testing of the abovementioned procedures within the local South African social care environment.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for conducting this review of procedures and methods in foster care assessment is to explore and describe those current procedures, processes and practices that social workers follow; to confirm the importance of precise and reliable assessment/screening; and to construct a proposed process framework for assessment and screening that may have potential for standardisation in future studies. Beyond the study it is assumed that appropriate, standardised procedures may contribute to the prevention of placement failure and a reduction in the risk for multiple placement – with its associated problems of insecure attachment patterns, behavioural problems and insecurity (Carter, 2013: 62; Williams-Mbengue, 2008: 1). This study proposes to inform practitioners regarding current practices and thereby to indirectly promote the best interests of children in foster care.

The reasons for compiling this review of procedures and methods in foster care assessment can be summarised as follows:

- Prospective foster parents need to be assessed/screened by a social worker prior to the placement (Carter, 2013:62). For this reason, it is of utmost importance that they are assessed precisely and reliably to prevent placement failure and thus multiple placements with associated problems such as insecure attachment patterns and behavioural problems (Williams-Mbengue, 2008:1).
- The use of a standardised assessment procedure and method is necessary to reduce the number of foster care failures (Carter, 2013:67), which in turn may indirectly counter any notion of permanency (Carter, 2013:62; Williams-Mbengue, 2008:2).
- The social work practice may benefit from the selection or development of a standardised assessment procedure and method to counter lack of training and associated assessment criteria. Lack of the aforementioned contributes to lack of systematic practice; leaving social workers to their own discretion during the selection of prospective foster parents (Carter, 2013:8; Khoza, 2011:2).

From the aforementioned it becomes clear that the development and utilisation of a standardised assessment procedure and method would greatly benefit local South African foster care practice.

A review such as this will contribute towards establishing the need for development of either a standardised procedure and method, or the identification and promotion of an existing procedure and method for use in local South African circumstances. Such a procedure will be regarded as the first stage of a comprehensive intervention design and development process, as suggested by Fraser, Galinsky, Rothman and Day (2009) and others, the subject of a further study.

The researcher is aware that a large number of kinship foster care or informal placements (related foster care) occur within local welfare organisations, but is of opinion that the results of this study will mainly benefit numerous other local welfare organisations where such processes are not yet formalised or well structured.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For purposes of this study an Ecometrics perspective will be utilised since, according to the Policy on Ecometrics technology of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2010) this perspective is used as a guideline for local assessment procedure and method. This implies that the parameters of the review will cover three main areas, namely: theoretical frameworks used for the interpretation of assessment data; methods and approaches; and assessment procedures and methods used (Roestenburg, 2011:21). This author further provides a framework for describing and evaluating the utility value of different classes of assessment procedures and methods. The researcher of the present study will use this framework of Roestenburg, as well as a submission template for Ecometrics procedure and method (as made available by the SACSSP to prospective assessment tool developers) as basis for qualitative interviews with social workers in the field of foster placement practice. This study will be informed by an Ecometrics perspective in that the researcher will interpret her observations according to this perspective in answering the research questions of this study.

Roestenburg (2011:17) is of the opinion that assessment can be seen as both a process as well as a product. When assessment is viewed as a process, it aims to collect information in order to develop new insights; whereas the assessment product is viewed as the description of the problem at hand. Decisions regarding interventions will be made based on the assessment product. Thus, Roestenburg contends that the assessment process and product both play an essential role in the process of change. The change process, also referred to as the helping process in the context of social work, consists of five phases, namely: identification, assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation. According to Roestenburg (2011:18) an assessment can only be conducted by means of the collection and gathering of data.

In the research study at hand, the researcher will explore the use of specific methods which are being utilised as a procedure and method. The use of different sources and methods of data collection will lead to triangulation. Data can then be sifted and organised into different relevant themes, where after the social worker can rely on her/his own discretion for the interpretation of the abovementioned. This means the social worker will give details regarding the situation at hand and this will contribute to the formulation of the assessment product. The change process as discussed above is viewed as an ongoing process where continuous re-assessment can take place.

According to Roestenburg (2011:21), Ecometrics can be viewed as a scientific process where procedure and method are being utilised by the social worker to produce results. It also refers to the utilisation of either quantitative or qualitative research methods in order to conduct assessments. It is furthermore stated that Ecometrics is viewed as a scientific approach that can be controlled by the social worker, whereby the validity and accountability of the assessment product can be improved. Roestenburg (2011:22) mentions that Ecometrics can be based on the principal of triangulation – meaning that if the social worker conducts an assessment according to an organised protocol, this will ensure that accountability for the assessment can be achieved. Secondly, such accountability and evidence-base is further improved by the use of quantitative and qualitative assessment methods. Thirdly, further accountability is achieved if the social worker compares and interprets her assessment findings with relevant literature in order to explain client situations. Thus, according to Roestenburg (2011:22) the above presents different ways of ensuring triangulation. It is argued that the quality of social work assessments can be improved by formally adopting these three principles (Roestenburg, 2011:21).

Roestenburg (2011:24) presents certain guidelines to improve evidence-based and accountable social work practice, namely:

- The assessment must be conducted in a structured manner through designing a protocol in advance and applying it.
- The methods that are being utilised must be consistent for different client systems.
- The approach and methods utilised at both the input (start) and output (end of) assessment phase must also be consistent so that change can be estimated.
- The protocol needs to be sensitive and flexible.

- Potential side-variables or influences that can impair objectivity in assessments must be minimised.
- A point of data triangulation must be reached through the utilisation of a variety of data sources or assessment methods/technologies as discussed above.

By taking the abovementioned into consideration the researcher will assess the process, procedures and methods that are being followed by the respective social workers from different welfare organisations. The process being followed at the different local welfare organisations will be compared to the Ecometrics paradigm within the literature study.

1.5 AIM

The overall aim of this research study is:

To compile a critical review of assessment procedures and methods that are being utilised by social workers within the Gauteng Province of South Africa within foster care practice.

1.6 OBJECTIVES

In support of the aim, the following objectives are relevant to the research study:

- To obtain rich, qualitative, textual data from known and recognised foster care practitioners within Gauteng regarding assessment methods, procedures and instruments used. This will be done by means of a structured assignment in preparation for objective two. This objective will assist the researcher in answering research question one regarding “what” is being used.
- To obtain rich, contextual descriptions from participating social workers, elaborating and illustrating textual data obtained under objective two. These interviews will assist in answering research question two regarding “how” methods and procedures are used in assessment. This objective allows the researcher to determine the categories of foster care in which methods are applied and how they are applied.
- To compile a profile of methods, procedures and instruments used by foster care practitioners in the course of their assessment of foster care cases. This objective reflects the primary outcome of the study and represents the outcome of analysis of the two data sources. Fulfilling this objective enables the researcher to reflect and weigh results against the central theoretical argument, and to conclude and recommend directions regarding suggested procedures, methods and instruments.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Research approach and research design

According to Creswell (2007:40) and Moriarty (2011:2) a qualitative approach includes the following core characteristics:

- Qualitative research is conducted when an in-depth understanding with regard to an issue is required.
- The results of a qualitative study will provide an interpreted and in-depth understanding with regard to the social world (context) of the research participants, including their perspectives, circumstances, histories and experiences with regard to how they implement and proceed with assessment, specifically regarding placement fit and foster parent screening.
- Compared to and in contrast with quantitative studies that generally require larger and non-probability samples, the qualitative research sample is small and purposive. It is based on the selection preference of the researcher and involves those who are best able to respond to the questions asked.
- Data collection methods in qualitative research involve close contact between the participants and researcher, which allows the researcher to gain and explore an in-depth understanding.
- Data obtained from the research study are rich in detail.
- Qualitative research is also appropriate in cases where quantitative measures do not fit the problem being studied.

A study of this nature, aimed at obtaining rich, interview-based data, requires the use of a qualitative research approach. This approach furthermore requires both a literature-informed and empirical study. The qualitative study was conducted to ensure an in-depth understanding with regard to local South African screening processes used by local foster care social workers. The sample was small and purposively focused upon carefully selected known experts in the field of foster care investigations, either from private practice or non-government organisation (NGO) agencies. The data collection methods in this qualitative research involved close contact between the participants and researcher, which allowed the researcher to gain and explore an in-depth understanding. The results of the qualitative study provided an interpreted and in-depth understanding with regard to the social world (context) of the research participants, including their perspectives, circumstances, histories and experiences with regard to how they implement and proceed with assessment – specifically regarding placement fit and foster parent screening (Creswell, 2007:40; Moriarty, 2011:2).

No particular research design was used. However, the qualitative research study was both descriptive and exploratory in nature, as it was stated that these designs are frequently used in qualitative research studies (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96; Rubin & Babbie, 2013:50). The abovementioned research design was used to accurately describe the different assessment procedures and methods utilised in local welfare organisations, as well as to explore the ways in which social workers utilise these within their organisational practice contexts during the selection of prospective foster parents. The aim was to evaluate the different procedures and methods that are being utilised within social welfare organisations situated within Gauteng.

1.7.2 Population and sampling method

Since the researcher used a purposive sampling procedure, the focus of the sampling was on social welfare organisations that specifically render foster care services to the public and are known to do this in a

professional manner (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007:37). The population in the research study involved social workers rendering foster care services within NGOs. The Department of Social Development could not be included; as this required separate ethical clearance application. The research population consisted of the following organisations: *SAVF* (Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie); *CSC Pretoria East* (Christian Social Council); *CSC Pretoria North* (Christian Social Council); *Rata Social Services*; and *Child Welfare Tshwane*. With regard to the CSC welfare organisations, there is a head office for every branch of this organisation. Because the majority of the other welfare head offices are situated within Pretoria, the researcher targeted the different branches of CMR situated within Pretoria.

In every organisation at least one social worker was included in the sample. This social worker was recruited on the basis of identification by the organisation as the most likely person to answer the research questions on behalf of the organisation. Thus, data were gathered from a total of 10 social workers, from each of the above local welfare organisations. These participants had experience in foster care assessment processes involving specifically prospective foster parents. The researcher concluded that these participants most adequately served the objectives of the study – especially as all of them were actively screening prospective foster parents at the time of the study. The choice of these participating organisations ensured adequate coverage of the topic, but also provided diverse opinions and accounts of practices in foster care services.

1.7.3 Recruitment process

The researcher identified a mediator, and the role of the mediator was to act as go-between for the researcher and the participants. The mediator initially advertised the project, recruited participants and finally selected participants.

The first step of sampling was to send an information pamphlet to each of the mentioned organisations with a request to respond to the mediator by means of e-mail or telephone. If, within a period of three weeks after initiating the project no response had been received, the mediator did a follow-up with each organisation telephonically. Should an organisation not wish to participate at that stage, they were acknowledged and the call was terminated. A list of potential participants was compiled by the mediator for individual follow-up. The mediator did, via e-mail, inform the participants about the purpose of the study, the requirements of participation and other relevant information such as the venue, date and time for the interviews to take place. A period of between seven and 14 days was allowed for the participants to react to the invitation e-mail. After the participants had expressed willingness to participate in this study, the mediator sent them a consent form.

Confirmed participants were provided with the two descriptive frameworks as well as an introductory document (Annexure 5) providing exact details of the required preparation for the qualitative interview. They were given three weeks to prepare these documents and return the completed documents to the researcher. Thereafter, and allowing a processing time of one week, an appointment for the qualitative interview was scheduled with each participant. A copy of the questions (Annexure 4) was provided to each participant prior to the interview and it was clarified that the submitted template, portfolio assignment, would be discussed further during the ensuing interview.

1.7.4 Sampling method

The researcher made use of the non-probability paradigm and a purposive sampling method. The non-probability paradigm uses procedures that do not involve random selection of a sample (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:171). The purposive sampling frame ensured that the sample was selected based according to the preference of the researcher as well as the purpose of the study (Stewart *et al.*, 2007:37).

If an organisation wished to participate it was the prerogative of the director of each organisation to nominate either one or two participants. The researcher relied on the director's knowledge and opinion of those participants best suited to answer relevant questions with regard to their procedures and methods used during the selection process of prospective foster parents. The inclusion criteria, as stated within the research study, could also be used as a guideline in the nomination process. According to the researcher potential participants needed to have sufficient knowledge and experience about their organisations' procedures and methods used during the selection process of prospective foster parents. This sufficient knowledge and experience were determined by the director of the organisation who referred the researcher to the relevant participant. This was deemed sufficient, fair, and scientific practice, since the directors were independent and in best position to identify relevant participants that she/he feels can best represent their organisation and fulfil the research sampling requirement. The directors were known to be experts in the field themselves and was in the best position to refer the mediator to the best suited candidate to represent their organisation.

The above sampling method was relevant to this research study, for purposes of describing and exploring the perceptions, knowledge and professional opinion with regard to the assessment tools that social workers were using during the selection of prospective foster parents. Sampling would be done in three phases, starting with organisational contact as phase 1; primary participant selection as phase 2, and phase 3, further participant selection if required. Phase 3 would be implemented in cases where data saturation was not reached; and thus the researcher would make use of snowball sampling until data saturation could be reached.

1.7.5 Data collection method

Data were gathered according to a qualitative research approach and for the purpose of this study the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews and a critical review of literature.

Before the semi-structured interviews took place the mediator sent, via e-mail, the interview schedule to the different social workers to prepare themselves through compiling a portfolio containing their selection tool/s as well as relevant information to answer the provided questions. The researcher ensured that the participants were prepared and that the interviews were fruitful and structured. .

This was termed a preparation assignment and enabled participants to be prepared thoroughly for the individual interview.

The following instructions were given to each participant with regard to the assignment:

- Participants had to bring along the compiled portfolio to the interview.
- The portfolio had to include copies of any assessments they had done, including manuals, documents, protocols, assessment procedures as well as methods and practices they used in the assessment of prospective foster parents. These had to illustrate the kind of work they did.
- In order to assess the scientific validity of any tools being used, participants had to submit references to the above documentation and tools.
- Lastly, an anonymous case study had to be included to illustrate how methods and tools were utilised within their practice.

Essentially, data were collected in two ways: First an assignment, to be completed in preparation for the second strategy, a qualitative semi-structured interview. Participants were given about three weeks to gather evidence and information for the assignment. Collected evidence and examples of assessment procedures and methods were submitted to the researcher, who after studying the contents of the evidence folder prepared for the interview. The researcher then used a semi-structured interview schedule as data collection tool during the qualitative interview. This interview was based on the guidelines of Greeff (2011:351).

The researcher designed her own interview schedule that was used during the semi-structured interviews (Annexure 4). These questions were neutral and would ensure a thorough and in-depth discussion of the topic with regard to foster care assessment tools. According to Greeff (2011:352) an interview schedule is a questionnaire consisting of a set of pre-determined questions. In the study at hand, the semi-structured interview lasted for about 60-90 minutes. In the interest of collecting rich, in-depth data, the schedule was designed to contain open-ended practice-based questions that encouraged participants to talk about their work. This ensured that the researcher could gain their perspectives on foster care assessment procedures and methods. During this form of interviewing it was also important to keep in mind that participant were the expert on this specific topic (Greeff, 2011:343). During the interview the researcher made short, qualitative field notes as well as audio recordings of each interview. After each interview the researcher transcribed the field notes as well as the information that had been audio recorded. The researcher obtained permission for the use of an audio recording device prior to the interviews for the purpose of data analysis. The confidentiality aspects with regard to the utilisation of an audio recorder and safe data storage were discussed with each participant.

According to Laforest (2009:3) the researcher prepared herself for the interview as follows:

- The researcher memorised the interview schedule and decided on the predominant questions.
- A consent form (Annexure 2) was compiled containing information such as confidentiality and the rules of the interview.
- The participants were contacted in advance to obtain permission, and to arrange the interview date, time and venue.

- The mediator sent the consent form and interview schedule in advance to the different participants. The consent form was signed in the presence of the researcher on the day of the interview.
- The researcher prepared the venue for the interview, and would start recording the interview only after she had explained the data-collection procedure to each participant.
- Participants were contacted by the mediator reminding them of the interview. Interviews were sufficiently spaced to provide enough time to each participant.

1.7.6 Data analysis methods

The qualitative data were analysed by making use of the ATLAS.ti software package. The eight step coding strategy of Creswell, (2013) was used to analyse the data. Within ATLAS.ti this meant that the researcher read through each transcript and performed coding in-vivo. Codes were designed as she read through the transcript. These codes were stored for future use along with their locations in the project Gui within the software. This was the first and initial coding level. The second coding level required the researcher to group codes into specific code families/themes indicating that the abovementioned codes are related to each other. Thirdly, the researcher designed a network view with regard to all the identified codes in order to indicate the relationship amongst the different codes under each identified theme. The identified themes were interpreted within the context of relevant literature. Thereafter an illustration was presented indicating the specific model (Creswell, 2013: 182-188).

1.7.7 Trustworthiness

The researcher applied the following measures to ensure trustworthiness and validity in her research study, as stated in studies by Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:419-421) and Tracy (2010:839-848):

Table 1.1 Aspects ensuring trustworthiness and validity

Credibility	According to Schurink <i>et al.</i> (2011:419) credibility is a substitute to internal validity. It demands that the research procedure must be conducted in a manner that is accurate. The overall aim of the study is to determine whether or not the collected data correspond with the reconstruction set out by the researcher at the end of the study. According to the studies of Tracy (2010:839) credibility can be linked to trustworthiness with regard to the research findings. In order to achieve credibility, it is required to provide rich detail; reason being that if a single behaviour is not linked to the context, it could have multiple meanings at the end. From the studies of Tracy (2010:839) it is also advised to provide rich enough detail in order for readers to make their own conclusions – thus, not manipulating them into a certain thinking pattern. Triangulation is seen as another way of ensuring credibility with regard to the findings of the research study. Triangulation in qualitative research implies that findings will be validated if identical findings occur (Tracy, 2010:839). Through making use of different sources and methods of data collection, it led to triangulation. Triangulation was achieved through a variety of data sources or assessment methods/technologies.
	The researcher ensured credibility by using a co-coder to code and analyse the data independent of the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher handed over the interpretation of collected data to her supervisor for further assurance of credibility. The researcher ensured that rich and accurate findings are provided in the research study. As stated by Tracy (2010:843), triangulation can also occur if multiple data resources and methods are utilised.
Transferability	According to Schurink <i>et al.</i> (2011:419) there are routes to follow for enhancing the transferability of a research study, namely multiple resources and theoretical frameworks. Tracy (2010:845) refers to a situation whereby the readers connect with the research findings – thus, it will lead to them transferring the findings to their own actions.
	The theoretical frameworks and multiple resources were consulted for guidance on the gathering and analysis of data, which in turn strengthened the research study.
Dependability	According to Schurink <i>et al.</i> (2011:419) this aspect focuses on the logical, auditing and documentation of the research process, meaning that in the context of change, the analysed data of a research study must be applicable to the phenomenon. An audit trail was kept by the software in the form of dates changes were made to the coding structure. This enabled the researcher to assess and defend her analysis.
	The researcher ensured dependability through providing in-depth and unprejudiced data which were based on multiple sources of data.
Confirmability	Confirmability means that the available research data confirm and give support to the interpretations made by the researcher during the study.
	The researcher gathered all relevant evidence and included it in the research report.

1.8 ETHICAL MATTERS

The researcher took the following into account during the course of this research study:

- The dignity of the participants: The researcher treated the experience, knowledge and expertise of each participant with respect by showing appreciation for their efforts. Furthermore, the researcher respected

the individual characteristics of each participant such as gender, age, and race. Respect was further shown through maintaining confidentiality as agreed on by the researcher, mediator and participants.

- The safety, well-being and interest of the participants: The research participants were registered social workers rendering foster care services. Interviews focused on those procedures and methods utilised by their respective organisations during the selection process of prospective foster parents. Thus, no personal or sensitive information was shared. However, the researcher was obligated to ensure the safety of her participants. In the unlikely event where some form of discomfort occurred as a direct result of participation, the participant would have been referred to the mediator to discuss the abovementioned. Thus, a risk protocol was set in place.

1.9 PROVISIONAL CHAPTER DEVISION

Section A: Introduction.

Section B: Literature review.

Section C: Research article.

Section D: Final conclusion, limitations and recommendations.

Section E: Annexures.

1.10 REFERENCES

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SECTION B: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 FOSTER CARE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

According to Lewis (2011:436) the term *foster care* can be defined as a system that is there to protect the child. Literature indicates that the main reason why the majority of children are removed from the care of their biological parents is because their safety cannot be guaranteed (Lewis, 2011:438; South African Law Commission 2002:215; Vanderfaeillie, Van Holen, Vanschoonlandt, Robberechts & Stroobants, 2013:587). These children will be placed in foster care because foster care is seen as the preferred form of substitute care in South Africa (South African Law Commission 2002:215, Review of the Child Care Act). According to Newton (as cited in Vanderfaeillie *et al.*, 2013:588) and Van Schalkwyk (2012:3), foster care is a temporary placement where children are placed into the care of foster families for a period of minimum two years. According to Carter and Van Breda (2016:209) foster care offers a child a second chance at growing up in a positive family structure. This corresponds with the best-interest of the child principle as stated in the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The placement is on-going until the circumstances of the child's natural or biological family have improved satisfactorily, enabling the child to return to this family. Children whose removal from the biological family is based on certain legal reasons, should be reunified with their biological parents or any related family care as the first option, and only thereafter can alternative care be considered (Boezaart, 2009:175; Children's Act 38 of 2005).

Specific criteria are stipulated in Section 150 (1)(a) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 for establishing whether or not a child is in need of care and protection. These criteria include situations where the child (Boezaart, 2009:175):

- a) has been orphaned or abandoned and is without any visible means of support;
- b) displays problematic behaviour which caregivers/parents cannot control;
- c) works, begs for a living or lives on the streets;
- d) is addicted to substances and is without any support;
- e) has been exposed or subjected to exploitation;
- f) is exposed to or lives in dangerous and harmful situations;
- g) is at risk of harm if family reunification must take place;
- h) is neglected; or
- i) is being abused or neglected by a caregiver.

Manukuza (2013:3) voiced concern when taking the abovementioned into consideration. Manukuza is employed as a statutory social worker within the Department of Social Development and has experienced situations where the commissioners of Children's Courts have overruled her recommendations when placing a child in foster care. Manukuza (2013:3) states there is some confusion amongst social workers about the definition of a child in need of care and protection. The cause of this confusion is that the presiding officer at the Children's Court often interprets the abovementioned Section 151(1)(a) in a different manner

as does the social worker. Thus, when referring to the meaning of “visible income” as stated in Section 151(1)(a) – it is interpreted by the presiding officer as any form of income including the receiving of a pension grant or any other type of grant by the caregiver, or that the child makes it possible for the foster parent to receive a child support grant (Manukuza, 2013:4). Manukuza (2013:4) continues by stating that a large number of foster parents do not qualify for the child support grant due to them being full-time employees with an income higher than the SASSA means test. There is also a perspective that the child is the responsibility of relatives and they should provide for the child. Based on the abovementioned, relatives do not always qualify for a foster care grant.

It has also been indicated that the majority of these orphaned children are in the care of a relative. In 2010 there was an increase in total foster care grants by over 70 per cent compared to that of adoption, which has decreased by more than 50 per cent, as stated by Blackie (2014:1). In 2013 more than half a million children were registered for foster care grants (Blackie, 2014:1; Breen, s.a.:1). In contrast to this high registration number it was stated that not more than a total of 40 000 children had received a foster care grant in the previous decade (Breen, s.a.:2), thus, indicating a significant increase over the past decade (Breen, s.a.:2). Because of the dramatic increase in the number of foster care cases the foster care system is under enormous pressure (Blackie, 2014:1; Breen, s.a.:1), leaving social workers with an insurmountable caseload (Manukuza, 2013:1). The abovementioned situation should be considered against the backdrop of guidelines given in 2002, whereby relatives caring for children were encouraged by the Minister of Social Development to apply for the child to be legally placed in their care by a court order (Breen, s.a.:2).

It was indicated in the year 2015 that there were at that stage approximately 1.5 million orphaned children in South Africa who qualified for the foster care grant and who were in the care of relatives. Statistics reveal that less than a third of orphaned children are being reached through the foster care system (Children’s Institute, 2015:1). Therefore, the foster care system in South Africa is deemed to have failed in achieving the primary objective of reaching out to all vulnerable orphaned children in South Africa (Children’s Institute, 2015:1). Between 2005 and 2015 (a period of approximately 10 years) the Department of Social Development only reached 500 000 (of the potential 1,5 million) orphaned children. Moreover, the number of foster care grants further decreased by 4 588 in 2013; and again by 20 104 in the year 2014 (Children’s Institute, 2015:1). According to the South African Social Security Agency (2015:1) a total of 482 432 foster care grants were recorded by 28 February 2015.

The number of orphaned and foster children has increased dramatically since the year 2010 due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (PAN: Children, 2012:2). Bungane (2007:iv) states that the epidemic of HIV/AIDS is in the process of changing the whole structure of the South African population. Due to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic it is also to be expected that the number of orphaned children will increase (Breen, s.a.:1; Bungane, 2007:iv; SA Department of Social Development Annual Performance Plan, 2013/2014:35; September, 2008:154). Manukuza (2013:1) states that children are left behind by parents who have passed away due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These children are then usually cared for by the maternal grandmother, who will come seeking support from social welfare organisations in order to finalise the legal placement of the child in their care.

Furthermore, (Breen, s.a.) mentions that children's courts and social workers are under a lot of pressure with regard to the high demand of foster care applications. This high volume of foster care related cases is why many caregivers and children are in the waiting process for approval/renewal of their foster care applications; thus leaving them without the foster care grant for an unreasonable, prolonged period of time (Breen, s.a.:2; Children's Institute, s.a.:1). According to Bungane (2007:iv) the HIV/AIDS epidemic is one of the main reasons for the high caseloads, especially those involving statutory work. The primary social service profession in South Africa for intervening on statutory level is social work; and those social workers will be left dealing with the rising challenges concerning the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Due to the fact that only a few social workers are accredited to render foster care services in South Africa, social workers struggle to keep up the pace with the increasing numbers of foster care related cases (Saayman, 2010:7). Another concern, due to this high volume of foster care related cases, is that social workers find themselves rendering poor quality services to abused children (Children's Institute, s.a.:1).

The study of Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan and Lucalio (2007:337) indicated that some foster children remain in the foster care system for more than 18 months and others for many years. Short placements contribute to instability, due to multiple foster care placements and transfers to children's homes. Research over the last two decades indicates a strong relationship between multiple foster homes and poor outcomes. This suggests that there is room for development and change within the child welfare system so that permanent placements can be facilitated. Children who failed to achieve placement stability were found to have an increased risk of behavioural problems compared to those foster children who achieved placement stability (Rubin *et al.*, 2007).

The following section presents a literature review regarding mainly two aspects: firstly, the role of assessment within the foster care investigation process; and secondly the role of assessment tools, measures and procedures that formalise and systematise the foster care assessment process.

2.2 ROLE OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE FOSTER CARE INVESTIGATION PROCESS

The United Nations (cited in Department of Education, 2013:6) indicated that no individual has the right to be a foster parent, but that decisions based on fostering will focus on the best interest of the foster child. Thus, assessment within the foster care investigation process serves an essential role in protecting the rights of the foster child.

A comprehensive assessment is conducted through a social welfare organisation with prospective foster parents to determine their capability to care for a foster child (Department of Education, 2013:6; Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:8). The purpose of the first stage of an assessment is to provide the social worker with relevant information with regard to prospective foster parents and whether they qualify and are capable of caring for the foster child. The first stage of assessment serves as a sifting method to identify and eliminate unsuitable foster parents. During the second stage of assessment more in-depth information is gathered. Both stages are conducted concurrently and inform the reports presented to a foster panel for approval or disapproval thereof (Department of Education, 2013:6).

Turney, Platt, Selwyn and Farmer (2011:3) as well as Farmer, Dance, Beecham, Bonin and Ouwejan (2010:6) indicate that sufficiency of assessment correlates to positive outcomes for foster children; and negative outcomes may be attributed to insufficient assessment, frequently resulting in incidents such as the disruption of a placement. Inadequate preparation of foster parents could also be linked to negative outcomes (Farmer *et al.*, 2010:6). These authors furthermore state that although intuition is a good starting point, it should not be regarded as the defining point in decision-making. The application of an individual's intuition should be reinforced by both the use of analytical and critical thinking (Turney *et al.*, 2011:7). When referring to the assessment process it is cautioned that assessments are usually done through verbal interviews, and that this can have the effect of cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This challenge can be overcome through assessing the parenting capability of the prospective foster parents through a variety of approaches in gathering sufficient information. Furthermore, attention needs to focus on family background information and the approaches to gather this information include the use of validated tools, taking into consideration previous reports on the prospective foster family (if applicable), conducting interviews and assessing parenting practices. Assessments should also focus on the relationship between a specific child and parent, as parents care differently for different children (Turney *et al.*, 2011:5).

2.3 ROLE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS, MEASURES AND PROCEDURES THAT FORMALISE AND SYSTEMATISE THE FOSTER CARE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A challenge that was highlighted in the studies of Turney *et al.* (2011:8) is the use of standardised assessment tools to support professional decisions. When referring to sufficiency in assessments it is stated that a variety of methods should be utilised instead of relying only on interviews with various individuals. A variety of tools can be used in conjunction with "traditional" approaches such as observation when gathering information. It is mentioned that the use of these tools may require some form of training. Studies of Farmer *et al.* (2010:6) found for example that psychological assessment (which would require professional training) could be beneficial in the process of screening and matching children to prospective foster parents.

From an international perspective, it is noted that the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA) is the representative organisation working with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as well as the Child and Youth Agency, focusing on all foster care related matters. Within this foster care process enquiry are conducted through telephone contact and followed up with home visits. Once it has been established that prospective foster parents meet the criteria of being foster parents (and provided that they are still willing to act as foster parents) only then will relevant documentation be distributed to the prospective foster parents. The assessment requires checks with regard to child protection, medical, psychological and mental health reports, reports from a public health nurse as well as three references which will be interviewed by the social worker (Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:8).

The assessment furthermore includes a screening based on the physical environment of the prospective foster home to ensure that it complies with minimum standards such as safety, hygiene and space. Interviews will also be conducted with adults residing in the home (Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:10). During the home visits aspects will be covered by the social worker such as: family history; experience in taking care of children; relationships within their family; focusing on how decisions are made in the family;

how time is spent in the family; and relationships with extended family members such as grandparents. Practical issues will be discussed such as how the foster child will be affected by work, accommodation, and so forth. Another aspect focused on is how co-operation would be assured between the prospective foster parents and the foster child.

Training is on-going and compulsory to empower prospective foster parents with relevant knowledge and skills that contribute to high quality care (Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:17). A foster care contract needs to be implemented between the social worker and prospective foster parents, emphasising their responsibility to care for the foster child, to co-operate with the social welfare organisations and attend compulsory foster parent training (Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:17).

The abovementioned assessment process is used to build a foster care bank – a data base of foster parents already assessed, trained with knowledge and skills, and approved. This will assist social workers with the matching process as the best suited foster parent can be matched with a specific foster child and its associated needs (Irish Foster Care Association, 2013:14).

Another source focusing on the foster care process in Northern Ireland highlights the procedure of their assessment process, starting with an initial visit where the social worker from the recruitment section will conduct a home visit to discuss the basics of foster care and to provide answers to questions that might arise (Adoption and Foster Care, 2016:1).

Once the social worker and prospective foster parents have agreed to continue with the process, pre-approval training will follow as an additional method of screening (Adoption and Foster Care, 2016:1). The training will be followed up with the distribution of relevant application documents, including a comprehensive medical report with the purpose of ensuring that the prospective foster parents are healthy and medically fit to take care of a foster child. The abovementioned is also conducted for the purpose of ensuring that the prospective foster parents will not endanger their own health, as foster care may serve as an added stressor. Furthermore, a police check will be conducted regarding all members above 10 years of age residing in the home. The police check requires relevant identification documentation such as birth certificates that need to be verified by the specific social worker. Furthermore, as part of the application, two references have to be nominated by the prospective foster parents. It will be expected from the references to compile a written reference as well as to be interviewed by the social worker. During the early assessment process an overall health and safety checklist needs to be completed by the social worker. This serves the purpose of eliminating possible risks at an early stage. These risks are focused on the physical home environment of the prospective foster parents; and in the case where possible hazards are observed these will be highlighted and discussed by the social worker (Adoption and Foster Care, 2016:1).

The abovementioned initial screening, checks and visits are followed with the more formal, comprehensive assessment process that is conducted by a social worker. A social worker will complete a comprehensive assessment of the prospective foster parents and family members residing in the home. The assessment process may last for a period of four to six months during which the social worker will conduct interviews with family members to establish if they are willing and open towards foster care. During the assessment any concerns that might arise will be discussed with the prospective foster parents, who have the right to

read through the assessment report and will be given the opportunity to add or rectify information (Adoption and Foster Care, 2016:1)

Thereafter, the social worker will approach the foster care panel for approval or disapproval of the foster care application. The panel consists of professionals, including senior social workers as well as an experienced foster parent. During the panel's process of consideration, the prospective foster parents will be granted the opportunity to sit in on the panel discussion. If the foster care application is approved the specific foster parent will be regarded as one of the foster parents in the foster care bank or data base. However, it is stated that a review of all approvals will take place annually (Adoption and Foster Care, 2016:1).

2.4 ECOMETRICS AND ASSESSMENT

Roestenburg and Van Breda (2003:1) state that in South Africa client assessments are usually based on the social worker's ability to conduct an interview. When referring to assessment as an activity, it is regarded to contribute to the experience and expertise of the social worker. In social work the skill to successfully conduct an interview is regarded as an effective tool. However, this method of assessment is accompanied by the challenge of subjectivity and bias. As a result, social workers have found that their reports are being rejected due to information ruled as unfounded and based on their assumptions (Roestenburg & Van Breda, 2003:2). According to the mentioned authors sound assessment is often characterised by the use of various processes while gathering information from the prospective foster parents (Roestenburg & Van Breda, 2003:2). The specific assessment tools and the approach followed are just as important as the process in which data were gathered during the assessment (Roestenburg & Van Breda, 2003:2).

When referring to "Ecometrics" Roestenburg and Van Breda (2003:2) state that sufficient assessment is done through measurements. However, in South Africa it is often found that measurements of social workers are mainly based on experience and intuition. Thus, it is contended that the use of an Ecometrics-based assessment will ensure that measurements are systemised and standardised. It will furthermore contribute to consistency and rationality when measuring (Roestenburg & Van Breda, 2003:2). According to Roestenburg (2011:33) good assessment processes improve effective service delivery when systematic qualitative assessments and validated quantitative assessments are employed by social workers. This ensures that decisions are regarded as accountable, because accountability is measured through making use of a more scientifically sound approach during decision-making. Jansen van Rensburg (2014:121) states that the use of methods within qualitative and quantitative assessments is described as Ecometrics. Furthermore, Ecometrics focuses on the ecology and specifically the measurement of interactions between individuals and their environment (Jansen van Rensburg, 2014:122).

The following section in the literature review will focus on the research study of Carter and Van Breda (2016) and will explore how it differs from the study at hand, as conducted by the researcher.

2.5 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE STUDY OF CARTER AND VAN BREDA (2016) AND THE STUDY OF THE RESEARCHER RELATED TO FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The research of Carter and Van Breda (2016:218) focuses on four central aspects indicating the ideal foster parent. The aspects that emerged from the research study of Carter and Van Breda (2016:218) indicated that an ideal foster parent should: 1) be able to provide a home for a foster child; 2) grounded by safety and security; 3) unconditional love; 4) nurturing and stability. This proposed model of the ideal foster parent was designed based on the inputs of different social workers and foster parents. This was in turn integrated into a document with regard to how social workers can assess prospective foster parents (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:218). Specific essential areas were identified under the four central aspects informing an ideal foster parent. The model is based on the strength perspective, as it is required from the social worker to identify strengths in each key area. Instead of disapproving prospective foster parents, the social worker will be encouraged and guided by the strength perspective to identify opportunities to overcome the challenges (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:221).

Taken the abovementioned research findings of Carter and Van Breda (2016) into consideration, it can be concluded that the proposed model will be utilised by social workers throughout the assessment process of prospective foster parents. It is recommended that the model should be used to encourage in-depth conversations between the social worker and the prospective foster parents, as the model is focused on mutual involvement during decision-making. The model will enable the social worker to establish whether or not the prospective foster parents can be regarded as suitable and capable of providing care for the foster child (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:222).

In comparison to the abovementioned research, the present study of the researcher highlights proposed phases (steps) to be implemented by social workers during the screening of prospective foster parents. The need for this is based on the fact that there seems to be no standardised screening process within the context of South Africa. The lack of standardisation has contributed to inconsistency amongst social workers rendering foster care services, in particular with regard to the screening of prospective foster parents. Thus, the focus of the present research study is on the process followed, the associated assessment tools and methods implemented in assisting the social workers, as well as how these tools and methods are implemented in a way that makes sense to the social workers and serves the best interest of the foster child.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Within the South African context, the following could be found: Carter and Van Breda (2016:208) emphasise that the foster parents of all children placed into foster care have to be positively screened by a social worker. With this in mind, there are several apprehensions when referring to the current screening process of prospective foster parents. No research could be found with regard to a standardised screening process that could guide social workers when screening prospective foster parents in South Africa (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:208). The criteria stated within the Children's Act 38 of 2005 are the only guidelines used by

social workers during the screening process of prospective foster parents. As discussed above, it becomes clear that these criteria, as stated within the Children's Act, are broad and open to various interpretations by social workers, as well as other professions (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:208). Another concern highlighted by Carter and Van Breda (2016:208) is that the majority of foster children will be in the care of positively screened foster parents up until the age of 18 years. The reason for this is that the majority of foster placements are not utilised as a short-term placement – as it was originally meant to be. Thus, these foster parents were positively screened to be fit and proper, but without the use of a standardised screening process (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:208). The term fit and proper, as stated within the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is broad and can be interpreted differently amongst social workers. In the study of Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) it was concluded that no adequate screening process is being implemented for the assessment of prospective foster parents. Durand (2007:1) states that foster parents can at times find it challenging when providing a long-term home to a foster child. It must, therefore, be questioned whether foster parents who were initially screened as fit and proper, will remain so over the course of many years.

As already highlighted above, the study of Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) places further emphasis on the negative effects of having screened prospective foster parents ineffectively. This is relevant to foster care placements with relatives and non-relatives (Carter and Van Breda, 2016:210). Ineffective screening of prospective foster parents can contribute to the breakdown of the foster care placement, which in return will have an effect on the overall welfare of the foster child. Reasons for the breakdown of foster care placements can vary from the absence of emotional support from foster parents, mismatched child placement, or the foster child displaying behavioural problems. Placement instability can be attributed to personal problems between foster parent and foster child; lack of support from a social worker; the foster child not obeying house rules of foster parents; lack of information provided by social workers; the foster child's involvement with illegal activities; the continuous involvement of the foster child's family; the coping skills of foster parents; and the possibility that the biological children of the foster parents could not adjust to the foster placement (Booyesen, 2006:2,5,61,75,82; James, 2004:620; Van der Riet, 2009:4). Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) add that there exists a lack of knowledge with regard to how social workers will screen prospective foster parents. The lack of sufficient knowledge can also result from the fact that at university level (during the training of social workers), foster care as a form of alternative care is not discussed in detail, but rather touched on briefly. For this reason, it may be concluded that graduating social work students are not fully equipped on how to render foster care services (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:210). Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) contend that there are mere vague guidelines provided by the Department of Social Development, which focus on the statutory process of foster care in South Africa. However, these guidelines are irrelevant in assisting social workers during the screening process of prospective foster parents. In practice, social workers have to screen prospective foster parents without having been given any form of accurate guidance, following insufficient training received at university level.

Thorough investigation and screening of prospective foster parents are regarded as one of the responsibilities of a social worker (Carter & Van Breda, 2016:211; Family for every child, 2015:5). However, Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) found that social workers are more lenient towards related foster care placements when coming to the screening process. This is also viewed as one of the reasons contributing

to the breakdown of a foster care placement. It is stated by Carter and Van Breda (2016:210) that research has shown that related foster care placements are not always in the best interest of the foster child.

Through the study of Carter and Van Breda (2016:211) it was found that social workers share a sense of concern with regard to the number of foster care breakdowns in their specific caseload. This researcher contends that the number of placement breakdowns could be reduced through ensuring that social workers are equipped with sufficient knowledge and skills on how to effectively screen prospective foster parents.

As becomes clear from the above literature review, the need to fill the gap in literature related to foster care in South Africa is evident. Apart from the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and the newly informed research of Carter and Van Breda (2016), no other literature is available within the context of South Africa on how the screening process of prospective foster parents needs to take place. This lack of standardisation is regarded as a weakness within the context of South Africa, and it leads to inconsistency during the service rendering to foster care related cases. Based on the literature review indicating the lack of standardisation, the present research study will fulfil an essential role to empower social workers in rendering sound foster care services, in particular the screening of prospective foster parents within the context of South Africa. The use of the Ecometrics model will contribute to decisions being regarded as accountable in the field of social work.

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SECTION C: RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROCEDURES AND METHODS UTILISED BY SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN GAUTENG DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER PARENTS

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Abstract

The dismal inefficiency of managing foster care cases has become the result of social workers not having access to or utilising standardised processes in the assessment and screening of prospective foster parents. Data indicate that in South Africa social workers rely on the Children's Act 38 of 2005, their own experience, expertise and professional discretion, but few utilise any assessment tools or measures to standardise the screening process and improve the consistency of foster placement investigations. This research study proposes a uniform screening process, constructed from a sample of social workers' opinions on best practices followed in their individual contexts.

Keywords

Procedures, methods, foster care selection process, prospective foster parents, social work, Gauteng

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research by Carter (2013: 73) concluded that an appropriate procedure and method for the assessment of prospective foster parents could not be found within the context of South African social services. Furthermore, it was found that the selection and matching of prospective foster parents to foster children are often subject to the personal bias of the social worker (Carter, 2013: 5). This indicates that there is a diverse understanding and varied implementation of assessment processes regarding prospective foster parents. In addition to variation in procedure, it is possible to identify several types of placement screening instruments from available literature. Classified into categories, some instruments are used for assessing

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risk levels in children prior to placement (Huang, Bory, Caron, Tebes and Connell, 2014: 87); *behavioural assessment* of children during placement (Tarren-Sweeney, 2013a: 384); *child mental health screening* at the start of and during placement (Tarren-Sweeney, 2013b: 778); *screening and selection of prospective foster families* and *monitoring of placement* (Delgado and Pinto, 2011: 1031); and instruments for assessing *placement stability* (Blakey, Leathers, Lawler, Washington, Natschke, Strand and Walton, 2012: 369).

The development, accreditation and use of assessment procedures and methods by social workers in the South African context are not currently regulated or formally managed by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). However, the accreditation of instruments is covered by means of the Policy on Ecometric Technology (SACSSP, 2010) and a specific task team is responsible for promoting the use of Ecometrics-based instruments by social workers. Ecometrics is a locally designed assessment concept formally recognised by the SACSSP and is defined as: "...the methodological body of knowledge concerned with the quantification (measurement) and qualification (description) of interactions of a person within the environment. Ecometrics incorporates a broad spectrum of practice approaches and is suitable for application in diverse practice contexts" (Roestenburg, 2007: 37). Based on principles of evidence-based practice; and practice-based evidence, Roestenburg (2011) argues that assessment becomes more relevant, accountable and scientific if it is underpinned by a sound theoretical framework, a specific method and sequence or procedure, and supported by specific assessment instruments such as scales or observation schedules. Procedures are often standardised and captured in assessment protocols. Ecometrics in turn is derived from ecological theories (Gitterman and Germain, 2008) as well as from Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Eco-systemic theory; theories standing central to social work – thinking and focusing upon the person-in-environment paradigm for practice. Ecometrics is furthermore regarded as the social work equivalent of psychometrics in psychology, in that it aims to systematise and formalise assessment in South African social work practice. Thus, the present study on the use of assessment procedures and methods within the field of child protection as a specific field of practice in social work, and specifically the placement of children in foster care, is relevant from an Ecometrics perspective (Roestenburg, 2011). An Ecometrics perspective argues that more rigorous assessment practice and the use of specific assessment procedures and methods should be encouraged in order to improve consistency, quality and sustainability in foster care placements (Roestenburg, 2011). According to UNICEF (2013), assessment is an ongoing challenge facing South Africa, and indeed a process that requires standardisation. According to Pollack (2012: 402) accurate assessment is associated with successful placement and therefore assessment cannot be done entirely according to the discretion of each individual social worker (Pollack, 2012: 415).

3.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

A confirmed problem is that no uniform, standardised assessment procedure and method for use in foster care assessments could be found within the context of South Africa (Carter, 2013). In practice, a variety of instruments were noted (some less vague than others), and, consistent with literature, the impact of inconsistent use or variation in the use of assessment procedures, methods and instruments will contribute to inconsistent practice. The topic of standardisation is not widely covered in literature, and instruments used in practice are frequently not adjusted or validated locally. The SACSSP currently does not list any

specific procedures, methods or instruments recommended for use within foster care placement. A further problem is that little is known about the types of assessment procedures, methods and instruments used by South African foster care workers; whether these are quantitative or qualitative in nature, or how these instruments fit the procedure.

3.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH STUDY

This study proposes to contribute to systematic social work practice and reduce subjective discretion during the selection of prospective foster parents (Carter, 2013: 8; Khoza, 2011: 2). From the above reasoning it is hypothesised that the development and utilisation of a standardised assessment procedure, uniform method or instrument may be regarded as a starting point for more rigorous foster care practice in future. This practice review contributes towards either the selection or development of standardised, locally relevant procedures, or development of methods and/or instruments for use in local circumstances. Such procedure will be regarded as the first stage of a comprehensive intervention design and development process, as suggested by Fraser, Galinsky, Rothman and Day (2009) and others, to develop standardised tools or interventions for practice. This study contributes to the first two stages of such process, namely exploration and review of current status.

3.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With the abovementioned taken into consideration the following three research questions are proposed to inform this study:

- Firstly, to discover “what” procedures, methods and instruments are being utilised by social workers in the assessment of foster care services. This question indicates a broad, exploratory study discovering procedures applied during all stages of foster care services, not limited to for example the selection process of prospective foster parents. Consistent with Ecometrics-based thinking, such exploration will focus upon identifying underlying theoretical assumptions in the practice of assessment and screening.
- In follow-up to the first question regarding those categories of foster care service delivery, the researcher asks in what part of the assessment and screening process these procedures and methods (protocols) are being used?
- Thirdly, in the case of each participant, the question is asked how these assessment procedures and methods are integrated and used accurately and meaningfully for foster care decision-making purposes.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Research approach

In this research study the qualitative approach was not used in a comprehensive exploratory manner. Rich textual data were collected from participants, but the focus of the in-depth interview was guided by a “prior probe” consisting of the structured assignment that was given to participants before commencement of the interview.

According to Creswell (2013: 43) a qualitative approach involves gathering information from different sources. For the purpose of this study the researcher conducted interviews with individual social workers, selected from a variety of social welfare organisations in South Africa, who are known to be involved in foster care services. She then used literature as control for verifying what she had observed empirically. The interview schedule focused upon two main issues: descriptions of different assessment procedures and methods; and secondly, how such assessments are conducted, the strengths and weaknesses of each procedure and method, the perceived impact of each method and what the need is for a standardised assessment procedure and method. The critical review enabled the researcher to form a comprehensive understanding of the topic that is being studied, in this case foster care assessment and its relationship to Econometrics (Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins, 2012: 2).

3.5.2 Research design

A qualitative study can be both descriptive and exploratory in nature (Fouché and De Vos, 2011: 96; Rubin and Babbie, 2013: 50). According to Fouché and De Vos (2011: 95) an exploratory study focuses on the answering of “what” questions would therefore be suitable for this study. Furthermore, the study will also be descriptive in nature and according to Fouché and De Vos (2011: 96) the focus is on the answering of “why” and “how” questions. According to Rubin and Babbie (2013: 51) a descriptive study will enable the researcher to get richer detail regarding a specific phenomenon, situation or relationship within the context of qualitative research. Thus, no particular qualitative design was utilised within this research study.

3.5.3 Research population

Interviews were conducted regarding individual practices, but within the context of the various organisations that individuals worked in. This fits the requirements for qualitative studies as stated by Rubin and Babbie (2013: 172). The population with regard to the research study did cover organisations within the Gauteng Province that render foster care services to the community. The research population represented a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), while government departments were excluded as these required separate ethical clearance not covered by the current study.

Table 3.1 Population

Name of organisation:	Number of participants:
SAVF (Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie)	2
CSC (Christian Social Council) Pretoria East	2
CSC (Christian Social Council) Pretoria North	1
Rata Social Services	3
Child Welfare Tshwane	2
<u>TOTAL</u>	10

In total ten participants were recruited from five organizations. All participants were female, the majority had more than three years' experience, and they were all regarded by their organization as specialised foster care assessors.

3.6 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Two data sources were used. Firstly, participants were given an assignment in preparation for the qualitative semi-structured interview. They had to collect evidence and information on any assessment procedure, method or instrument they use in the assessment of foster care cases. Participants were given three weeks to complete the assignment. These items were studied by the researcher prior to the interview and were used to direct the conversation. In addition, a self-designed interview schedule, based on guidelines by Greeff (2011: 351) as well as Harrell and Bradley (2009: 27), were used as a data collection tool during the qualitative interview. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for purposes of analysis.

3.7 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data transcripts were analysed by means of ATLAS.ti software. The software provided a useful mechanism for storing data and facilitated the coding process. The researcher first read each transcript to gain a sense of the whole, then designed suitable codes for sections of data, then reduced the topics represented by codes to themes. These themes were then interpreted, or contextualised within the framework of literature and finally represented in a process flow model illustration that allowed her to abstract the findings to the broader context (Creswell, 2013: 182-188). The family creation and network facility in ATLAS.ti assisted with this illustration, showing the relationships between different themes.

3.8 ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval was applied for and received by the University's Health Research Ethics Committee on 10 May 2016, prior to the commencement of the data collection. Ethics number: NWU-00012-16-S1.

3.9 RESULTS OF THE DATA ANALYSIS

After the researcher had analysed the data, five broad themes emerged as presented in Figure 1 (the arrows show the relationships amongst these themes). Participants explained the different procedures and methods they utilised during the screening process of prospective foster parents as well as their understanding with regard to the importance thereof.

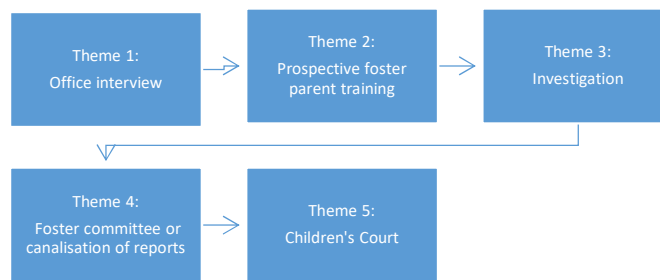


Figure 3.1 Five broad themes that emerged after analysing the data

3.10 DISCUSSION

Each main theme is divided into the following:

- Aspects to include in each phase.
- The importance of the specific aspects in the screening process.
- Different documentation to be completed and the purpose thereof.

Each of the abovementioned themes are divided into different aspects. The proposed aspects serve the purpose of achieving process consistency that guides the social worker during each phase of the screening process.

3.10.1 Theme 1: Office interview

Some participants reflected on the role of screening in their organization and regarded it as a specialised field of practice that few social workers achieved. It was stated that it is an essential task and one needs to have at least the basic social work skills to do. They further regarded training as essential, combined with years of experience, as well as the talent to fulfil such screening. Literature indicates that social workers rendering foster care services should ensure they are trained in using selection instruments, if these are used in the process, and also if information will be gathered and analysed through the use of observation skills. It is furthermore stated that these social workers need to have training in conducting interviews as well as how to make use of their observation skills during home visits (Luke and Sebba, 2013: 6).

The office interview was identified as the first formal screening step, and this can take place either through telephone contact or during a “walk-in”. The telephone contact with prospective foster parents will be used as a platform to explore their reasons for applying, their understanding about foster care, their expectations of placement as well as the invitation to an office interview. Literature indicates that foster parents lack the understanding of what foster care as a whole entails. It is, therefore, stated as a crucial task to seek an understanding about their expectations when referring to foster care. Emphasis is placed on making sure that prospective foster parents understand their role and responsibilities, the complex needs and behavioural problems of the foster child, coping strategies in dealing with foster care, as well as the impact and additional stress that could be placed on their personal lives and marriage (The Fostering Network, 2010: 16).

With regard to the office interview, it appears that the office interview is used as the primary method of sifting through applications. It is also an opportunity to inform prospective foster parents in accordance with their right to be well informed about the advantages and disadvantages of foster care – also described as an orientation or preparation phase. Data indicated that this orientation and preparation phase leads to “screening themselves” with regard to their willingness and suitability of being a foster parent. This is supported by literature, as Durand (2007: 39) states that the preparation phase is a significant contributor to placement stability. According to Sehgal (2010: 69) the interview plays a substantial role in the task description of social workers and that most of their time is being spent on this important phase. Participants in this study indicated that they are mainly guided by their professional capability and years of experience when interviewing prospective foster parents. In literature, professional interviewing is described as a skill guided by experience and the ability to interview in order to work towards a specific purpose (Sehgal, 2010: 70).

Participants consistently referred to multiple requirements of prospective foster parents, however, these requirements varied from one participant to another with regard to what was seen as the ideal profile that would qualify a prospective foster parent to continue with the screening process after the office interview. Some of the mentioned requirements were: the age of the foster parent; health status at time of application, (chronic illness would be an additional stressor); adequate communication skills; openness for advice and willingness to learn, the ability to accommodate a foster child in their lifestyle and ability to provide unconditional love and care. Fuentes, Salas, Bernedo and Garcia-Martin (2014: 704) mentioned that some parenting styles of foster parents potentially contribute to behavioural problems displayed by foster children. Furthermore, foster children tend to display less behavioural problems in settings where foster parents adequately communicate warmth and understanding towards the child.

In the study at hand much emphasis was placed on confirming the motivation (reason for applying) for fostering, as this was found to be associated with a greater risk for placement disruption. This is supported by literature, for example Carter (2013: 160) states that social workers need to explore the full reason (motivation) for wanting to foster a child. Sebba (2012: 9) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic factors; where extrinsic factors include situations where foster parents want a sibling for their biological child, or the motivation of wanting additional income (foster care grant). Intrinsic factors include emotions, beliefs and personal morals.

Another important aspect to consider during the office interview is to start screening by completing formal documentation such as the background and present circumstances report of the prospective foster parent and the circumstantial report for biological parents. In addition to being guided by their own experience, professional opinion and ability, social workers are guided by the formal documentation to gather in certain information.

During the office interview prospective foster parents need to submit relevant documentation as required by the Children’s Court. These documents include: application for foster care form; certified identity document copies of the prospective foster parents; marriage certificate of prospective foster parents (if applicable); birth certificate of the foster child; death certificate of the biological parents (if applicable); proof

of income; proof of residence (for purpose of home visit); school report and school progress report of biological children and prospective foster child; medical reports of both prospective foster parents and their biological children; psychiatrist report (if applicable); Form 30 and police clearance for all members of prospective foster family; police profile or affidavits for temporary use; and a list of references. Participants placed different emphasis on this formal documentation, for example, the health status report played a key role to some organisations but not in others. In the latter cases the social worker's own observations regarding the health status of prospective foster parents was deemed sufficient. One of the participants argued that this is a weakness in the screening process, as it is not her field of expertise to objectively assess health status. This appears to be an area of inconsistency that may influence the quality of screening and eventual placement.

Another document to be completed is the foster care agreement. Data of the present study indicates that in some contexts this is a pre-designed agreement contract, but with space to add relevant conditions or information as may be necessary for a specific case. The foster care agreement fulfils an important role as a reminder of the responsibilities of all relevant parties. It was also motivated that during the office interview prospective foster parents may be overwhelmed by information and the foster care agreement serves as a reminder to refresh their memory regarding the conditions of fostering. One participant indicated that an explanation of the foster care process should be included in the foster care agreement for the same above reason. This finding is confirmed by literature as Durand (2007: 40) states there should be a documented foster care placement agreement that directly emphasises the rights and responsibilities of each party involved.

Whether the completion of documentation and the foster care contract should be completed before continuation to the next stage, as indicated by some participants is doubted. It may be more realistic to proceed to foster parent training after the initial office interview to allow prospective parents time to consider their options and responsibilities before formally agreeing to become foster parents.

3.10.2 Theme 2: Prospective foster parent training

Foster parent training needs to take place prior the investigation phase, as it was found that the training empowered prospective foster parents with required knowledge and skills. This ensures that myths, as well as wrong beliefs regarding foster care, are addressed. Data from this study indicated that social workers found that prospective foster parents used this training as a method of "self-screening" to determine their own willingness, capacity and "fit" to foster parent requirements.

Participant 4: "...some of them will say 'I don't think I will continue...'"

Two participants indicated that the training is used for screening purposes, as attendance is compulsory.

Participant 4: "Yes, we do make a decision based on that..."

Durand (2007: 10) indicates that there is limited literature available on foster parent training within the South African context. It could also be concluded from the data that participating organisations did not have a standardised training manual to follow and made up their own material as they saw fit.

Data from this study indicated two types of training, namely formal and informal training. Formal training was described as either a group or one-on-one training with the use of a self-designed foster care manual of the specific organisation. This training was presented by different social workers and/or motivational speakers. However, during analysis, significant content variation in the sampled manuals was observed. In one example only very basic information was found, whilst another example the focus was at a much deeper level, exploring various issues of foster care. The researcher found this latter example to be more comprehensive as it focuses on the realities of foster care and its associated aspects. It was found to be of greater educational value to prospective foster parents, empowering them with knowledge on what to expect and skills how to deal with specific child care situations.

In contrast to this, informal training was found to involve one-on-one training sessions with the social worker rendering the screening services. The informal training was not guided by a manual, and tailored to fit the specific situation of the foster parent and issues that may arise in such conversations. Data indicated that the majority of foster care placements involve relatives, and in many such cases the child could already be residing with the foster parent at the time of screening. Training would then be less formal and was done to legalize the placement.

For this reason, some participants felt that training is not relevant or important when dealing with related foster care placements. It was stated that related foster care placements are more difficult, as most of the time the foster parent is an aunt or a grandmother who might be set in their own ways on how to raise children. This was cited by some to be a reason not to involve related foster carers in training during screening at all.

Participant 8: "We don't really give training, because most of the time we get foster parents that are already parents...but we don't have a foster care parent training for the screening. ...it just doesn't make sense to train a parent who got their own styles at being a parent to then train them to do your style and then if they struggle with your style then we don't screen them. So everybody is unique."

In contrast with the abovementioned statement, another participant stated that previously there was no training provided for related foster parents at their organisation, however, the need for such training was discovered and subsequently implemented. Related foster parent training is not as comprehensive as the unrelated foster parent training. Another three social workers indicated that although their organisations are not rendering formal training, the need for such training is acknowledged.

Although it can be acknowledged that training should be provided in consideration of individual case needs, the advantages thereof outweigh the disadvantages, yet this seems to be another area of potential inconsistency in screening processes. Literature (Durand, 2007: 41) indicates that the aim of foster parent training should be that foster parents are equipped with knowledge and skills in order to assist them in the coping and handling of the overall foster placement, and specifically the foster child. Durand (2007:44) and Van der Riet (2009:116) argue that sufficient training is a requirement for ensuring placement stability. Where training was offered during the screening process, this was found to contribute to fewer placement

disruptions; foster parents were more empowered with relevant skills and knowledge and the placement more stable (Cuddeback and Orme, 2002: 886).

The prospective foster parent training phase is followed by the investigation phase. The term investigation refers to a designated social worker who has the responsibility to investigate the suitability of the prospective foster parents during the screening process.

3.10.3 Theme 3: Investigation

Data from this study indicated that social workers rely on different theoretical perspectives when conducting their investigation, although this was found not to be limited to this specific phase only. Data indicated that there would often be an implementation of at least one theory per social worker. These include: the systems theory, holistic approach, ecological approach, Children's Act 38 of 2005, developmental stages of a child (Erikson), circle of security, parenting styles, narrative approach, binding theory, strengths perspective, and Maslow's hierarchy.

Some of the descriptions for the use of a specific theory were as follows:

Participant 8: "...the ecological one..."

Participant 5: "...holistic approach..."

Participant 7: "...we rely on the Children's Act."

The South African Government (2016) officially states on its website that one of the requirements of being a foster parent is that an environment should be provided to ensure positive development and growth of the foster child. In support of the above, a home visit will be conducted by a designated social worker. Data from the present study indicated that during the home visit social workers rely on documentation such as the background report, application report, Form 38, and a screening report in order to guide them. Apart from these, participants relied on their extensive experience (practice wisdom) and observation skills to conduct the home visit and eventually complete the relevant documentation. All information gathered at this point in the screening process will be qualitatively interpreted, as indicated by all of the participants. None of the participants reported utilising any quantitative assessment tools during the screening process. In the studies of Kirkman and Melrose (2014: 5) based on their research findings, recommendations were made which included the design of quantitative practices within the field of social work, as well as the design of quantitative checklists or tools that can be used as guidance during decision-making processes. The recommendations of Kirkman and Melrose (2014) are supported by the researcher, as the findings of the study at hand indicated that practice wisdom are preferred above any structured, quantitative practices (Kirkman and Melrose, 2014: 4).

According to Carter and Van Breda (2016: 210) social workers lack knowledge on how to effectively screen prospective foster parents. In the present research study, social workers appeared to be more lenient towards related foster care placements as they felt there is no need for strict and thorough screening when

in related foster care placements. This was seen as one of the possible reasons for the breakdown of foster care placements.

The study also indicated a variation of opinion between different social workers when referring to related placements and unrelated placements. This could also be an indication of possible interference of personal and professional belief, as illustrated by the following response:

Participant 5: "...the important thing is that there is already a bond. It is easier for social workers, because there is no confusion between the foster child and foster parent..."

Some participants stated that family-related placements are experienced to be more difficult, as these parents are set in their ways of raising children and that some will question the social worker if recommendations are made, which is one of the reasons why the organisation implemented foster parent training for family placements.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the preparation of prospective foster parents regarding the specific foster child. Once again, the extent of preparation depends largely on whether the placement is related or unrelated. In this study preparation seems integrated with any of the first three phases of the screening process. Participants affirmed the need for preparation of foster parents with regard to a specific child's characteristics and expected behavioural problems and background circumstances. It was reasoned that based on the information given, the prospective foster parents could also do introspection about their willingness and ability to provide care and support to a child. Literature concurs with this, and Durand (2007: 39) states that prospective foster parents should be provided with accurate information on the specific foster child before legalisation.

With reference to the home visit, the number of home visits was found to vary from one social worker to another. Data indicated that there would be at least one home visit. However, some participants felt that three to four home visits are preferred, as each of these home visits gave the opportunity to explore different facets of the home-environment. Social workers felt strongly about utilising at least one of the home visits for conducting interviews with all foster family members, to assess the family's readiness to accept and integrate a foster child in their family system.

Participant 7: "I will speak to the other members in the family – be it cousins or whoever stays there – to understand if they also support the decision."

Durand (2007: i) confirms the above and also that other systems are to be included in the investigation. Some participants expressed the need to visit the school/nursery school of the foster child in order to gather information about the child's functioning in the school system. Observational information from school visits are often linked to the school progress report outlining parental involvement with the child, and the general school report explaining academic achievement, as data source for obtaining a more comprehensive view of the child's functioning in the broader environment. School reports provide additional information about

the socio-emotional well-being of the foster child, record behavioural problems and the foster child's general functioning at school.

Participant 7: "...what we call, the adaptation to progress report...it reports what, how is his participation, is he spontaneous or does he only participate when he needs to...behaviour at school, how many friends..., how do the friends influence him, is he a follower or leader in the group, ...does he conform to authority, is he friendly or aggressive, does he show restlessness, ...hyperactive..."

Some participants indicated that during further home visits neighbours to the family could be visited, as these could be a valuable resource regarding the family's general functioning in the community.

Participant 8: "We do like 1 scheduled visit and then maybe 2 or 3 maybe unscheduled visits. ...the neighbours can tell you a lot of things like is there domestic violence ... are they drinking over the weekend..."

Some participants focused on observing physical environment such as available sleeping space, whether the child is likely to have personal space and privacy. Of more concern was to assess whether the child is likely to be emotionally supported and cared for by the foster parents. Assessing this capacity was far more important in view of the fact that foster children come from disrupted families, frequently are vulnerable and come with emotional and problematic behavioural baggage. Thus, foster parents need to be emotionally "zoomed in" and willing to address this effectively. Research findings by Carter and Van Breda (2016: 216) also indicated that foster parents are less concerned about physically caring for the child and more concerned about their ability to emotionally care for the child.

Participants furthermore used home visits to observe interactional patterns within the foster family. Much can be learnt from observing natural behaviour patterns in potential foster families and assessing how the inclusion of a child will impact these interactional patterns. In the case of a related placement where the child is already included in the family interaction, the observation is more focused on assessing whether existing patterns are healthy and conducive to growth and nurturance of the child. Street and Davies (1999: 40) concluded in their research study that if attention is given to interactional patterns, the result may be a more positive matching in foster care.

Another aspect to focus on is assessing potential risk factors in the foster family. Risk factors vary from family to family and are easily identified through repeated interactions with a family. The identification of negative behavioural patterns, beliefs and attitudes may be observed during each contact throughout the first three phases of screening. Such observations need to be shared with the foster parent and dealt with during counselling. Participants identified the following as possible risk factors: unresolved childhood or conflict related trauma; inability to deal with specific developmental stage and associated behaviour problems of the foster child; impact of own health and self-management of health issues, foster parent motives for taking a child into care and attitudes of biological children towards inclusion of a foster child in the family. Studies by Dozier and Lindhiem (2009: 343) as well as Gabler, Bovenschen, Lang, Nowacki, Kliewer and Spangler (2014: 493) found that older children in care more likely present with severe

behavioural problems that are difficult to manage by foster parents, compared to younger children where these problems less frequently occur. In this study, participants thought that identification of a placement risk would not necessarily jeopardize the eventual placement of a child. It will be the responsibility of the prospective foster parents and social worker to address these factors with relevant interventions. Data further indicated that social workers need to bring these factors to the attention of the foster committee or manager, where solutions need to be generated – and if not possible, such an application will only then be disapproved based on the specific risk factor as these are likely to contribute to placement disruption.

One participant identified specific background risks to be investigated such as: prior criminal record (the severity and date should be considered); sexual orientation of prospective foster parents (biological parents have a say in agreeing to the temporary placement of the foster child in gay-family constitutions); second or multiple foster applications (whether placement will be in the best interest of both children); foster application in a family with an adopted child (to explore their motivation and to assess if the placement is in the best interest of both children); and prospective foster parents who are childless (assess their motivation).

As indicated by participants in this research, the provided references in phase 1 could also be contacted by telephone or visited in person, depending on the situation. Testimonials received from references such as employer, pastor, psychologist, medical practitioner and school teacher play an important role as additional information regarding the social functioning of the prospective foster family in the broader community. Comparing such information with what they had observed during their investigation phase (phase 3) assisted them in drawing conclusions regarding the suitability of placement.

Participants explained the purpose of different sources of information as “building a solid argument”:

Participant 7: “...put the forms together and make a solid statement. Or sometimes you will find that the information is not the same – so you will have to go and ask...”

If testimonials lack information, this could be resolved by personal contact with the source or a visit. Testimonials are also used to identify risk factors.

Participant 8: “...will ask questions such as does your employee come late every day, has he ever been drunk when he comes to work, has he got a temper problem, is he calm in a conflict situation.”

Participants indicated that due to the costs involved, more in depth assessments and personality assessments are not a requirement in South African foster care assessment (due to a lack of finance), although they felt such in-depth assessment could lead to more effective screening. However, if an assessment is required in a situation, based on the discretion of the social worker, a referral could take place during phase one to phase three in order to assist with the screening process. Turney, Platt, Selwyn and Farmer (2011) emphasise the importance of utilising different inputs from different professions, such as a psychological assessment.

After the completion of these three phases, participants indicated that their findings are submitted to either the foster committee for approval, or their manager for the canalisation to formal court procedure.

3.10.4 Theme 4: Foster committee and canalisation of reports

One participant reported making use of an ad-hoc meeting consisting of the social work director, social work manager as well as ad-hoc voluntary members from the community (retired social workers – experts in the field of social work). Another participant reported making use of a foster committee, also referred to as a panel, consisting of a social work director, social work managers and social workers. In another case the panel was extended by including an educational psychologist and a pastor.

The ad-hoc meetings and foster committees serve the purpose of evaluating foster care applications based on the investigation conducted by the foster care social worker. The diverse membership of the committee is used to promote balance and evaluation from multiple angles. This contributes to a more holistic way of evaluating recommendations and prevents bias. From an international perspective, it was found that according to the National Minimum Standards of Nottingham City Council (2013) a foster care panel ensures recommendations that are appropriate and of quality, ensuring that decisions are based in the best interest of the foster child.

Panellists were interested in assessing the motivation for fostering, history of the prospective foster parents, as well as any risk factors. They would further examine the report in terms of its quality and depth of investigation. In some cases, the investigating social worker would present the prospective foster parents to the committee, manager or supervisor by providing them with proof (documentation) such as a screening report, background report, Form 38, as well as any other documentation that can serve as addenda to any of the submitted documentation discussed in phase one. Based on the abovementioned, the committee, manager or supervisor would approve or disapprove the foster care application. Committees would also ask for further investigation if they were unsure of findings.

Four participants reported not making use of a foster committee during the screening process, but only relying on either their supervisor or manager to approve the application prior to submission to the Children's Court (phase 5). In both instances the quality and depth of a report would be primary considerations in accepting the recommendations. A report in itself did not seem sufficient and panels would require supporting documentation to substantiate recommendations. Participant 8 described the role of the manager or supervisor for canalising reports:

Participant 8: "She has a lot of years' experience – obviously in social work...comes back with more questions that she wants to find out. She is almost like the detective of what you have written – if you haven't got enough information then she will tell you to go and find out more...she gets obviously supervised by our directors – so she gets supervised, but if she says it is fine then it is."

Although panels or committee decisions can be considered superior to a manager's approval, it appears that decision making is based mainly on experience and practice wisdom rather than objective, confirmed

evidence. The researcher argues that this, and relevant documentation to be completed, cannot be the only aspect guiding social workers during the screening process. Kirkman and Melrose (2014: 5) as well as Clayton (2013: v) also concluded in their research findings (UK and Canada) that more emphasis is placed on the expertise and experience of the social worker in order to make a decision. Their research findings furthermore stated that due to the high workload and lack of time, social workers are left making decisions intuitively. It was also found in this study that social workers spend a lot of time and energy on gathering information, which is sometimes of a low quality. This leads to social workers spending more time on piecing together information to form a picture – thus, leaving them with insufficient time to analyse the data gathered. It was furthermore indicated that these decision-making processes can easily be influenced by behavioural biases (Kirkman and Melrose, 2014: 4).

Based on the decision made by the committee, manager or supervisor, both the prospective foster parents and biological parents will be informed thereof. After the abovementioned phase has taken place and the foster care application was positively screened, the Children's Court will be approached to finalise the legalisation of such a foster care placement.

3.10.5 Theme 5: Children's Court proceedings

It will be the responsibility of the social worker to approach the Children's Court after the positive screening of the foster parents has been concluded, as stated by participant 7:

Participant 7: "...and then I have to get a court date."

Foster parents will be summoned to appear before the Children's Court and based on evidence laid before the Magistrate of the Children's Court regarding their suitability to be foster parents. Apart from the screening report, Form 38 and background reports, social workers in this study indicated that there are non-optional documents to submit to the Children's Court, such as certified copies of identification documents, the marriage certificate of foster parents, birth certificates of the foster child and biological children, a police clearance certificate and results of Form 30 with details of the foster parents. Optional documents could include documentation such as the school reports and school progress reports of the foster child and biological children. However, it was stated that depending on the Children's Court, further documentary evidence may also be requested. Social workers indicated that although there are optional and non-optional documents, all the information on these documents is stated within the different reports such as the screening report, background reports, and Form 38. Optional and non-optional documents serve as addenda to strengthen the decision of the social worker.

Participant 8: "...a finalisation report, a foster care screening report, all the Form 30's, certified copy of the ID's – all your proof basically of why you've screened this foster parents...reference letters – everything that we have."

Before a hearing at the Children's Court can take place, the responsible social worker prepares foster parents, foster child and biological parents with regard to Children's Court procedures. Preparation is necessary to reduce feelings of anxiety commonly associated with unknown situations (Confirmed by own

experience). One participant indicated that by explaining the layout of the court by using illustrations, the magistrate's name and exploring the kinds of questions to be expected, helped prepare the child and parents for the event. It was indicated that a finalisation hearing is usually an emotional process for biological parents, and therefore the parties are best prepared before court proceedings. Reading the social work report to the different parties prior to the court proceedings is not only ethical, but further assists parties in understanding and dealing with the consequences of this process and any aspects they differ with. Further assurance is added by knowing that a Children's Court order is the only document that can legally place a child in foster care.

Participant 4: "Then with unrelated foster care placement the child will be placed in foster care with a court order."

Also, that if a child is not placed in foster care the reasons for that decision will be stated by the Magistrate, for example a possible need for further investigation.

Based on the researcher's observations regarding the above thematic analysis, a graphical representation of the main elements, steps and processes followed within a South African context, is proposed in Figure 2. This figure captures the common elements of what social workers in this research study had to say about assessment and screening.

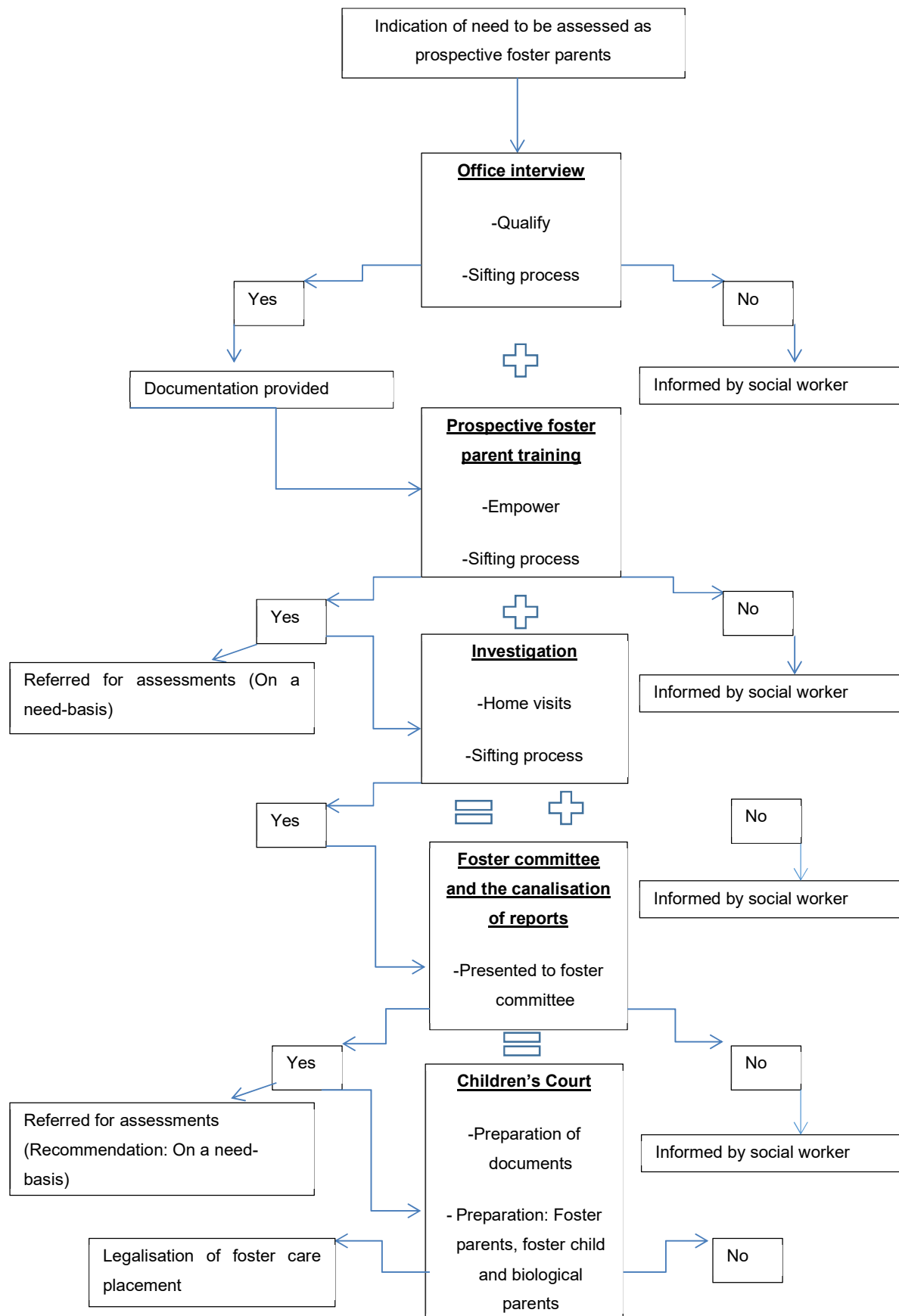


Figure 3.2 Proposed screening process

The key elements in the centre of the graph show the different steps leading towards Children's Court procedures. Two classes of assessment are conducted. The first is a basic screening process which is used for selecting potential foster parents, to be included in further training and preparation activities. The second describes specific psychosocial assessments to be conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of specific psychological and social factors impacting the potential foster care situation. These assessments are only conducted once initial screening has been completed and the social worker is more assured that prospective foster parents are committed towards the potential placement. The last area for assessment is that of assessing a placement fit. The current study did not focus on this kind of assessment, as participants mentioned this to be a separate topic. This research focused mostly on screening processes. Arrows indicating "yes" or "no" refer to the selection decisions at different exit points in the process. These exit points represent definite, systematic screening points where repeated consideration and decision making promote rigour in the process of selection.

3.11 CONCLUSION

From the research findings it is concluded that South African foster care practice is characterised by a lack of standardisation in the screening process of prospective foster parents, and according to the researcher this could be viewed as a weakness of practice. Although this conclusion cannot be generalized, it was remarkable that in a small sample such as was used in this study, significant variation was observed in practices. The various accounts by individual participants lead one to conclude that the lack of standardisation contributes to inconsistency in service delivery amongst social workers. The field of social work, referring to foster care in particular, was described as a grey area because there is no definite right or wrong answer; and this leaves social workers to implement decisions intuitively as they feel is best. One example of the aforementioned could be seen in the way some social workers described their bias towards family-related foster parents, compared to non-related foster parents. The occurrence of this practice could be due to the fact that the Children's Act 38 of 2005 places emphasises family care rather than unrelated placement.

A further conclusion is that foster care social workers rely more on their intuition than on objective measures whilst the completed documentation only serves as backup to substantiate findings of the social worker. The actual interpretation of data remains subject to the interpretation of each individual social worker. Differential interpretation of documentation contributes to more variance in recommendations.

An overall finding of the study at hand is that social workers showed passion, commitment and devotion to their foster care assessment work, but that quality is influenced by problems and challenges that at times prevent sufficient service rendering. The lack of time, unmanageable workload, lack of resources, experience, expertise and the lack of standardised processes, all combine to cause insufficient service rendering at times, and may lead to issues such as placement disruption. Participants all felt their practices were in the best interest of the child – as this mandate drove them to do their best. However, the variation in practices necessitates a model such as is suggested in this research study as this could be a foundation contributing to consistency in service rendering by different welfare organisations within South Africa.

3.12 RECOMMENDATIONS

This project enabled the researchers to conclude that the assessment practices of foster care social workers in the area of foster parent screening are characterised by significant variation. The three-phase screening process identified in this article may contribute to the formulation of a standardised foster parent screening protocol that could become part of future child-protection training.

It is further concluded that few standardised assessment instruments are used in the screening process, and that in this regard, local practice does not match the rigour of international foster care screening practice. It is therefore recommended that specific instruments such as mentioned in the literature study to this article are considered for introduction, testing and eventual adoption in screening practice, in order to begin efforts to standardise foster care screening.

The phenomenon of informally arranged, related foster care warrants further investigation as it seems that quality and depth of screening is lowered in cases where foster parent applications are made when a child is already living with the applicants. Although our participants have indicated that different criteria hold in these informal placements, it is still necessary, in the best interest of the child, to thoroughly assess these cases.

This study has mainly confirmed what is shown in international literature. However, related foster care, or the informal foster arrangements that exist between relatives seems to attract less rigorous assessment and screening effort from social workers in the study. The mapping of what foster care workers actually do during screening can be considered a first step towards formalizing and standardizing a very important facet of social work practice.

3.13 FUNDING

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Author biography

Daniëlle Murray, Masters student, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, employed as a social worker within the Department of Social Development, South Africa.

Willem Roestenburg, is Professor of Social Work at the School for Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

SECTION D:

FINAL CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 FINAL CONCLUSION

This section elaborates on the observations and findings of the study.

The title of the research study is:

Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

The research questions introducing the research study are as follows:

- Firstly, to discover “what” procedures, methods and instruments are being utilised by social workers in the assessment of foster care services. This question indicates a broad, exploratory study discovering procedures applied during all stages of foster care services, not limited to for example the selection process of prospective foster parents. Consistent with Ecometrics-based thinking, such exploration will of necessity focus upon underpinning theory as well.
- In follow-up to the first question, the researcher asks in what categories of foster care service delivery these procedures and methods (protocols) are being used.
- Thirdly, in the case of each participant, the question is asked how these assessment procedures and methods are integrated and used accurately and meaningfully for foster care decision-making purposes.

The research findings indicated a lack in the use of a standardised screening process of prospective foster parents. Although social workers reported important aspects, the research findings highlighted the fact that social workers from different social welfare organisations are inconsistent during the screening process of prospective foster parents. This could be due to the reality that social workers are left to make important decisions based on their intuition and perception of a particular situation. It was also mentioned that social workers rely on mainly the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, their years of experience and expertise during the screening process. Social workers highlighted different aspects to focus on during the screening process. Thus, certain processes and aspects are implemented based on what is thought to be the best practice. For this reason, foster care was described as a grey area, since there are no other structured guidelines, apart from the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, to be followed. However, it was determined that the process of screening foster parents – as described in the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 – was vague and open for varying interpretation by different professions.

Furthermore, research findings indicated that none of the social workers implemented any quantitative tools or assessment to assist them during the screening process. This could be concluded as a weakness within the screening process, as qualitative approaches leave space for personal bias. The studies of Roestenburg (2011:33) state that the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches would be the best

practice; in this case for the screening of prospective foster parents. The utilisation of quantitative approaches would contribute to a more objective screening, as it does not leave space for the interference of personal bias of the social worker.

This study concludes that the utilisation of both approaches would be the best practice to implement, however, the data need to be integrated and analysed to assist with the screening of prospective foster parents.

Proposed foster care screening process of prospective foster parents:

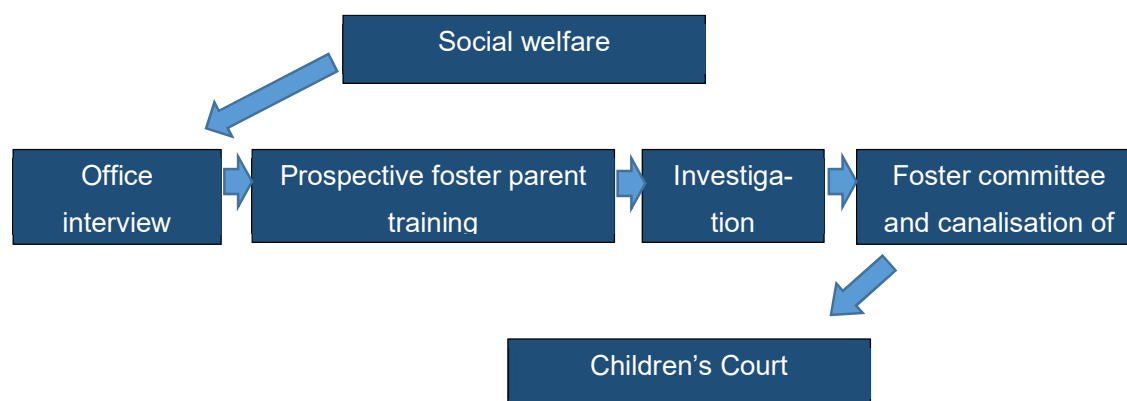


Figure 4.1 Proposed screening process of prospective foster parents

The proposed foster care screening process starts with conducting an office interview at the specific social welfare organisation, which is used as a sifting method to identify possible foster care applicants. At this office interview the application form with relevant requested documentation will be handed to the prospective foster parents for completion. The office interview is followed by an invitation to a prospective foster parent training session that is aimed at empowering the prospective foster parents with relevant skills and knowledge regarding foster care. This training is also used as a sifting method for prospective foster parents to “self-screen” and for social workers to screen their willingness and capability. Only thereafter will the investigation phase take place, where the social worker will visit the physical environment of the prospective foster parents to determine their capability to take care of a foster child. Based on the investigation the social worker will compile her evidence in the form of relevant documentation and this will be presented to the foster committee, consisting of different professionals for assisting in the decision-making process. If the application of the prospective foster parents has been screened positively, the Children’s Court will be approached for legalisation and finalisation of the foster care placement.

4.2 LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following limitations were relevant to the research study:

The unfortunate reality of insufficient and limited research literature with regard to the screening process of prospective foster parents within the context of South Africa had the consequence that sub-themes within the research study could not be substantiated.

Within this research study the method of data collection was semi-structured interviews to obtain rich qualitative data. This methodology was feasible with a small group of participants, the reason being that their knowledge, experience and practice could be explored and described. Thus, this choice of methodology prevented the researcher to obtain information from a much larger population group, as a quantitative study would have been able to offer.

The researcher acknowledges that the research findings might be limited due to the fact that the study was conducted only with research participants situated in the Tshwane (Pretoria) area in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

The participants from the research study represent non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The Department of Social Development could not be included because the research study had to be ethically approved and this would have delayed the submission of the study.

Four participants did not have a foster care manual for training purposes and two participants declined participation in the submission of the assignment. Thus, the researcher could only analyse three manuals.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.3.1 Recommendations for practice

The implementation of the proposed screening process could contribute to consistency in the work of social workers as there is a need for standardisation in the screening process.

During the screening process data should be gathered quantitatively and qualitatively, and should be integrated and analysed to assist in the decision-making process with regard to the screening of prospective foster parents.

The foster committee should include a cultural representative to ensure that decisions are in the best interest of the child, while ensuring culture sensitivity.

4.3.2 Recommendations for further research studies

To conduct research studies in other provinces of South Africa to establish if the research findings could be confirmed.

The design of structured and standardised documentation and assessment tools to assist social workers during the screening process.

4.4 REFERENCES

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SECTION E: ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1: PROOF OF ATTENDANCE OF ETHICS TRAINING



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY®
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research,
Training and Support
Tel: 018 299 2092
Fax:
Email: minrie.greeff@nwu.ac.za

22 April 2016

Dear Ms Daniëlle Murray

PROOF OF ATTENDANCE

This letter certifies that you have attended the 2 day ethics training, entitled:

The Basics of Health Research Ethics

(Accreditation number: UP1163 from University of Pretoria CPD accreditation department)

presented by Prof Minrie Greeff (Head of the Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support) on **19 and 20 April 2016**.

This proof of attendance, as recognised by HREC and the Ethics Office, NWU, is valid for 3 years and expires on the 19th of March 2018. Where applicable, Ethics CEUs awarded: **27 Ethics CEUs**

Yours sincerely

A stylized signature of Prof Minrie Greeff.

Prof Minrie Greeff
Head of Health Sciences Ethics
Office for Research, Training and Support

A stylized signature of Prof Awie Kotzé.

Prof Awie Kotzé
Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences

ANNEXURE 2: WRITTEN CONSENT FORMS



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM FOR

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

PROCEDURES AND METHODS UTILISED BY SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN
GAUTENG DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER
PARENTS

REFERENCE NUMBERS: NWU-00012-16-SI

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Prof. W.J.H. Roestenburg

ADDRESS: North- West University of Potchefstroom – Building E8

CONTACT NUMBER: (018) 285 - 2270

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my MSW in Child Protection. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU: Potchefstroom)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records.

What is this research study all about?

- *This study will be conducted in your office or any relevant venue for the purpose of confidentiality and will involve semi- structured interviews with experienced social workers trained in foster care. At least 8-10 participants will be included in this study.*
- **The following aim is relevant to the research study:**
To compile a critical review of assessment procedures and methods that are being utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents.
- **The following objectives are relevant to the research study:**
 - To obtain rich, qualitative, textual data from Social Welfare Organisations within Gauteng that is rendering foster care services by means of the completion of a structured assignment before commencement of the semi-structured interviews.
 - To conduct a critical review on assessment procedures and methods that are utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents.
 - To compare the findings from the textual data obtained with the critical review whereby similar themes can be highlighted and recommendations can be made with regard to a South African standardised assessment procedure and method which can form the basis for future studies.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- *You have been invited to participate because you are a social worker with experience in rendering foster care services and this can contribute to the overall purpose of the study*
- *You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria:*
 - *A registered social worker in South Africa;*
 - *Working at the head office or relevant service providers of the target organisation;*
 - *A social worker rendering foster care services or having experience of foster placements, for a period of at least three years;*
 - *Identified by the organization as most knowledgeable regarding the organization's foster care practices;*
 - *Willing to voluntarily participate in the research study while signing the provide consent form;*
 - *Willing to participate in semi- structured interviews while being audio-recorded;*
 - *Willing to communicate freely and honestly;*
 - *Willing to compile a portfolio/ assignment prior the semi- structured interview;*
 - *A social worker of any race;*
 - *A social worker of any gender;*
 - *Preferably Afrikaans or English speaking social workers*
- *You will be excluded if:*
For the purpose of the study the researcher will include the following exclusion criterion that is applicable to the study:

- *In addition to not fitting any of the inclusion criteria, participants will not be included if they indicate a lack of interest in or knowledge about the use of assessment tools in practice applications;*
- *Although the research study will focus on the assessment process of prospective foster parents – no contact will be made with prospective foster parents. Only social workers rendering foster care services (the selection procedure of prospective foster parents) will be included.*

The above mentioned exclusion criteria is important, because it will ensure that the included participants will contribute to the purpose of the research study.

What will your responsibilities be?

- *It will be expected from you to compile a portfolio assignment prior the interview containing the following information:*
 - *Compile a portfolio;*
 - *A copy of your organisations assessment procedures and methods that are being utilised in the selection process of prospective foster parents;*
 - *Any reference with regard to the above mentioned needs to be submitted;*
 - *Anonymize a case study to illustrate how the above mentioned was utilised within the practice.*
- *You will be expected to participate in one semi- structured interviews for a duration of 90 minutes while being audio- recorded. The date, venue and time will be discussed prior to the interview via the mediator.*

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- *Participation within this study will have no direct impact on the participants, but possible long term impact on practice will occur.*
- *The indirect benefit on the participants will be that on the long term their participation will contribute to the design of a South African standardised assessment procedure and method which will in turn be utilise to do accurate assessment of prospective foster parents to prevent multi- foster care placements. Thus, the quality of their assessments will be improved ensuring that accurate assessments are done.*

This research will be cardinal in the availing of valuable information that can be utilised by foster care social workers in South Africa. The information contained within the research results and recommendations can be used by foster care social workers to determine important elements that should be addressed in the design and implementation of criteria used to assess prospective foster parents.

This study will offer the participants the opportunity to discuss their practices and voice their opinions regarding critical aspects. This in turn will offer the participants the opportunity to critically evaluate their own practices, to learn from these evaluations and to improve them where necessary and possible.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research?

- *The risks in this study are :*

Dangers/risk	Precautions
<i>Time consuming (prior and during the interview):</i> <i>It will be expected from the participant to compile a portfolio assignment, prior the interview, containing their organisations procedure and method that is being utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents. Furthermore, an interview will take place and will continue for 90 minutes.</i>	<i>The above mentioned will be communicated to the director during the initial contact made through the mediator. The above mentioned details are already stated within the invitation letter/information pamphlet. Thus, the participants will be made aware of the above mentioned.</i>
<i>Boredom:</i> <i>The possibility is there that the participants will experience boredom.</i>	<i>The researcher clearly states that participation within the research study is voluntary. This will be emphasised by the mediator as well during every contact with the organisation. Furthermore, it is also stated within the inclusion criteria that participants must be willing to compile a portfolio assignment and be willing to participate in an interview while being audio recorded. Thus, the participant will be informed with regard to the above mentioned and will be given to opportunity to decide whether or not he/ she wants to participate in the study.</i>
<i>Any other form of discomfort:</i>	<i>In the unlikely event if any other form of discomfort occurs as a direct result of taking part in the research study the participants will be directed to the mediator to discuss the issues that arose.</i>

- *The benefits outweighs the risk*

What will happen in the unlikely event of some form of discomfort occurring as a direct result of your taking part in this research study?

- *Should you have the need for further discussions after the semi- structured interview an opportunity will be arranged to receive clarity on the matters questioned. If any other form of discomfort occurs as a direct result of taking part in the research study the participants will be directed to the mediator to discuss the issues that arose.*

Who will have access to the data?

- Confidentiality will be ensured whereby interviews will be conducted in a private room/office. Furthermore, their names and any identification details will not be published. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in a personal safe and for electronic data it will be password protected. The audio- recordings will be transferred, after each interview, to a password protected computer. Thus, the recorder itself will be wiped clean. This serves as another way to control access to the data and it will also reduce the risk of interviews becoming lost. (As soon as data has been transcribed it will be deleted from the recorders.) Data will be stored for 5 years.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

*No, you will not be paid to take part in the study.
There will be no costs involved for you, if you do take part.*

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Prof. W.J.H. Roestenburg at (018) 285 - 2270 if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 1206. carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

How will you know about the findings?

- *The findings of the research will be shared with you via email.*

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled: A review of best assessment tools utilised during the selection of prospective foster parents

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by person obtaining consent

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of person obtaining consent

.....
Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher

I (*name*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use a interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) on (*date*) 20....

.....
Signature of researcher

.....
Signature of witness

ANNEXURE 3: CONFIDENTIALITY

AGREEMENT WITH THE INDEPENDENT

MEDIATOR

This confidentiality agreement is dated 2016/05/13, and entered into by and between the undersigned parties and Ms Nomcebo Shabalala who shall serve in the capacity of mediator within this research study.

PROJECT TITLE: Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDIATOR:

- To send an information pamphlet to each of the mentioned organisations with a request to respond to the mediator by means of e-mail or telephonic response. If, within a period of three weeks after initiating the project no response is received, the mediator will follow-up each organisation telephonically. Should an organisation not wish to participate at this stage they will be acknowledge and the call will be terminated.
- A list of potential participants will be compiled by the mediator for an individual follow-up.
- The mediator will via e-mail inform the participants about the purpose of the study, the requirements of participation and other relevant information such as the venue, date and time for the interviews to take place. A period between 7 and 14 days will be given for the participants to react on the abovementioned email.
- After the participants have established willingness to participation in this study the mediator will send them a consent form.
- Confirmed participants will be provided with the two descriptive frameworks as well as an introductory document providing exact details of the required preparation for the qualitative interview. They will be given three weeks to prepare these documents and return the completed documents to the researcher.
- Thereafter, and allowing processing time of one week, an appointment for the qualitative interview will be scheduled with each participant. A copy of the questions will be provided to each participant prior to the interview and it will be clarified that the submitted template will be discussed further during the ensuing interview.
- The mediator will also send via e-mail information with regard to the way data will be gathered as well as stored.
- If any form of discomfort occurs as a direct result of taking part in the research study the participants will be directed to the mediator to discuss the issues that arose.

NEUTRALITY: The mediator, Ms Nomcebo Shabalala, will fulfil the role of a neutral mediator during the course of this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information shared with the mediator by relevant organisations will be handled in a confidential manner by the mediator. The mediator will not disclose any information made available to her during the course of or after the completion of this research study.

Signed and agreed on by all parties whose signatures appear below:

Date	Date	Date
2016/05/13	2016/05/13	2016/05/13
Signature of mediator Ms N. Shabalala	Signature of researcher Ms D. Murray	Signature of supervisor Prof. W.J.H. Roestenburg

ANNEXURE 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

PROCEDURES AND METHODS UTILISED BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN GAUTENG DURING THE SELECTION PROCESS OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER PARENTS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Please describe the assessment procedure and method that your organisation is utilising during the selection process of prospective foster parents through anonymising a case study while taking the aspects of cultural diversity and sensitivity into consideration?
2. Is your procedure or method being used as an additional resource to ensure triangulation during the selection process of prospective foster parents?
3. From which theoretical perspective is your organisation working during the implementation of the specific procedure and method?
4. Please explain the manner in which the gathered information will be quantitatively rated and qualitatively interpreted?
5. Please indicate both the strengths and limitations of your organisation's assessment procedure or method that is being utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents?
6. What suggestions with regard to the design of a South African-specific assessment procedure and method can you make?

ANNEXURE 5: DESCRIPTIVE FRAMEWORK (INVITATION)

TO: *Organisation / Department Name*
 Name of contact person
 Position of contact person

FROM: Ms. D. Murray
 MA Student
 MSW in Child Protection
 North West University
 Potchefstroom Campus

DATE: xx/xx/xxxx

SUBJECT: PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

The researcher, Daniëlle Murray, is a social worker practicing within the Department of Social Development, Tshwane Region. She is currently busy with her MSW in Child Protection. The researcher is conducting a MA research study titled: Procedures and methods utilised by social workers within Gauteng during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

The aim of the study is to determine the content of assessment procedures and methods utilised by foster care social workers within Gauteng, as well as to determine and make recommendations with regard to the content of a standardised South African- specific foster care procedure and method to be utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

The researcher hereby humbly requests to make use of at least one, maximum two, foster care social workers in (*name of organisation*) as participants in the study. She furthermore requests to be granted access to your foster care assessment procedure and method that are being utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents. It will be expected from each participant to submit an assignment in preparation of the semi- structured interview:

- Compile a portfolio;
- A copy of their assessment including manuals, documents, protocols, assessment tools and practices that are being utilised in the assessment of prospective foster parents;
- Any reference with regard to the above-mentioned needs to be submitted;

- Anonymize a case study to illustrate how the above mentioned was utilised within their practice.

An in- depth interview of no more than 90 minutes will be conducted with the respected foster care social worker with regard to procedure and method that is being utilised during the selection process of prospective foster parents.

Please note that the participation in this study is in no way compulsory for any organisation or person within that organisation. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary.

The researcher has already submitted her research proposal to the North- West University of Potchefstroom. Approval was granted for the research study (NWU-00012-16-SI). The contribution that (*name of organisation*) will have in data collection will be of immense value and the utmost appreciation. Please feel welcome to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about the research study or if you would like to have more information in order to decide about the participation of (*name of organisation*) in this study.

The research study will be conducted under the supervision of study leader Prof. W.J.H. Roestenburg (*contact details*) who is a lecturer at North West University Potchefstroom under the social work faculty. I herewith would like to seek permission for social workers from your organisation to take part in the study if they wish to do so.

The researchers contact details are as follows:

Contact details:	xx
Email address:	xx
Study leader:	Prof W.J.H. Roestenburg
Contact details:	xx

Thank you for taking the time to consider this application.

xx

Ms. D. Murray
Researcher

xx/xx/xxxx

Date

ANNEXURE 6: CO-CODER REVIEW

REVIEW: CO-CODER: HENRIETTE VAN DER WAL

After reviewing Ms Danielle Murray's data analysis process (her families, codings, themes and some of her diagrams), I noticed that I do agree with the process that she followed and I am quite impressed by her analysis techniques and especially her diagrams. However, I also suggest some recommendations.

Compliance/agreement:

I comply with the way Ms Murray categorised her families (themes) within steps and phases as this makes it easily understandable. I could clearly see which themes and sub-themes fall under which family and I agree with each of these themes and subthemes. Ms Murray's diagrams are set out in the way that I would have set them out and it seems to me that the themes within each diagram are represented correctly. I also agree with her steps and the order thereof (except for documentation).

Differences/recommendations:

As mentioned, I like the fact that she categorised her families/process within steps or rather phases and I do agree with most of these steps. However, I do have some recommendations. It became clear that "documentation" is a strong theme that comes through within most steps of the process and therefore I would have personally taken "documentation" out as a step and rather would include it as a sub-theme within the other steps, as it forms a big part thereof and as it is relevant to most of the categories. Thus her steps would look like this: Step 1: Office interview; Step 2: Investigation; Step 3: Training; etc.

I do understand that "documentation" can be regarded as a step as it comes into play only after the first step "office interview" and therefore I do not totally disagree with it being a step on its own. While we are at "documentation", looking at the code managing of documentation seems a bit confusing. In my opinion there are too many or rather a lot of information (themes) under this main theme (family) making it harder to understand and grasp. Therefore, I would suggest that Ms Murray categorise this category even further into smaller themes and subthemes such as: "Documentation" as main theme/category and then perhaps "documentation during the first step", "documentation during the second step" etc. I would also recommend Ms Murray to categorise documentation within the network manager as one category and then break it up into smaller themes.

When I looked at her coding manager process I also found that the family called "investigation" also had too much or a lot of information which I thought could be categorised even more and broken down into smaller themes and sub-themes for example: Assessments, home investigation, reports, risk factors, etc.

Reviewing her network manager files, I realised that it seemed to differ from their coding, as she did not include her steps or named her categories/networks as steps. I therefore recommend that she name her

networks, categorises and lists them as steps according to how she did it in the coding manager to avoid confusion and ensure consistency.

An indication of how I see the process:



The researcher took note of the abovementioned comments and recommendations of the co-coder and the following could be reported:

Initially, the researcher included 'documentation' as theme 2 (phase 2), but after reconsidering, the researcher removed this theme and incorporated it with other identified themes as recommended by the co-coder.

Based on the recommendations of the co-coder with regard to some themes being too complex – the researcher broke down the main themes into sub-themes to ensure that the reader will understand and grasp what is being stated in a convenient user-friendly manner. Furthermore, the researcher took note of the recommendation of the co-coder with regard to the numbering of the networks. The researcher agreed that this will ensure that there is no confusion.

However, during the writing of the article the researcher identified the need from the data and this lead to changing step 3 to step 2 and step 2 to step 3. Thus, step 2 is presented as prospective foster parents training phase and step 3 is presented as the investigation phase.

Taking the abovementioned co-coder review into consideration the researcher found the feedback of the co-coder to be neutral, specific and meaningful. According to Mouter and Vonk (2012:i) the reliability of coding within qualitative research studies could be verified through utilising a co-coder, also described as an inter-coder.

REFERENCES:

Mouter, N. and Vonk, 2012. Intercoder reliability for qualitative research: You win some, but do you lose some as well? <http://repository.tudelft.nl/assets/uuid:905f391d-4b25-40cf-9292-e253b7e55db2/288162.pdf> Date of access: 3 November 2016.

ANNEXURE 7: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH CO-CODER



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

CONFIDENTIALITY UNDERTAKING

entered into between:

I, the undersigned

Prof / Dr / Mr / Ms MS. HENRIETTE VAN DER WAL

Identity Number: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]

hereby undertake in favor of the **NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY**, a public higher education institution established in terms of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997

Address: Office of the Institutional Registrar, Building C1, 53 Borchard Street,
Potchefstroom, 2520

(hereinafter the "NWU")

1 Interpretation and definitions

1.1 In this undertaking, unless inconsistent with, or otherwise indicated by the context:

1.1.1 "Confidential Information" shall include all information that is confidential in its nature or marked as confidential and shall include any existing and new information obtained by me after the Commencement Date, including but not be limited in its interpretation to, research data, information concerning research participants, all secret knowledge, technical information and specifications, manufacturing techniques, designs, diagrams, instruction manuals, blueprints, electronic artwork, samples, devices, demonstrations, formulae, know-how, intellectual property, information concerning materials, marketing and business information generally, financial information that may include remuneration detail, pay slips, information relating to human capital and employment contract, employment conditions, ledgers, income and expenditures and other materials of whatever description in which the NWU has an interest in being kept confidential; and

1.1.2 "Commencement Date" means the date of signature of this undertaking by myself.

1.2 The headings of clauses are intended for convenience only and shall not affect the interpretation of this undertaking.

2 Preamble

2.1 In performing certain duties requested by the NWU, I will have access to certain Confidential Information provided by the NWU in order to perform the said duties and I agree that it must be kept confidential.

2.2 The NWU has agreed to disclose certain of this Confidential Information and other information to me subject to me agreeing to the terms of confidentiality set out herein.

3 Title to the Confidential Information

I hereby acknowledge that all right, title and interest in and to the Confidential Information vests in the NWU and that I will have no claim of any nature in and to the Confidential Information.

4 Period of confidentiality

The provisions of this undertaking shall begin on the Commencement Date and remain in force indefinitely.

5 Non-disclosure and undertakings

I undertake:

5.1 to maintain the confidentiality of any Confidential Information to which I shall be allowed access by the NWU, whether before or after the Commencement Date of this undertaking. I will not divulge or permit to be divulged to any person any aspect of such Confidential Information otherwise than may be allowed in terms of this undertaking;

5.2 to take all such steps as may be necessary to prevent the Confidential Information falling into the hands of an unauthorised third party;

5.3 not to make use of any of the Confidential Information in the development, manufacture, marketing and/or sale of any goods;

5.4 not to use any research data for publication purposes;

5.5 not to use or disclose or attempt to use or disclose the Confidential Information for any purpose other than performing research purposes only and includes questionnaires, interviews with participants, data gathering, data analysis and personal information of participants/research subjects;

5.6 not to use or attempt to use the Confidential Information in any manner which will cause or be likely to cause injury or loss to a research participant or the NWU; and

5.7 that all documentation furnished to me by the NWU pursuant to this undertaking will remain the property of the NWU and upon the request of the NWU will be returned to the NWU. I shall not make copies of any such documentation without the prior written consent of the NWU.

6 Exception

The above undertakings by myself shall not apply to Confidential Information which I am compelled to disclose in terms of a court order.

7 Jurisdiction

This undertaking shall be governed by South African law be subject to the jurisdiction of South African courts in respect of any dispute flowing from this undertaking.

8 Whole agreement

8.1 This document constitutes the whole of this undertaking to the exclusion of all else.

8.2 No amendment, alteration, addition, variation or consensual cancellation of this undertaking will be valid unless in writing and signed by me and the NWU.

Dated at Potchefstroom this 8 OCTOBER 2016

Witnesses:

1 [Signature]
2 mg du Toit
(Signatures of witnesses)

[Signature]
(Signature)