

**THE UTILISATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY
SOCIAL WORKERS IN FOSTER CARE SUPERVISION**

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INDEX

THE UTILISATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN FOSTER CARE

SUPERVISION I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS II

INDEX III

TABLE LIST V

ILLUSTRATIONS V

ABSTRACT 2

OPSOMMING 3

PREFACE 4

THE UTILISATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN FOSTER CARE

SUPERVISION 5

PROBLEM STATEMENT 5

AIM AND OBJECTIVES 6

 Aim: 6

 Objectives: 7

CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT 7

THEORETICAL REVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY 7

 Origin of Attachment Theory and Major Contributors 7

 Basic assumptions and theoretical constructs 8

 Clinical presentations 10

 Application in the social work field 10

 Attachment therapies 11

 Limitations of the theory 12

METHODOLOGY 12

Empirical study	12
Ethical aspects	14
Limitations	15
RESULTS	16
Demographics	16
Education and years of experience	16
Knowledge and use of theoretical components of Attachment Theory	17
Sources of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory	20
Application (use) of Attachment Theory in foster care supervision	21
Cross reference of Attachment Theory knowledge and use with years of experience	22
Perception and self-evaluation of the application of Attachment Theory components	23
Perception of knowledge through in-practice experience	24
Self-evaluation of in-practice Attachment Theory use	26
In-practice constraints preventing the application of Attachment Theory	28
DISCUSSION	30
RECOMMENDATIONS	34
FINAL REMARKS	34
ANNEXURE A: VOORSKRIFTE AAN OUTEURS / INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS	40
ANNEXURE B: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE	42

Table List

Table 1: Age distribution of the research participants	16
Table 2: Racial distribution of research participants	16
Table 3: Tertiary education of respondents	17
Table 4: Years of experience of the research participants	17
Table 5: Total averages of knowledge and use of Attachment Theory theoretical components	18
Table 6: Cross reference of years of experience and knowledge and use of Attachment Theory	22

Illustrations

Figure 1: Comparison of average Attachment Theory knowledge and use	19
Figure 2: Sources of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory	20
Figure 3: Attachment Theory used in foster care supervision	21
Figure 4: Perception of knowledge of Attachment Theory through 'in practice' experience	25
Figure 5: Self evaluation of 'in practice' use of Attachment Theory	28
Figure 6: 'In practice' constraints that prevent the use of Attachment Theory	30

ABSTRACT

Title: THE UTILISATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN FOSTER CARE SUPERVISION

Attachment Theory and its practical application have re-emerged in recent years as a critical factor in understanding and determining the quality of relationships between the primary caregiver and the child. The reasons for disruptions in foster care placements have also been linked to problems with attachment. Foster care, in turn, has also become more prominent as a placement option in South Africa as we try to deal with the effect of HIV and AIDS on our communities. It would seem that the latest development in the application of Attachment Theory has specific value in assessing, developing and supervising the relationships in out-of-home care such as foster care placements.

In this study the knowledge and application of some of the theoretical components and Attachment Theory of the social workers of Child Welfare Tshwane and their perceptions of their in-practice use thereof were explored. The results suggest that although the social workers knew that the quality of the relationship between the foster parents and the child is predictive of the success of the placement, they lacked the basic knowledge and skill to effectively attend to the attachment between foster parent and child. It seemed that they took more of a common sense approach towards understanding and addressing the attachment between the foster parent and the child. The research indicated that they do not have a sufficient grounding in Attachment Theory to be able to provide effective intervention regarding attachment-based concerns within the foster care context. The results indicate that there is a need to better equip social workers to deal with attachment-related issues they would routinely encounter when doing foster care supervision.

Key terms: foster care, attachment, Attachment Theory

OPSOMMING

Titel: DIE GEBRUIK VAN DIE BINDINGSTEORIE DEUR MAATSKAPLIKE WERKERS IN PLEEGSORGSUPERVISIE

Die Bindingsteorie en die praktiese toepassing daarvan het oor die afgelope jare op die voorgrond getree as 'n kritieke faktor in die bepaling en verbetering van die gehalte van die verhouding tussen die kind en die primêre versorger. Die mislukking van pleegsorgplasinge is ook in verband gebring met bindingsprobleme tussen die pleegouer en die kind. As 'n plasingmoontlikheid het pleegsorg in Suid-Afrika op sy beurt in die stryd om die uitwerking van HIV en Vigs op ons gemeenskappe te bekamp toenemend prominent geword. Dit wil voorkom of die onlangse ontwikkelinge op die gebied van die Bindingsteorie spesifieke toepassingspotensiaal kan inhou vir in die assessering en ontwikkeling van verhoudings binne die konteks van pleegsorgsupervisie.

In hierdie studie is die maatskaplike werkers in diens van Kindersorg Tshwane se kennis en benutting van sommige van die teoretiese komponente van die Bindingsteorie en hul persepsies van hul in-praktykgebruik daarvan ondersoek. Die bevindings toon dat die maatskaplike werkers bewus was daarvan dat die gehalte van die verhouding tussen die pleegouer en die kind 'n aanduiding van die geslaagdheid van die plasing was. Die bevindinge dui daarop dat hulle van intuïtiewe insig rakende binding gebruik gemaak het tydens die assessering en verbetering van pleeggesin-verhoudings. Die werkers het egter nie oor genoeg kennis of vaardighede rakende die Bindingsteorie, beskik om die binding tussen die pleegouer en kind doeltreffend te hanteer nie. Die navorsing toon ook dat daar 'n behoefte is daaraan om die maatskaplike werkers beter op te lei met betrekking tot die Bindingsteorie om probleme rakende binding binne die konteks van pleegsorgsupervisie te hanteer.

Sleutel terme: pleegsorg, binding, Bindingsteorie.

PREFACE

This manuscript is presented in article format in accordance with Rule A.13.7.3 as set out in the Calendar of the North-West University. The manuscript is a mini-dissertation and a partial requirement for the structured MA (Social Work) degree in forensic practice. The content and technical requirements of *Social Work / Maatskaplike Werk* (see ANNEXURE A) were used as a basis for preparing the manuscript.

THE UTILISATION OF ATTACHMENT THEORY BY SOCIAL WORKERS IN FOSTER CARE SUPERVISION

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Children entering the foster care system often experience attachment difficulties due to exposure to traumatic experiences while in the care of their parents or other caregivers prior to their removal (Harden, 2004:11; Howe *et al.*, 1999:62; May, 2005:81). These children later present behavioural difficulties which could range from mild to severe and could include psychological diagnoses such as oppositional defiant disorder, hyperactivity, depression, eating disorders, etc (Harden, 2004:14; May, 2005:83; Sheperis, 2003:32). Foster care is defined as “The nursing or rearing of a child by a person or persons other than its natural parents” (Pratt, 1968:123). Children in foster care also have a higher prevalence of developmental delays and school-related problems which make them more demanding on the resources of the foster parents (Doggett *et al.*, 2003:106; Sheperis, 2003:33).

Many of these placements eventually collapse because the underlying issues which lead these children to form ineffective attachment patterns and associated effects thereof, were not addressed (Green, 2003:209; Harden, 2004:35). The increased risk of placement disruption has been positively linked to problems with attachment (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2001). Since the development of Attachment Theory by Bowlby (1969), many subsequent theories and applications related to attachment between parents and children have developed. In recent years Attachment Theory has undergone a renaissance and has been applied and researched in the social work field of foster care and adoption (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:139).

Research done by Stone and Stone (1983) and Pardeck (1984), quoted by Chamberlain *et al.*, (2001:201), on foster care placement indicates that “system level contextual factors such as degree of contact, rapport building, energy expended by the case worker, the foster parents’ positive relationship with the supporting agency and case worker’s continuity were associated

with increased placement stability". From this information it could be stated that the quality of the case workers' inputs in the case and organisational factors, impact on the foster placement. It could then further be argued that a better understanding of attachment-related issues of the social worker dealing with foster placements and supervision may then also have a positive impact on placement stability.

From this bulging field of information the question arose as to whether the social workers in the field are aware of these new insights and whether they consider issues related to attachment when placing children in alternative care. Associated with this is the question whether or not social workers are equipped with the foundational concepts of Attachment Theory. Haight *et al.*, (2003) holds that "understanding several aspects of attachment relationships can guide social workers to developmentally and culturally sensitive practice, as well as provide a foundation for recognising problems in attachment relationships". It would seem that a gap currently exist regarding the impact that Attachment Theory could have on the social work field and especially on the placement outcomes of children in foster care.

The researcher postulates that having adequate knowledge of Attachment Theory and the ability to apply this knowledge in practice, i.e. facilitating the formation of secure attachments between foster parent and child, may have a positive impact on the success of these foster care placements in the long run. Attachment Theory and its possible uses in foster care supervision are however in the view of the researcher, not generally known by social workers in Child Welfare Tshwane.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

In this study the researcher therefore aimed at exploring what social workers' knowledge and practical application regarding the components of Attachment Theory actually were and what they perceived their knowledge and use in practice to be in the context of foster care supervision. The researcher anticipated to find a low score of the knowledge and application of the theoretical components but a higher score of their self-evaluation of in-practice knowledge and use of Attachment Theory.

Objectives:

- To explore the sources of their knowledge from their educational and training background.
- To explore their utilization of the theoretical components of Attachment Theory during foster care services.
- To explore practice constraints that prevents the use of Attachment Theory.

CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Social workers currently doing foster care supervision, employed at Child Welfare Tshwane, do not have adequate knowledge of Attachment Theory nor do they apply this knowledge in practice.

THEORETICAL REVIEW OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Origin of Attachment Theory and Major Contributors

Attachment Theory was originally developed by John Bowlby as an off-branch of psychoanalytic theory (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:139) during the 1950s and 1960s (Bowlby, 1969). He described the formation of the bond between a mother and an infant and the significance this bond has, in terms of the lasting impact of this bond on the life of the child, and on a larger scale, the survival of the human species. Bowlby conceptualises attachment as a biological drive towards specie survival. He theorised that attachment to a primary care giver (mother) provided protection from predators and a safe environment for the infant to explore the world. In doing so he revolutionised thinking about a child's tie to a caregiver and the effects of disruption through separation and deprivation (Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment theory was extended and its concepts refined by various contributors such as Ainsworth, Belhar, Waters and Wall (1978) who took Bowlby's theory and developed it further and made it more applicable by categorising attachment relationships as secure and insecure and thus formulating the concept of **attachment patterns**. They also identified two patterns of attachment, namely insecure-avoidant and insecure-ambivalent patterns. They also developed the 'strange situation' as an assessment method to determine the attachment patterns of a child (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:139).

Belsky and Nezworski (1988) and Sroufe (1988) also contributed by describing the correlation between the quality of care that the infant received and the quality of the attachment relationship between the child and care giver. This became a basic assumption within the theory. In this study the phrase Attachment Theory is used to refer to the larger theoretical body of knowledge associated with developments in the field of attachment and not only to the work of the above-mentioned contributors. "Attachment theory is continually evolving in the light of new research" (Department of community services, NSW, 2006:2); therefore it would not be possible to give an overview of all the concepts of this theory in this article. What follows is a discussion on the key theoretical components used in this research paper.

Basic assumptions and theoretical constructs

Attachment could be defined as the "enduring emotional bond that exists between a child and a primary caregiver, who could be a biological parent or an unrelated caregiver" (Sheperis *et al.*, 2003:13; Harden, 2004:31). Bowlby suggested that attachment had a protective and instructive function where the mother kept the infant close for protection in the presence of danger but when in the absence of danger the infant used the mother as a secure base from which to explore the world (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:139-140). The interaction between the mother or primary caregiver and child formed the basic expectation of the child of other relationships and its place in the world.

The need to attach is a universal occurrence (Harden, 2004:30). How these attachments are formed and what qualities are deemed important is influenced by the values of a specific culture (Haight *et al.*, 2003:196-201). Most of the research on attachment has been done with Western European samples and scholars have indicated the need to research attachment presentations in non-Western cultures and that cultural differences are under-represented in the body of knowledge regarding attachment (Haight *et al.*, 2003:201). Research has indicated that adequate attachments are needed for healthy development (Haight *et al.*, 2003:195). Attachment formation occurs in the infant from birth to about 18 months. By 24 months the child would have established his or her attachment pattern and would have come to some conclusion of self and the world either as positive or negative (Haight *et al.*, 2003:198).

If these interactions were good and the child had received attentive and concerned care the child would form a **secure attachment**. This secure attachment is characterised by a sense of belonging and intimacy, emotional security and safety when the child is in the presence of the primary carer (Harden, 2004:31; Peluso *et al.*, 2004:140).

In contrast, an **insecure attachment** is formed where there was some disturbance in the

interaction between carer and child such as illness, adverse circumstance or neglect. The child then does not experience a sense of emotional security and belonging and it has a negative influence on the way they perceive themselves and the world at large. These negative perceptions may persist into adulthood (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:140). Three insecure attachment patterns have initially been identified.

The **insecure-avoidant** attachment pattern – these children display withdrawal from the caregiver, low need for physical contact and seem emotionally distant. Their caregivers often display feelings of anger and annoyance towards the child (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:140). **Insecure ambivalent** – this attachment pattern forms in the presence of inconsistent and unresponsive care where the child remains uncertain with regard to the caregiver's reaction. The child experiences internal conflict regarding the availability and care of the parent. These children show "inhibited exploration and the pre-occupation with self-protection while showing increased recklessness and accident proneness" (Lieberman & Pawl, 1988; Sroufe, 1988 in Peluso *et al.*, 2004:140). A fourth attachment pattern, **insecure-disorganised**, was later described by Sagi *et al.*, (1994) whereby a child is unable to form a predictive expectation of the carer's interaction where the carer has displayed frightened or frightening interactions with the child. This pattern has been shown to be prevalent among children who have been exposed to severe neglect and abuse (Haight *et al.*, 2003:202).

Another attachment pattern that has emerged more recently in literature is **insecure-indiscriminate** attachment. In this pattern the child had experienced several primary carers during infancy and had failed to form a significant attachment with any of them. Indiscriminate attachment has been linked to reactive attachment disorder (Newman & Mares, 2007:344). Their relational patterns are superficial and usually short-lived. Young children in the foster care system are particularly vulnerable to the formation of this attachment pattern.

By the age of three years a child would have internalised and established his or her attachment pattern. These internalised expectations are then transferred to relationships and form a blueprint for future interactions. This experience of self and the world stabilise and an **internal working model** is established (Ackerman & Dozier, 2005:508; May, 2005:82). This model will "shape an individuals behaviour, affect, ideas about self, others and relationships along the lifespan" (Howe *et al.*, 1999:49; Peluso *et al.*, 2004:141). The attachment patterns of a young child could be determined by the '**strange situation**' which is an observational assessment method first developed by Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) and has been tested extensively (Goossens *et al.*, 1986:23-32; Harden *et al.*, 1999:48). An acceptable standardised assessment method for older children and adolescents has not yet been established (Sheperis *et al.*, 2003; Newman &

Mares, 2007). A battery of a number of psychological tests such as the Child Behaviour Check List developed by Achenbach (1991), Reactive Attachment Disorder Check List (Minnis *et al.*, 2006:336-342) and others along with clinical and in-home observations are usually employed to assess older children's attachment patterns.

These are tests social workers may not perform and seldom have access to. This complicates the effective identification of attachment disorder. The researcher is of opinion that adequate knowledge of Attachment Theory would enable social workers to at least become sensitive to the attachment needs of the client and to adapt services to the family accordingly.

Clinical presentations

The clinical presentation of children with Attachment difficulties vary in range from mild to severe. Indications of their attachment-based problems are often manifested in their behaviour which could lead to these children being labelled naughty, uncontrollable and 'hard to place'. Maltreated children with attachment difficulties may present as impulsive, with low self-esteem, emotional instability, poor school performance, difficulty with abstract concepts and poor conscience development (May, 2005:81).

Severe attachment difficulties could be diagnosed based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV, Text Revised (Newman & Mares, 2007:343) as having reactive attachment disorder (RAD). The disorder is defined as "markedly disturbed and developmentally inappropriate social relatedness in most context and begin before age 5 years and is associated with grossly pathological care" (DSM-IV-TR, 2004). Sheperis et al (2003:291) and Newman and Mares (2007:343-345) elaborate on the difficulty in diagnosing reactive attachment disorder, arguing that although attachment disorders are acknowledged, a standardised evaluation tool is yet to be developed to aid in effective and time sensitive diagnosis. It is generally accepted that RAD in children is over diagnosed and is thought to be uncommon (Newman & Mares, 2007:343-345). Such a diagnosis is equally uncommon in the current social work service field at Child Welfare Tshwane, but undoubtedly children with this disorder would be present but largely unidentified in foster care caseloads. Children who "display over-vigilant or overly compliant behaviour and show indiscriminate connection to every adult or do not demonstrate attachment behaviour" (Harden, 2004:35) could also indicate attachment-related problems.

Application in the social work field

Attachment theory holds specific application potential in social work services to children. It has

bearing on child protective services and alternative care situations such as foster care, institutionalised care and adoptions by providing a framework of understanding and evaluating parent-child relationships. Attachment Theory concepts “help to explain why children who had a poor start to relationships with others, or who have experienced seriously disrupted care, often behave in very troubling ways while in care” (Department of Community Services, NSW, 2006:1).

Placement disruptions have been linked to attachment difficulties (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2001:200). Children in foster care have been exposed to adverse circumstances such as poverty, maltreatment and the removal from parental care, which has been linked to an array of developmental stumbling blocks including inadequate social skills, poor physical and mental health and attachment disorders (Harden, 2004:30). Research also suggests that children in foster care are more likely to display insecure and disorganised attachments than non-foster children (Harden, 2004:34-37) and that placement instability has been associated with negative developmental outcomes. It has also been established that positive stable and warm home environments have had a positive effect on foster children where it has “lessened the effects of the harmful experiences by exposing them to protective factors that can promote resilience” (Harden, 2004:35; Haight *et al.*, 2003:197). Children with attachment difficulties have been able to “develop positive attachment relationships with new and sensitive caregivers” (Department of Community Services NSW, 2006:7).

The need for sensitive social work supervision and support to foster care placements has also been underscored in literature. Harden (2004, 37-38) indicated that placement stability was influenced by the case worker-foster parent relationship and that welfare agencies have fulfilled an important role in ensuring that the child’s individual needs are met (Stone and Stone, 1983; Harden, 2004:42). A noteworthy finding of current research is that it seems possible to “maintain contact with the birth parents without compromising the developments of new attachments while in foster care” (Howes *et al.*, 1999:671-687, in Department of Community Services NSW, 2006:4). Findings such as these could make a difference in the way contact with the biological parents are viewed in foster care supervision and could strengthen the argument for current training on Attachment Theory. A comprehensive service, attending to the child and foster parent attachment needs and providing adequate support has the potential to enrich the foster care experience and could mitigate the occurrence of placement collapse.

Attachment therapies

Attachment therapies attempt to address the problematic behaviour of a child by improving the

attachment relationship between the primary caregiver and child. "Such therapies seek to repair a break in the need cycle by confronting the child, identifying and breaking down psychological defences and repairing the trust of the child through a combination of holding and nurturing touch" (Attach, 2004 in Barth *et al.*, 2005:260). These therapies take on different approaches and convergences of various modalities such as Theraplay that combine play therapy with attachment principles (Jenberg & Booth, 2005) and Family Attachment Narrative Therapy that also uses narratives as part of the therapeutic process (May, 2005:81-99).

Holding therapy is one of the more known attachment therapies but has come under increasing criticism for its seemingly 'coercive and forceful' holding of the child (Barth *et al.*, 2005; 260; Newman & Mares, 2007:345-346). Scholars recognise that attachment therapies have been found to be effective in altering parental sensitivity and behavioural symptoms in infants and young children (Velderman *et al.*, 2006 in Newman & Mares, 2007:345-346).

Limitations of the theory

Attachment Theory and the application thereof has come under scrutiny of other schools of thought in psychology, which argue that Attachment Theory and especially Attachment Therapy, has become an umbrella term to diagnose and treat behaviour that could also be understood from different frameworks (Barth *et al.*, 2005:265). They also argue that the application of Attachment Theory in the child services field has outpaced the theoretical and empirical support for these interventions (Barth *et al.*, 2005:257). It would seem that Attachment Theory could identify and address an array of behaviour among the children social workers routinely deal with and it may be tempting to interpret all these symptoms in terms of attachment. The researcher cautions not to see Attachment Theory as a 'silver bullet' to change barely functioning foster placements into havens of emotional security over night but it can offer valuable insight into the family dynamics present and lead to more sensitive service delivery.

METHODOLOGY

Empirical study

A survey of the knowledge and practical application of social workers regarding Attachment Theory in foster care supervision is at the core of this research project. The following methodological parameters were decided on for the completion of the study:

Research design

The student embarked on a quantitative-descriptive (survey) design usually associated with quantitative research methodology (Fouché & De Vos, 2005:137). The purpose of this study is to establish what the social workers know and how they apply this knowledge in foster care supervision through their training and in-practice experience. In order to do so the researcher tapped into the thinking of the social workers by administering a questionnaire related to the topic.

Measuring instrument and data collection

Delport (2005:168) mentions that the researcher conducting a survey could make use of a questionnaire for data collection. The researcher developed a four-part questionnaire that captured the demographic description, training background, theoretical components of Attachment Theory and the social workers' experiences related to attachment in foster placements (see Annexure B). The researcher did a survey among social workers on the research topic. Babbie and Mouton (2005:232) describe a survey as one of the best methods to collect original information from a population "which is too large to observe directly".

The researcher decided to utilise telephonic interviews due to its cost efficiency and the availability and accessibility of the research respondents. The respondents were located at various community-based offices across the Tshwane Metropolitan area which made the logistics to complete face to face interviews impractical. The interviews stretched across two days and seventeen respondents were accessed from all of Child Welfare Tshwane's community-based offices.

Sampling and criteria for research participants

The researcher used the non-probability purposive sampling method to select the research participants; which is described by Singleton *et al.*, (1988) in Strydom (2005:202) "This type of sample is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attribute of the population".

Arkava and Lane (1983:27), as quoted by Strydom (2005:193), describe a 'universe' as "referring to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested". A total of 38 social workers were employed by Child Welfare Tshwane which comprised the universe of potential participants. The researcher identified all the social workers in Child Welfare Tshwane who dealt with foster care placement supervision and assessment as

candidates for the research. Eighteen of these social workers work directly with the placement and supervision of children in foster care, thus 45% of the entire population of social workers employed at the organisation and 94% of those who work directly with placing children in foster care were accessed in the study. This included three social workers in residential care facilities, four social workers doing therapy and assessments and ten foster care supervision workers.

Reliability and validity

Issues related to reliability and validity (Babbie & Mouton, 2005:119) were addressed through carefully operationalising the variables gathered from other literature sources so as to remain scientific. The questionnaire was given to the manager and supervisor of the Therapy Unit to give feedback on the content with specific reference to the questions pertaining to the field experience of the social workers. The research project was piloted and adjustments were made to the questionnaire to rectify the problem areas that were identified.

The researcher built the triangulation of measures, described by Neuman (2000) in De Vos (2005:362) as “multiple measures of the same phenomenon”, into the questionnaire. The respondents’ theoretical knowledge and application regarding Attachment Theory was measured and followed up with a measurement of a self-evaluation of in-practice-based statements regarding their knowledge and use of Attachment Theory.

Data processing

Kruger *et al.*, (2005:218), quoting Kerlinger, describes data analysis as “the categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising of data to obtain answers to research questions. The purpose of analysis is to reduce data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relations of research problems can be studied tested and conclusions drawn.” The questionnaire was developed within the parameters of the data analysis software for easy capturing and processing. The researcher made use of a computerised data analysis programme to do the initial data processing. The statistical processing was done by Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University and further processed by a privately hired research psychologist. The results are visually represented in tables and graphs for further interpretation in the light of the current academic discourses.

Ethical aspects

The goal of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed as a result of your research activities (Bak, 2005:28). The following ethical considerations were taken into account in

conducting the research:

The research design, implementation and reporting of findings complied with the North-West University's guidelines for ethical research. (Ethics Committee, reference number: NWU-00037-07-S7)

The researcher approached Child Welfare Tshwane in order to negotiate with them for permission to use their employees during company hours for conducting this research. The research proposal was also submitted to them for their approval.

- The participants were requested to give verbal consent after the standard consent form of the Ethics Committee of the North-West University according to the MNR –Guidelines regarding Ethical Principles in Medical Research, Revised Edition (2002) had been read to them as part of the telephonic interview.

Limitations

The population selection (only social workers from Child Welfare Tshwane) and sample size (n=17) may have negatively impacted on the validity of the study. The researcher was limited by time and accessibility constraints; therefore had to make some sacrifices in the ability to generalise the results of the study. A more representative sample reflecting the larger social work population may have yielded different results. The group of social workers who had 0-3 years of experience were also over-represented in the sample. This phenomenon reflects an organisational constraint within Child Welfare Tshwane which might not be applicable to all other welfare organisations. The data collection method of telephonic interviews posed a further difficulty. Some of the respondents found it difficult to recognise some of the terminology of the theoretical component of Attachment Theory and a face-to-face interview may have presented less constraints. The researcher compensated for this limitation by conducting the interviews herself, which made it possible to adapt the pace of the interview and clarify the questions to the respondents in order to facilitate accurate data collection.

The study also researched the perceptions of the social workers regarding their knowledge and use of Attachment Theory but their actual in-practice use was not independently assessed as a control measure. This constraint was addressed to a certain extent by triangulating the theoretical component of 'knowledge' and 'use' with the 'in-practice' statements concerning the respondents' knowledge and use of Attachment Theory. It also seemed that the respondents over-estimated their own knowledge and use of Attachment Theory in the self-evaluation questions, which led to large discrepancies between the theoretical component questions and

the self-evaluation statement scores.

RESULTS

The research results are discussed with reference to the demographic description, educational and experiential background of respondents, knowledge and use of the theoretical components and self-evaluation of application of Attachment Theory.

Demographics

Table 1: Age distribution of the research participants

	Mean	Min.	Max.
Age (n=17)	36	22	65

The respondents were selected from the staff of Child Welfare Tshwane who is directly delivering social work services to foster care placements in the Greater Tshwane Metropolitan area. A total of 17 respondents were accessed from the possible 18 respondents identified. All the respondents were women and they ranged in age from 22 to 65 years with a mean age of 36 years. The respondents represented nine of the ten community-based offices and residential facilities of operation of the organisation. The areas included Atteridgeville (12%), Bramley Children's Home (12%), Centurion (6%), Eersterust (12%), Elandspoor (12%), Itumeleng shelter for street children (6%), Mamelodi (12%), Olivenhoutbosch (6%) and the Therapy Unit (24%). The racial distribution reflected that of the organisation at large and that of the communities the organisation serviced. The black population group had the highest representation (53%) in the study.

Table 2: Racial distribution of research participants

Race (n=17)	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
Percentage	53	6	6	35

Education and years of experience

The education and years of experience of the respondents had significance in the study, since this was identified as possible sources of information regarding Attachment Theory. In South Africa, legislation dictates that a four-year university degree or a three-year degree with an

Honours Degree is a requirement to practise as a social worker. Ninety four percent (94%) of the respondents were university graduates and 24% had completed post-graduate studies. There was one respondent (6%) who had not yet graduated. A total of 41% reported that they had received post qualification training regarding Attachment Theory.

Table 3: Tertiary education of respondents

Research Participants (n=17)	Under-graduate	Graduate	Post-graduate	Training included Attachment Theory
Percentage	6	94	24	41

Nine universities were represented in the study, which comprised of the University of South Africa (UNISA) (29%), University of Pretoria (24%), Huguenot College (12%), University of the Free State (6%), University of Johannesburg (6%), University of Limpopo (6%), University of KwaZulu-Natal (6%), University of the North (6%) and Venda University (6%).

The group of respondents that had between nought and three years of experience as social workers was over-represented in the sample (59%). Child Welfare Tshwane has experienced a high turnover of staff in that the more experienced social workers had been lured away by Government departments and the private sector.

Table 4: Years of experience of the research participants

Experience	1-3 Years	4-6 Years	7-9 Years	10-12 Years	12<
Social work experience	59%	6%	6%	12%	18%
Foster care experience	82%	12%	6%	0%	0%

There has also been a shortage of experienced social workers in the pool of applicants who left the organisation in the position of hiring newly qualified workers. The group of respondents who had between nought and three years of experience in the foster care field was again over-represented in the sample (82%). There were no respondents with more than nine years of experience in foster care. The statistics reveal a disturbing trend within the workforce, namely that those social workers whom are responsible for foster care supervision seem to be younger and to have less experience. The effect a young and inexperienced work force would have on the quality of foster care supervision services is yet to be seen.

Knowledge and use of theoretical components of Attachment Theory

The researcher postulated that the social workers do not have enough knowledge regarding

Attachment Theory, although they might be under the impression that they do. Therefore they might have evaluated their knowledge and use of Attachment Theory higher than their theoretical knowledge score would be. The data supported the expected outcome of a low theoretical knowledge and use of Attachment Theory and a higher measure of their self-evaluation of in-practice knowledge and use.

The researcher identified eleven key words and concepts associated with Attachment Theory, namely John Bowlby, Attachment Theory, strange situation, attachment pattern, secure attachment, insecure attachment, avoidant attachment pattern, ambivalent attachment pattern, disorganised attachment pattern, indiscriminate attachment pattern and attachment therapy (see theoretical review for term descriptions). The respondents were then asked whether they are familiar with these terms and in which context they became familiar with them – either in university social work, university psychology, post-qualification training or in-practice experience. Referring to the same key concepts, they were asked where they had used them in foster care supervision – either in foster care screening, supervision visits, placement assessment, report writing or panel discussions.

An average was then calculated for each one of the Attachment Theory terms or concepts across the two axes of knowledge and use. The results yielded lower than expected scores with the total average of ‘Knowledge of theoretical components of Attachment Theory’ being only 24%, and the total average of ‘Attachment Theory use’ was 20%.

Table 5: Total averages of knowledge and use of Attachment Theory theoretical components

Theoretical components	Average knowledge	Average use
Percentage	24%	20%

The most commonly known and used component was the term ‘Attachment Theory’ (Knowledge=38%, Use= 43%) followed by the component ‘insecure attachment’ (Knowledge=35%, Use= 26%). The third most known and used component was ‘attachment therapy’ (Knowledge=25%, Use= 30%). The lowest scoring components were ‘indiscriminate attachment’ (Knowledge=18%, Use= 10%), and the ‘strange situation’ (Knowledge=7%, Use=1%). The remaining components ranged between 18% and 31% for knowledge and between 15% and 30% for use.

The low percentage scores across all the variables indicate that Attachment Theory may not be well known or used among the social workers of Child Welfare Tshwane. The components

which referred to more advanced concepts of Attachment Theory such as the 'strange situation', avoidant, ambivalent, disorganised and indiscriminate were lower scoring on both the knowledge and use axes which suggests that the respondents do not have a workable understanding of what Attachment Theory entails.

Figure 1: Comparison of average Attachment Theory knowledge and use

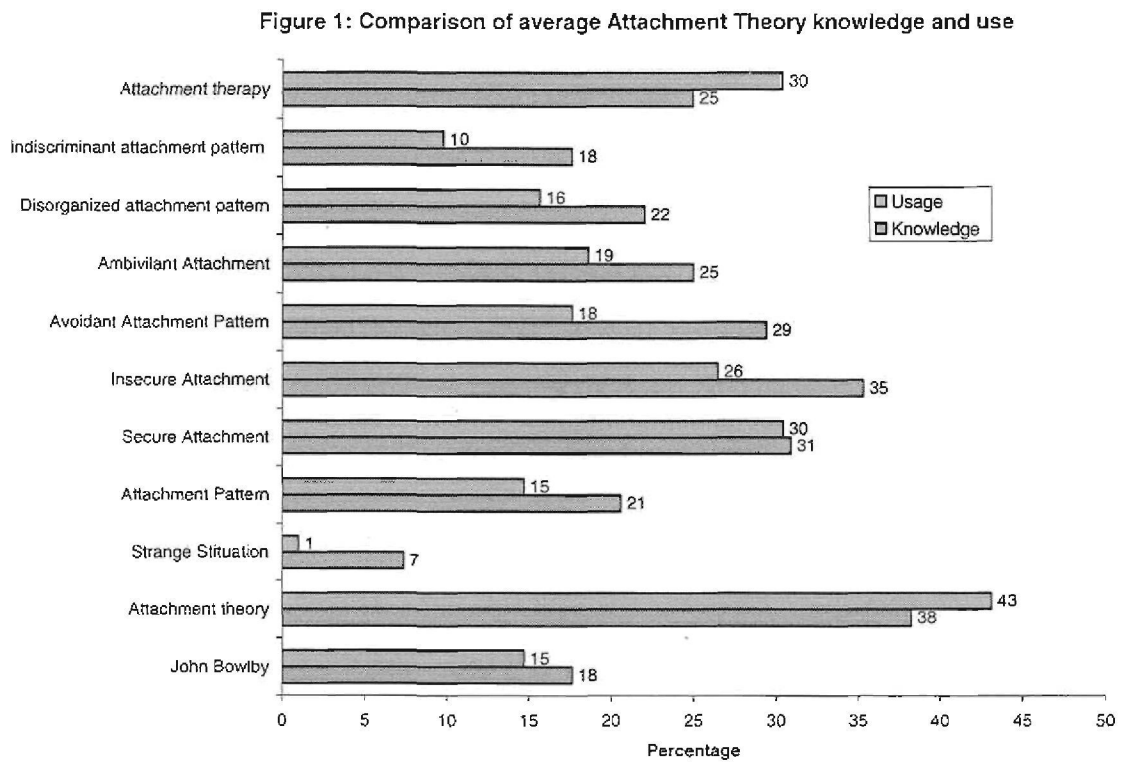
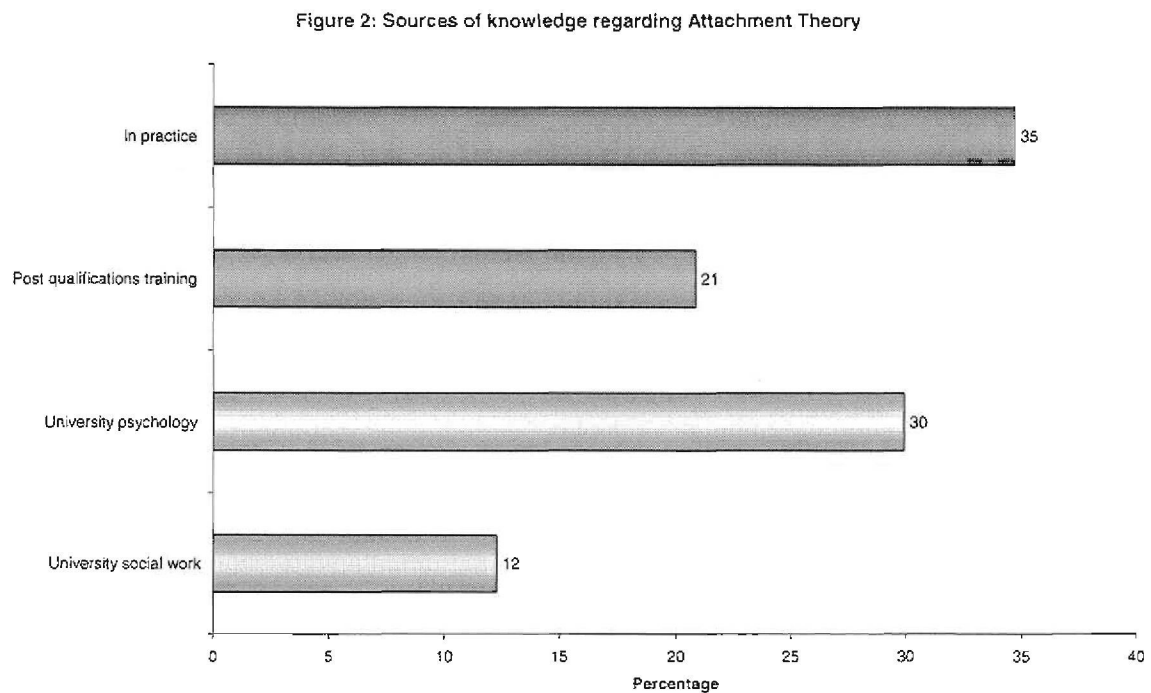


Figure 2: Sources of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory



Sources of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory

The study explored the respondents' exposure to Attachment Theory from four possible sources namely in-practice exposure, post-qualification training, university psychology and university social work graduate level studies. Most of the respondents identified in-practice experience (35%) as their main source of information regarding Attachment Theory. This is cause for concern since most of the respondents in this sample have three years of experience or less. The second source of information identified was from university psychology (30%) followed by post-qualification training (21%) which is usually left to the discretion of the individual to choose which training courses he/she is interested in. Their interests may or may not lie with attachment-related issues and therefore this source of information would not necessarily be the most effective way of training the larger social work population on Attachment Theory.

Social work graduate studies were the lowest scoring source of information (12%), indicating that Attachment Theory possibly does not receive much attention in the social work curriculum. The importance of Attachment Theory within the social work context, especially foster care, has been established by recent research done in this field (Haight *et al.*, 2003; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2001; Sheperis *et al.*, 2003; Harden, 2004; Howe *et al.*, 1999 & Department of community services NSW, 2006). From the current academic discourse it could be argued that the ability to

evaluate and address attachment difficulties within foster care placements is necessary for effective service delivery even at the first-time entry into practice.

Application (use) of Attachment Theory in foster care supervision

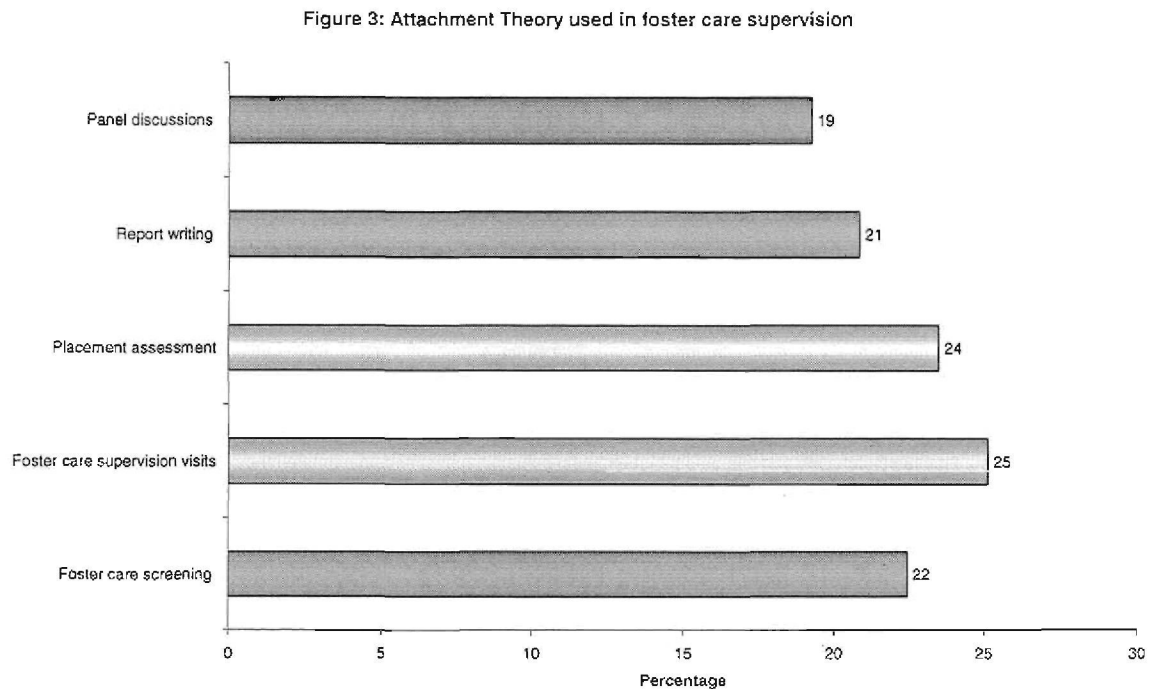
The researcher arranged foster care supervision in five categories in which Attachment Theory could be used, namely:

'Foster care screening' – the process of selecting prospective foster parents and matching of foster children.

- 'Foster care supervision visits' – regular in-home contact where the placement is monitored.
- 'Placement assessment' – the mandatory two-year revision of the physical conditions, social and emotional wellness of the foster parents and child in order to renew the Children's Court order.
- 'Report writing' – writing of Article 16(2) reports to the Department of Social Development, or any other reports, i.e. assessment reports.
- 'Panel discussions' – forums where the Foster Care placement is discussed to facilitate decision making.

The measured scores were very low and ranged between 19% and 25%, with 'foster care supervision visits' measuring the highest score of 25%. 'Placement assessment' scored 24%. The research indicated that Attachment Theory is least used in 'panel discussions' (19%). From these measurements it could be concluded that Attachment Theory were in general not used in any of the researched application areas. The presence of attachment-related issues within the case loads of these social workers seemed to be largely unnoticed and the attachment needs of the children, as identified in Attachment Theory, were not taken into consideration in critical foster care supervision activities.

Figure 3: Attachment Theory used in foster care supervision



Cross reference of Attachment Theory knowledge and use with years of experience

The data indicated that there might be a correlation between years of experience and the knowledge and use regarding Attachment Theory. These variables were cross referenced with the following result description.

Table 6: Cross reference of years of experience and knowledge and use of Attachment Theory

Experience	0-3 Years=10		4-6 Years=1		7-9 Years=1		10-12 Years=2		12< Years=3	
n=17										
Attachment Theory	Know	Use	Know	Use	Know	Use	Know	Use	Know	Use
Percentage	26%	10%	21%	17%	0%	0%	48%	49%	30%	42%

The cross reference between years of experience and the respondents' knowledge and use of Attachment Theory revealed that there is a positive correlation between years of experience and their knowledge and use of Attachment Theory. The higher the number of years of

experience the higher the score of their knowledge and use. The respondents with between 10 and 12 years of experience scored 48% for knowledge and 49% for use which was the highest among all the categories measured. The lowest score measured was for the group 7-9 years which had one respondent that fell within this category. This respondent mentioned in her interview that she had not been trained in any of the theoretical components of Attachment Theory.

The differences between the knowledge and use measurement also yielded significant data. Among the 0-3 years of experience group, their Knowledge component (26%) measured 16% higher than their use measure (10%). This might indicate that this group which had graduated recently had more theoretical knowledge transferred but lacked in application due to less field experience. The difference between their knowledge (21%) and their use (17%) decreased to 4% in the group with 4-6 years of experience. The discrepancy between their knowledge and use measurement decreased but the total scores remained in the lower percentage range. This could indicate that they are still ill equipped to assess and address attachment-based issues.

In the group between 10 and 12 years of experience the difference between their knowledge component (48%) and their use component was 1% with their use exceeding their knowledge. This group tested highest in post-qualification training, which may account for their higher knowledge score and they may have sufficient field experience to value the importance of attachment-related issues within the field of social work. The difference between the knowledge (30%) and the use component (42%) of 12% among the 12+ group, with their use again exceeding their knowledge, indicates that their theoretical knowledge may have stagnated while their use of what they did know increased. It should be noted that the actual years of experience of this group all exceeded 22 years of social work experience and the questionnaire did not make provision for categories exceeding 12 years.

Perception and self-evaluation of the application of Attachment Theory components

The respondents were asked to comment on whether they agreed, were not sure or disagree on a given statement reflecting their personal experience and opinion regarding real-life foster care situations where Attachment Theory components and attachment-related issues were present. These questions were asked to measure their in-practice use of Attachment Theory where knowledge of the specific wording such as “disorganised attachment” was not important. The measurements were again taken across the axes of ‘knowledge’ and ‘use’ of Attachment Theory in-practice experience (see items 4.1-4.16 of the questionnaire). A third measurement

was taken of the respondents' views of practice constraints which prevent the use of Attachment Theory.

Perception of knowledge through in-practice experience

(See items 4.1; 4.4; 4.5; 4.6; 4.12; 4.13; 4.14 of the questionnaire.)

Knowledge of Attachment Theory:

Fifty three percent (53%) of the respondents reported that they did not have enough knowledge of Attachment Theory and 24% reported that they were unsure. Only 24% were satisfied with their level of knowledge of Attachment Theory. The average score of the knowledge of Attachment Theory was 24%, which suggests that some of the respondents held an inflated view of their knowledge of Attachment Theory.

Attachment forms naturally between a foster parent and a child:

Forty seven percent (47%) disagreed with this statement, while 35% of participants were unsure and 18% agreed. Current research suggests that attachments does form naturally- "all children will form some attachment regardless of the depravity of the environment" (Peluso *et al.*, 2004:140). The attachment that does form may not necessarily be secure. The attachment between a foster parent and a child is more at risk of being insecure due to various negative factors that may have an influence such as familial instability, prior abuse and parental substance abuse (Harden, 2004:35). The response to this question again indicates the lack of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory.

Attachment does not play a role in the foster placement outcome:

Eighty two percent (82 %) disagreed with this statement. The influence of the attachment between the foster parent and the child on the outcome of foster placements is well documented. Insecure attachments between the foster parent and child have been positively linked to placement breakdown (Green, 2003:209; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2001:200). The respondents displayed insight into the influence of attachment on a foster placement. This insight does not seem to be grounded in their knowledge of Attachment Theory but may rather indicate a 'common sense' approach when responding to the research questions.

The younger the age of the child at the time of the placement the better the attachment:

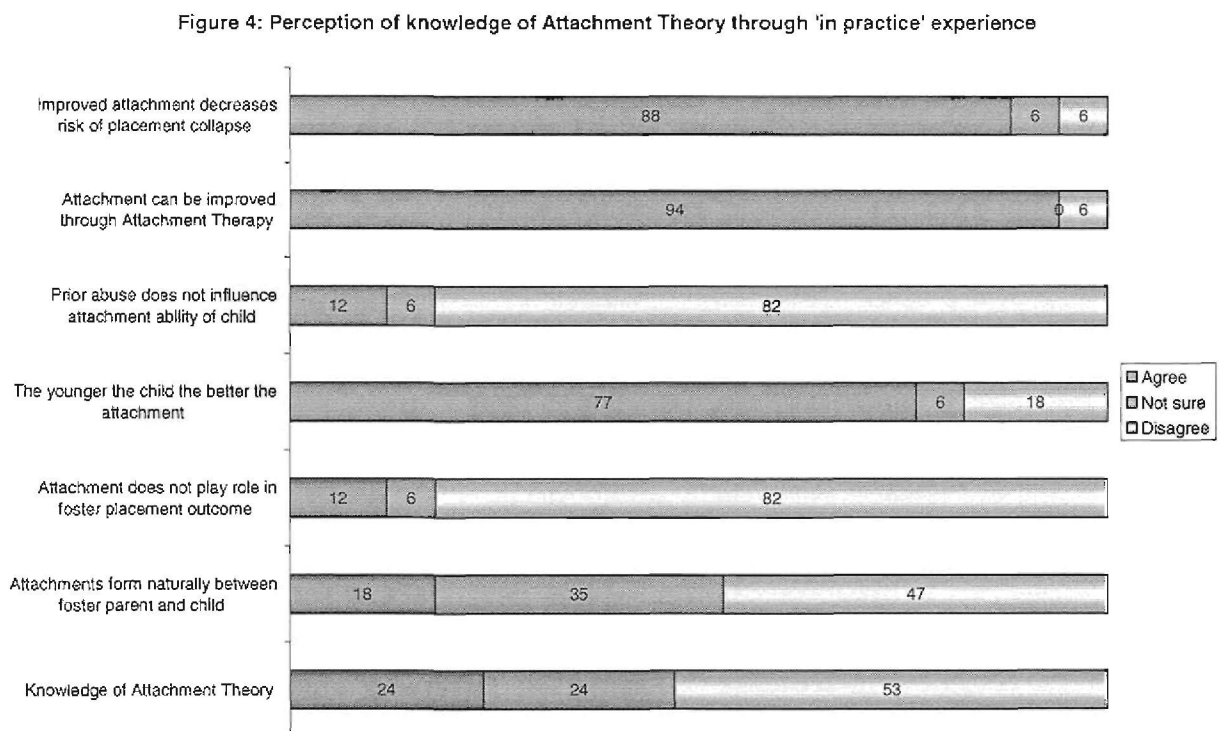
Seventy six percent (76%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. Although younger children do attach more easily, their young age is not the only predictor of a secure attachment.

Haight, Kagel and Black (2003:195) reflect on Crittenden and Ainsworth (1989) in Cicchetti and Carlson (1998) who found that attachment relationships the infant has formed up to the age of three years are likely to influence subsequent relationships and its effects are likely to carry on into adulthood. The ability of the social worker to identify and address the type and quality of the attachment patterns within the foster placement, even for young children, remains essential.

Prior abuse does not influence the ability of the child to attach:

Eighty two percent (82%) of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Prior abuse including previous placement breakdowns are predictive of attachment difficulties of insecure attachment patterns of children in foster care (Haight *et al.*, 2003:197; Chamberlain *et al.*, 2001:200). The in-practice experience of the respondents has led them to concur with current research that prior abuse does influence the child’s ability to attach. It would seem that the respondents knew that prior abuse had the potential of negatively impacting on the placement of the child. However, it does not seem from the current study that they have the know-how to pin point or address the attachment-based problems in the cases they supervise.

Figure 4: Perception of knowledge of Attachment Theory through 'in practice' experience



Attachment can be improved by attachment therapy:

Ninety four percent (94%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. Various Attachment Theory-based therapy methods have developed in recent years such as Theraplay (Jenbergh & Booth, 2005), Family Attachment Narrative Therapy (May, 2005 81-99). The question arising from this discussion is whether children in foster care have access to such therapies and whether the social workers are trained to provide it to the clients. The respondents concur with the findings of recent studies which hold that attachment therapy could improve the foster parent-child relationship (Velderman *et al.*, 2006 in Newman & Mares, 2007:345-346; May, 2005:81; Jenbergh & Booth, 2005:31). Their statement may rather reflect a belief that attachment therapy can improve the attachment between the parent and the child, than an experiential reality in their current environment.

Improved attachment decreases the risk of placement collapse:

Eighty eight percent (88%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. The proponents of the attachment-based therapies have researched and reported positively on the effectiveness of their therapy models to address attachment difficulties and prevent placement collapse (May, 2005:81; Jenbergh & Booth, 2005:31).

Self-evaluation of in-practice Attachment Theory use

The respondents' self-evaluation of their in-practice use of Attachment Theory was contrasted with their reported use of the theoretical concepts. The respondents reported that they use Attachment Theory 20% on average in foster care supervision as discussed in the article earlier (see items 4.2; 4.3; 4.8; 4.10; 4.15; 4.16 of the questionnaire). The following five statements were made regarding their in-practice use of Attachment Theory:

I am able to identify the attachment pattern of a child:

Sixty five percent (65%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. However, in the measurement of the theoretical components of Attachment Theory it was revealed that 21% of them have heard of the concept of attachment pattern and that 15% of them have used it in foster care supervision. It would seem that they evaluate their in-practice knowledge and use of the concept 'attachment patterns', higher than their theoretical knowledge actually are.

I consider the attachment pattern of the child when placing him/her in foster care:

Eighty eight percent (88%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. This statement

implies that the respondents were mindful of attachment issues when placing a child in foster care. It also indicates that the social workers consider themselves be able to identify the attachment pattern of the child and to factor it in as part of the matching process between the child and the prospective foster parent. From the preceding discussion it seems that the social workers lacked the basic knowledge of what an attachment pattern refers to. It also is evident that the social workers are not adequately trained to make such evaluations.

My current level of knowledge concerning Attachment Theory would allow me to enrich the quality of attachment between foster parents and child:

Fifty nine percent (59%) of the respondents agreed with this statement and 18% were not sure. The average score of Attachment Theory knowledge (24%) and use (20%), as mentioned earlier, contradicts their self-evaluation of their in-practice use of Attachment Theory. The generally low scores measured on both axes of knowledge and use indicates that the respondents do not have sufficient knowledge of Attachment Theory.

I feel confident in assessing the attachment between foster parent and child:

Fifty three percent (53%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. The 'strange situation' is one of the primary and well-researched assessment methods of determining the attachment pattern between a primary caregiver and a child. The respondents reported that only 7% of them had heard of it, and only 1% use was reported. The researcher postulates that the respondents may be able to determine in generic terms whether the attachment between a foster parent and child is good or bad, but do not actually assess the attachment in terms of the parameters and concepts of Attachment Theory

I feel confident about doing attachment therapy:

Only 35% of the respondents agreed with this statement and 47% were unsure and 18 % evaluated themselves as not being confident about their ability to do attachment therapy. This response revealed a strong indication of the insecurity of the respondents regarding their ability to use knowledge specifically associated with attachment-based interventions and therapy. This score is more in line with the scores measured for the knowledge and use of the theoretical components of Attachment Theory.

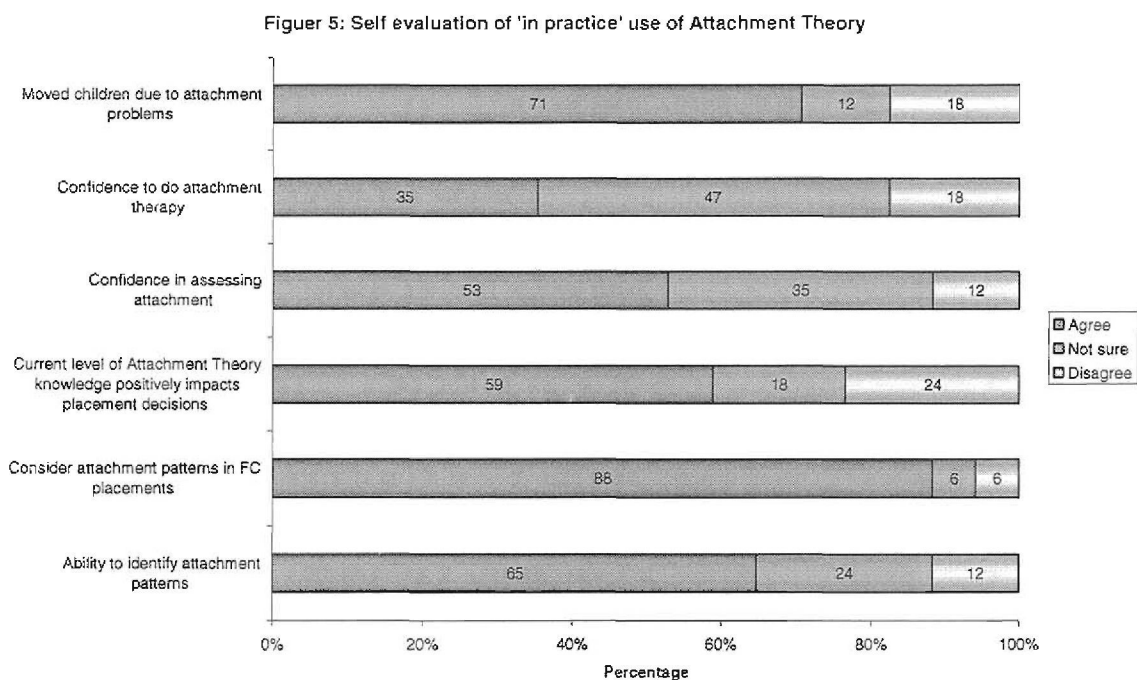
I have moved children out of a foster placement because there were attachment problems between the child and foster parents:

Seventy one percent (71%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. This score indicates

that the respondents have identified attachment issues as a reason for placement collapse which is supported by recent research. It would seem from the participants' responses that their self-evaluation of their in-practice use of Attachment Theory is generally much higher, ranging between 35% and 88%, than their measured use of theoretical components which was 20% on average (ranging between 1% and 43%).

The social workers reported that they were able to use theoretical components in practice which they previously reported they knew very little about (Knowledge of theoretical components averaged 24% ranging between 7% and 38%). This discrepancy possibly indicate that they are of opinion that they know and use the theoretical components of Attachment Theory, but that their knowledge is rather based on their own perceptions (common sense understanding) of Attachment Theory than its actual definitions.

Figure 5: Self evaluation of 'in practice' use of Attachment Theory



In-practice constraints preventing the application of Attachment Theory

The environment in which foster care supervision services are rendered, often have crippling implications for the quality of service provision. The researcher explored three possible constraints, namely a high foster care case load, the pressure to find new foster placements

and time limitations due to high case loads (see items 4.7; 4.9; 4.11 of the questionnaire).

If the foster care placement of the child meets his/her physical and educational needs but I were not sure of the attachment possibilities, I would still place the child:

The in-practice reality is that there often are not enough foster parents available to place children, and social workers may have no alternative but to place a child in a home where their basic needs are met without giving thorough attention to the attachment needs of the child. Twenty nine (29%) of the respondents indicated that they would still place a child even if their attachment needs are not met and a further 29% were unsure.

This indicates that 59% of the respondents may make decisions based on the circumstances involved in the case rather than on the principle of providing a physically and emotionally secure placement for a child. Another possibility is that they might not have the knowledge or experience of the importance of the attachment needs of a child when developing and supervising a placement. Forty one (41%) of the respondents disagreed with this statement, reflecting their concern for the attachment needs of the child when placing him/her in foster care.

The need to find new foster placements does not allow me time to consider the attachment needs of the child:

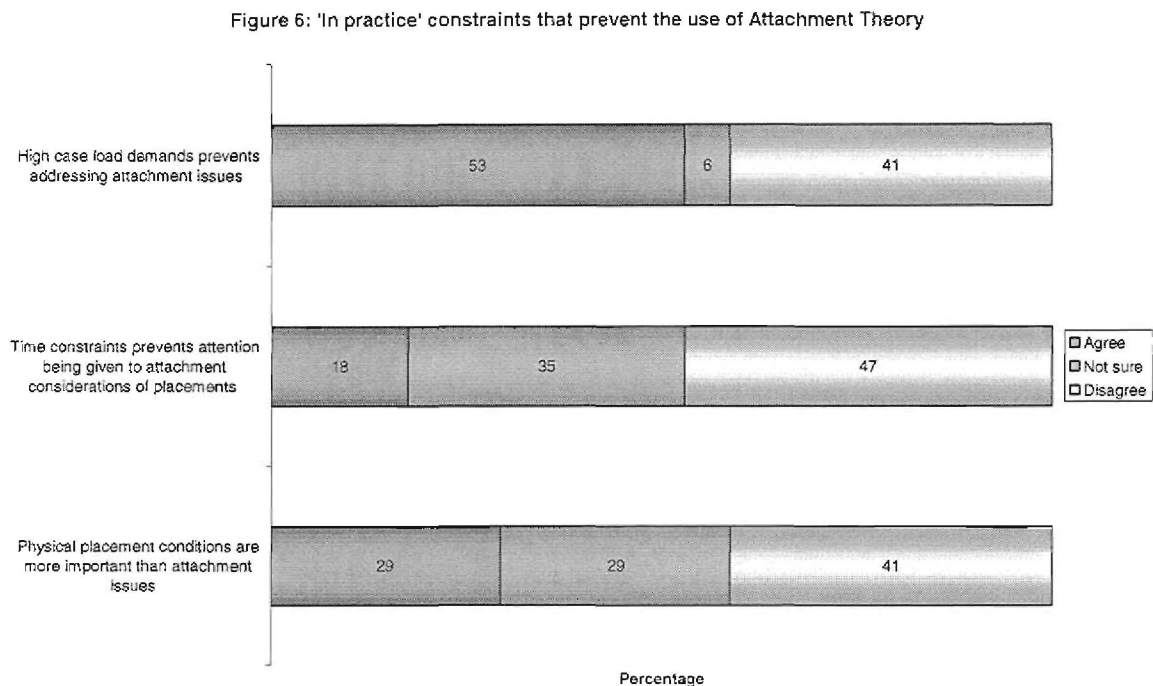
Eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents concurred and said that they are experiencing pressure to find new foster parents for children entering the system. A significant percentage reported that they were unsure (35%) which may indicate that they might not have determined attachment-related issues as a priority. A total of 53% therefore felt that they could not address the attachment needs of their clients. Forty seven (47%) disagreed with this statement, indicating that they did not consider the pressure of finding new foster parents as a reason for not paying attention to the child's attachment needs.

Due to my high case load I do not have time to address the attachment between the foster parent and the child:

Fifty three percent (53%) of the respondents felt that their high case loads prevented them from addressing the attachment needs of their clients and 6% of them were unsure. A combined total of 59% seemed to be negatively affected by their high case loads. This measurement reflects the in-practice reality that the respondents do not always have the time to pay attention to attachment-related issues while doing foster care supervision. A significant percentage of the respondents reported that they did not agree with this statement (41%), which may indicate that

they consider attachment as a priority in spite of their high case load. These respondents could possibly be reflecting on tension between their moral obligations to consider the attachment needs of the children in spite of their high case loads.

Figure 6: 'In practice' constraints that prevent the use of Attachment Theory



DISCUSSION

The value of Attachment Theory in the context of foster care has been well documented. The insight that Attachment Theory has brought into understanding and enriching the relationship between the foster parent and the child has particular application potential within the social work field. In this paper the researcher explored the utilisation of Attachment Theory by social workers in foster care supervision. Central to the research has been the statement that social workers currently doing foster care supervision do not have adequate knowledge of Attachment Theory, nor do they apply this knowledge in practice.

To this effect the researcher conducted a quantitative survey of a sample of social workers employed at Child Welfare Tshwane working in the greater Tshwane Metropolitan area (Pretoria) regarding their knowledge and use of Attachment Theory. A total of 17 female respondents were accessed who comprised 94% of the total population in the organisation who directly worked with foster care placements. Practically all the respondents (94%) had

completed social work studies at graduate level and 24% had completed post-graduate studies.

The respondents were given a questionnaire developed by the researcher which captured their demographic information with specific reference to their educational and training background. The questionnaire also measured their knowledge and use of eleven theoretical components of Attachment Theory. Their perception of their knowledge and self-evaluation of their in-practice use of Attachment Theory were measured and then contrasted with their measured knowledge and use of the theoretical components.

The researcher anticipated a low score on the theoretical components measured and a higher score on the practice-based measures. The data supported the expected outcome of a low theoretical knowledge and use of Attachment Theory and a higher measure of their self-evaluation of in-practice knowledge and use. What were surprising were the low scores attained on both the average knowledge (24%) and average use (20%) of the theoretical concepts of Attachment Theory. The highest source of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory was in-practice experience (35%) followed by university psychology (30%) and post-qualification training (21%). University level social work was the least likely source of Attachment Theory training with 12%. This possibly implies that Attachment Theory has not been included in the social work curriculum and that recent developments in the arena of attachment are not available to the social workers.

The researcher identified eleven theoretical components that were used to determine the respondents' knowledge and use of Attachment Theory. The most well-known and used components were Attachment Theory (knowledge= 38% and use=43%) and attachment therapy (knowledge= 25% and use=30%). The least known and used components were the 'strange situation' (knowledge= 7% and use=1%) and indiscriminate attachment (knowledge= 18% and use=10%). The respondents generally had very low scores, which indicate that they did not know and therefore could not use Attachment Theory at a significant level within foster care supervision.

The use of the theoretical components in the five foster care supervision activities that were researched, namely foster care screening (22%), supervision visits (25%), placement assessment (24%), report writing (21%) and panel discussions (19%) were measured. The low scores again suggested that the social workers did not generally use Attachment Theory during foster care supervision. A cross reference of the knowledge and use of Attachment Theory with the years of social work experience revealed a positive correlation between the increased knowledge and use of the theoretical components, with the increase of years of social work experience. This could indicate that, with increased experience, the workers have become

aware of the importance of attachment-related issues in foster care supervision.

The respondents had a much higher perception of their in-practice knowledge of Attachment Theory (53% compared to 24% theoretical component knowledge). Although their responses to the in-practice statements corroborated with researched findings, it seemed that they were using more of an intuitive or 'common sense' approach in responding to the questions than they actually knew about Attachment Theory.

It would seem from the participants' responses that their self-evaluation of their in-practice use of Attachment Theory is again generally much higher (ranging between 35% and 88%) than their measured use of theoretical components, which was 20% on average. The social workers reported that they were able to use theoretical components in practice that they previously reported they knew very little about. This discrepancy possibly indicates that they are of opinion that they know and use the theoretical components of Attachment Theory, but that their knowledge is rather based on their own perceptions (common sense understanding) of Attachment Theory than on its actual definitions.

Some practical constraints were offered to the respondents as reasons for not applying Attachment Theory in practice. Fifty nine (59%) percent of the respondents would still place a child in a family where his/her physical and educational needs were met but not necessarily their attachment needs. Fifty three percent (53%) also reported that time constraints prevented the application of Attachment Theory in practice. Fifty four percent (54%) considered their high case loads as a reason for not applying Attachment Theory. This result indicates that there are practical issues that should be overcome before Attachment Theory gains mainstream application within the foster care supervision context. It could also show that the lack of Attachment Theory knowledge might be a reason for them not prioritising attachment-related issues when developing and monitoring foster care placements.

The research indicates that the social workers did not have adequate knowledge of Attachment Theory to optimally utilise it within foster care supervision. They had a 'common sense' approach to understanding and addressing attachment-related issues but lacked the theoretical knowledge to underscore their efforts to address the attachment between the foster parent and the child. The generally low scores related to the theoretical components compared to the respondents' higher scores of self-evaluation of their in-practice knowledge and use of Attachment Theory revealed that they are unable to identify and address the attachment needs of their clients. It seemed that they were largely under a false impression of their actual ability to deal with attachment-related issues. These research results could indicate that the attachment-

related needs of clients are, to a large extent, left unattended.

Harden (2004:41) argues that it is “imperative for the welfare system to move beyond a singular focus on safety and permanency and that it promote the well-being of children in custodial care”. By casting a wider net that includes knowledge of Attachment Theory in foster care supervision, social workers would be enabled to better evaluate the quality of care and align support and other interventions to address the needs of the foster child and family; thus moving towards a greater sense of wellness. Within the South African context there seems to be an opportunity to determine how cultural differences are shaping the attachment relationships in kinship care and foster placements. Haight *et al.*, (2003:200) is of opinion that “understanding universal aspects of attachment relationships, as well as the ways in which such relationships develop within particular social and cultural groups, provides a foundation for recognising any problematic aspects of parent-child attachment relationships”. To be able to accomplish it, social workers should be trained in Attachment Theory and its implications for the field of social work in delivering services to children and families.

This study has pointed out that the social workers concerned with foster care in Child Welfare Tshwane, do not have the appropriate knowledge or skill to apply it constructively in their current practice of foster care supervision. The effects of the current loss of skilled social workers to Government departments and the private sector within Child Welfare is evident in the high number of staff with little social work and foster care experience. This, along with the limited knowledge and use of Attachment Theory and the identified practical constraints, may not be unique to Child Welfare Tshwane. Other social work NGOs could be faced with similar conditions which negatively impact on the quality of foster care supervision. The results of this study therefore could create awareness in other welfare organisations of the need to better equip their social work staff with Attachment Theory knowledge.

Thyer (2001:11) comments on the general gap between theory and practice and says “the practical reality is the design and outcome of conduct and outcome studies in the human sciences without any reliance on a formal theoretical foundation is not uncommon”. If this is the case for such formal actions such as research to be without theoretical foundation, it is hardly surprising that the practice of routine foster care supervision services may be without theoretical grounding.

In conclusion the researcher concurs with Haight *et al.*, (2003:196) that “understanding several aspects of attachment relationships [and Attachment Theory] can guide social workers to developmentally and culturally sensitive practice, as well as provide a foundation for recognising problems in attachment relationships”. It is the researcher’s view that, by considering the

attachment needs of clients, we can improve the quality of foster care supervision and the general foster care experiences of the children we work with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher would make the following recommendations that:

This study be repeated with a larger sample size and include social workers from a variety of organisations in order to generalise the findings to the field of social work.

The second study also would be anchored to actual measures of the use of Attachment Theory application by for example, drawing upon real foster care supervision case studies.

Child Welfare Tshwane extends its in-service training programme to include focussed training on Attachment Theory.

Appropriate attachment sensitive interventions be developed and made available to the client base of Child Welfare Tshwane to provide support to the children and parents in foster care placements.

The results of this study would be forwarded to the South African Council of Social Service Professions' manager Education and Development, Ms S Prius, to make the argument for the inclusion of Attachment Theory in the social work curriculum at university level to ensure more extensive knowledge and use of Attachment Theory within the social work context.

FINAL REMARKS

Attachment Theory has emerged as an important field of study within the social work context. This study revealed that the social workers of Child Welfare Tshwane has a common sense sensitivity to attachment-related issues but lack the thorough theoretical grounding in Attachment Theory to address it successfully. The researcher postulates that adequate training regarding Attachment Theory would make a positive impact on the quality of foster care supervision within the Child Welfare Tshwane and other organisations.

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Annexure A: VOORSKRIFTE AAN OUTEURS / INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

VOORSKRIFTE AAN OUTEURS / INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

The Journal publishes articles, short communications, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions relevant to social work from other disciplines will also be considered. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Commentary on articles already published in the Journal must be submitted with appropriate captions, the name(s) and addressee(s) of the author(s) and preferably not exceed 5 pages. The whole manuscript plus one clear copy as well as a diskette with all the text, preferably in MS Windows (Word or WordPerfect) or ASCII must be submitted. Manuscripts must be typed double spaced on one side of A4 paper only. Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger 1967:12). More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors. Note the use of capitals and punctuation marks in the following examples.

Die Tydskrif publiseer artikels, kort mededelings, boekbesprekings en kommentaar op reeds gepubliseerde artikels uit enige gebied van die maatskaplike werk asook relevante bydraes uit ander dissiplines. Bydraes mag in Afrikaans of Engels geskryf word. Artikels in Afrikaans moet vergesel wees van 'n Engelse opsomming van ongeveer 200 woorde. Alle bydraes sal krities deur ten minste twee keurders beoordeel word. Beoordeling is streng vertroulik. Manuskripte sal na die outeurs teruggestuur word indien ingrypende hersiening vereis word of indien die styl nie ooreenstem met die tydskrif se standaard nie. Kommentaar op artikels wat in die Tydskrif gepubliseer is, moet van toepaslike titels, die naam(name) en adres(se) van die outeur(s) voorsien wees en verkieslik nie langer as 5 bladsye wees nie. 'n Disket met die hele teks, verkieslik in MS Windows of ASCII moet die hele manuskrip en een duidelike kopie daarvan vergesel. Manuskripte moet slegs op een kant van die bladsy in dubbelspasiëring getik word. Verwysings moet volgens die Harvard-stelsel geskied. Verwysings in die teks: Wanneer woordelike sitate, feite of argumente uit ander bronne gesiteer word, moet die van(ne)

van die outeur(s), jaar van publikasie, en bladsynommers tussen hakies in die teks verskyn, bv. "...” (Berger, 1967:12). Meer besonderhede omtrent bronne moet alfabeties volgens die vanne van die outeurs aan die einde van die manuskrip onder die opskrif "Bibliografie" verskyn. Let op die gebruik van hoofletters en leestekens by die volgende voorbeelde.

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ANNEXURE B: Research questionnaire

Research is being done on the knowledge social workers in Child Welfare Tshwane have concerning attachment. The following questions will render information on your knowledge of attachment and how you go about reflecting your knowledge in your daily work. The questionnaire is confidential and will only be read by the researcher. Your name will not be mentioned in the research. Please answer ALL the following questions truthfully. Thank you for your support.

1 Demographic Details:		
1 Name and Surname:		
2 Age:		
3 Gender:		
4 Race (only for statistical purposes):		
5 Home language:		
6 Do you agree to be interviewed?	YES/NO	
7 Would it be acceptable if the interview were conducted in English	YES/NO	
8 Home telephone number:		
9 Work telephone number:		
10 Cell phone number:		
11 Area office		
12 Social worker	YES/NO	
13 Supervisor	YES/NO	
Date		2 0 0 8

Please complete the following questions regarding your educational background.

2 Educational Details:		
2.1 University:		
2.2 Year of graduation:		
2.3 Post-graduate studies completed?	YES / NO	
2.4 Name of degree:		
2.5 Completed at which University:		
2.6 Year of graduation:		
2.7 What other certificated training related to social work have you received?	UNISA COURSES	

2.8 Which short courses related to social work have you completed?	RP TRAINING	
	PLAY THERAPY	
	NARRATIVE THERAPY	
	OTHER:	
2.9 What training related to foster care have you received?	DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	
	IN SERVICE TRAINING	
	OTHER:	
2.10 Did this training include information on attachment?		
2.11 What training specifically related to attachment have you received		

2.12 How many years of experience as a social worker do you have? Please mark with an x.

	Years of experience	As social worker	
2.11.1	0-3 years		
2.11.2	4-6 years		
2.11.3	7-9 years		
2.11.4	10-12 years		
2.11.5	Above 12 years		

2.13 How many years of experience as a foster care worker do you have? Please mark with an x.

	Years of experience	As foster care worker	
2.13.1	0-3 years		
2.13.2	4-6 years		
2.13.3	7-9 years		
2.13.4	10-12 years		
2.13.5	Above 12 years		

3 Attachment Theory components

Please indicate whether you have heard of or have used the following terms by ticking the appropriate box and briefly describing where you heard of it or how you used it.

Attachment Theory Component		
3.1 John Bowlby		
E.G. HEARD		
3.1.1 University: social work		

3.1.2 University: psychology		
3.1.3 Post-qualification training		
3.1.4 In practice		
3.1.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.1.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.1.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.1.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.1.2.4 Report writing		
3.1.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.1.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.1.2.7 Other		
3.2 Attachment Theory		
E.G. HEARD		
3.2.1 University: social work		
3.2.2 University: psychology		
3.2.3 Post-qualification training		
3.2.4 In practice		
3.2.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.2.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.2.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.2.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.2.2.4 Report writing		
3.2.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.2.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.2.2.7 Other		
3.3 Strange situation		
E.G. HEARD		
3.3.1 University: social work		
3.3.2 University: psychology		
3.3.3 Post-qualification training		
3.3.4 In practice		
3.3.5 Other		

E.G. USED		
3.3.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.3.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.3.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.3.2.4 Report writing		
3.3.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.3.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.3.2.7 Other		
3.4 Attachment pattern		
E.G. HEARD		
3.4.1 University: social work		
3.4.2 University: psychology		
3.4.3 Post-qualification training		
3.4.4 In practice		
3.4.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.4.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.4.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.4.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.4.2.4 Report writing		
3.4.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.4.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.4.2.7 Other		
3.5 Secure attachment		
E.G. HEARD		
3.5.1 University: social work		
3.5.2 University: psychology		
3.5.3 Post-qualification training		
3.5.4 In practice		
3.5.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.5.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.5.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.5.2.3 Placement assessment		

3.5.2.4 Report writing		
3.5.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.5.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.5.2.7 Other		
3.6 Insecure attachment		
E.G. HEARD		
3.6.1 University: social work		
3.6.2 University: psychology		
3.6.3 Post-qualification training		
3.6.4 In practice		
3.6.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.6.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.6.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.6.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.6.2.4 Report writing		
3.6.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.6.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.6.2.7 Other		
3.7 Avoidant attachment pattern		
E.G. HEARD		
3.7.1 University: social work		
3.7.2 University: psychology		
3.7.3 Post-qualification training		
3.7.4 In practice		
3.7.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.7.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.7.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.7.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.7.2.4 Report writing		
3.7.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.7.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.7.2.7 Other		

3.8 Ambivalent attachment		
E.G. HEARD		
3.8.1 University: social work		
3.8.2 University: psychology		
3.8.3 Post-qualification training		
3.8.4 In practice		
3.8.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.8.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.8.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.8.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.8.2.4 Report writing		
3.8.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.8.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.8.2.7 Other		
3.9 Disorganised attachment pattern		
E.G. HEARD		
3.9.1 University: social work		
3.9.2 University: psychology		
3.9.3 Post-qualification training		
3.9.4 In practice		
3.9.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.9.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.9.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.9.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.9.2.4 Report writing		
3.9.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.9.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.9.2.7 Other		
3.10 Indiscriminate attachment pattern		
E.G. HEARD		
3.10.1 University: social work		
3.10.2 University: psychology		

3.10.3 Post-qualification training		
3.10.4 In practice		
3.10.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.10.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.10.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.10.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.10.2.4 Report writing		
3.10.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.10.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.10.2.7 Other		
3.11 Attachment therapy		
E.G. HEARD		
3.11.1 University: social work		
3.11.2 University: psychology		
3.11.3 Post-qualification training		
3.11.4 In practice		
3.11.5 Other		
E.G. USED		
3.11.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.11.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.11.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.11.2.4 Report writing		
3.11.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.11.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.11.2.7 Other		
3.12 Bonding therapy		
E.G. HEARD		
3.12.1 University: social work		
3.12.2 University: psychology		
3.12.3 Post-qualification training		
3.12.4 In practice		
3.12.5 Other		
E.G. USED		

3.12.2.1 Foster care screening		
3.12.2.2 Foster care supervision visits		
3.12.2.3 Placement assessment		
3.12.2.4 Report writing		
3.12.2.5 Panel discussions		
3.12.2.6 Attachment therapy		
3.12.2.7 Other		

4 Experiential components

Statement	Agree (1)	Not Sure (2)	Disagree (3)
1 I have enough knowledge of Attachment Theory.			
2 I am able to identify the attachment pattern of a child.			
3 I consider the attachment pattern of the child when placing him/her in foster care.			
4 A good attachment would form naturally between foster parent and child.			
5 Attachment between child and foster parent does not play a role in the outcome of the foster placement.			
6 The attachment between the child and foster parent can be improved through attachment therapy.			
7 If the foster care placement of the child meets his/her physical and educational needs but I were not sure of the attachment possibilities, I would still place the child.			
Statement	Agree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (4)
8 I have moved children out of a foster placement because attachment problems had occurred between the child and foster parents.			
9 The need to find new foster placements does not allow me time to consider the attachment needs of the child.			
10 My current level of knowledge regarding Attachment Theory would allow me to enrich the quality of attachment between the foster parents and the child.			
11 Due to my high case load I do not have time to address the attachment between the foster parent and the child.			
12 The risk of the placement collapsing decreases when the attachment between the child and foster parent improves.			

13 The younger the child the more easily he/she attaches to the foster parents.			
14 The abuse the child was exposed to does not influence his or her ability to attach to the foster parents			
Statement	Agree (2)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (4)
15 I feel confident in assessing the attachment between the foster parent and the child			
16 I feel confident about doing attachment therapy.			

5 Explain your needs regarding Attachment Theory and the practical application thereof to the placement of children.

Thank you.