

**Elements promoting critical thinking skills in
report writing of forensic social workers: A
rapid review**

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree *Masters of Arts in Forensic Practice* at the
North West University

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Examination: November 2019

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Foreword

As a social worker having practised statutory social work, foster care, group work, community work and forensic social work, the researcher can safely say that social work in general requires a range of emotional and psychological skills in addition to formal academic training. Critical thinking skills necessitate utilising a variety of skills to critically appraise opinions, arguments, claims and actions to arrive at well-reasoned judgements or evaluations (Mathias, 2015: 458). Practising forensic social work requires specialised skills and knowledge relevant to civil and criminal court settings (Hewitt, 2012). Therefore, forensic social work requires training and experience beyond that provided only in social work education programs. Acquiring specific skills and knowledge will assist and guide the practicing forensic social worker to become an expert in their field.

As such, the product of a forensic assessment namely the forensic court report, should reflect how the social worker argued the case based on critical thinking principles, formulating their own arguments based on different perspectives. Not only should the social worker form their own opinions but their arguments should be strengthened and grounded in a theoretical framework. Meintjies-van der Walt (2003) reiterates the importance of independently testing the expert's opinion, stating "it is of the greatest importance that the value of the opinion should be capable of being tested and unless the expert states the grounds upon which he bases his opinion, it is not possible to test its correctness so as to form a proper judgment upon it." (Meintjies-van der Walt, 2003:49).

Different studies advocate the role that critical thinking plays in encouraging rational, thorough assessments and demonstrating effective oral and written engagement with various client systems. In forensic court reports, critical thinking should play an important role as report writing is not only an intricate process but further involves careful and thorough attention to

deliver a written product of outstanding quality (Monosi, 2017). The aim of this study is to synthesise information by conducting a rapid review. A knowledge synthesis will gather evidence to identify key elements that promote critical thinking skills in forensic report writing of social workers practising forensic social work. Identifying these elements will improve the development of critical thinking skills, specifically in forensic report writing and contribute towards the knowledge base of social work education and practice as well as guide future studies.

Acknowledgments

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

Father God, I say Thank you for giving me the knowledge and perseverance in completing this dissertation. It was a long, difficult journey that taught me great lessons but I would do it over again, having the assurance that **You** are ever present and with me every step of the way.

Thank You is such a simple expression but so meaningful in extending one's heartfelt gratitude for assistance, assurance, love, listening, caring and support. To every single person who started and completed this journey with me, I say Thank You!

Thank you to my mother Sophy Louw. You are a true inspiration to me every day of my life. You encouraged and motivated me throughout the completion of this dissertation. Mom, I salute you for being there for me in every possible way. If you are not with me, I know that your prayers sustain me. You always listen, assist, love, encourage and pray. Thank you.

Thank you to my straight talking little sister, **Marie Louw**. I love you and appreciate you. You listened to me complaining, venting, being positive, and getting good news pertaining to this research. I knew that whatever was happening I could share and talk to you. I love you.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues **Col. Scheepers, Tanya, Inge, Iris, Karin** and **everyone else** who supported me by listening, understanding, advising and encouraging. You made me realise the importance of friendship that build and grow you as a human being. I appreciate you all so enormously.

Thank you to my supervisor, **Tasleem Sayed**. I firmly believe that encountering certain people at a certain time happen with a divine reason. You came at the right time. No

words can express the gratitude and respect I have for you. **Thank You** for always believing in me no matter how adverse the circumstances were. I will be forever grateful.

Thank you to all the other great people at the North West University of Potchefstroom. Thank you for your assistance and your willingness to extend a helping hand.

Last but not least, my lovely children Roberto, Palesa and Peter. I dedicate this dissertation to **Roberto Louw** (16 years), **Palesa Msimanga** (11 years) and **Peter Msimanga** (8 years). Thank you so much that I could take your time and invest it in our future. You motivate and inspire me every day of my life. I learn so many new things from you. Roberto, thank you for sitting up with me and making endless cup of coffees. I extend my gratitude for your motivation to me in continuing my studies. Never give up. Hard work always pay off. My dear son, remember God is the limit. You have immense potential. Palesa, you are always looking for ways to make me happy. My only daughter, you are the light in my life. I see great possibilities and a wonderful future for you. Peter, my little wise guy. Thank you for understanding that I had to make sacrifices in completing this dissertation. As great as your name is, you are and will be a greater boy and man one day. I love you all so much.

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Research outline and preface

This mini-dissertation is submitted in article format as indicated in the 2018 General Academic Rules of the North-West University. This mini-dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree, Master of Arts in Forensic Practice. The body of this dissertation will consist of the following:

Chapter One: Background and orientation

Chapter One includes the full research proposal together with the necessary documents required by the various committees. Chapter One serves as a baseline to the study and includes the in-depth preparation that was followed in order to be able to commence with Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: Manuscript in article format

Chapter Two consists of the manuscript in article format. This manuscript follows the guidelines of the Journal for *Child Abuse Research a South African Journal*. The requirements of the manuscript are aligned to the editorial policy as well as the technical and formatting requirements.

Chapter Three: Conclusion, limitations, future recommendations, policy brief and personal reflections

In Chapter Three, the researcher will provide conclusions based on the outcome of the study. Furthermore, the researcher will provide the limitations of the study as well as future recommendations. Lastly, the researcher will provide a personal reflection of this process.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS, LETTER OF PERMISSION AND DECLARATION

Ms. C J Louw

Ms. Louw is a Masters student enrolled in Forensic Practice. The student was responsible for the development of the proposal, was the primary reviewer of the rapid literature review process as well as wrote up Chapter One, Two and Three.

Mrs. T Sayed

Mrs. Sayed served as the supervisor as well as the second reviewer for the rapid review. Mrs. Sayed was also responsible for guiding the student during the process.

Below is the declaration from the researcher and the supervisor approving their contribution to this mini-dissertation. The approval serves that this mini-dissertation has been accepted and fulfills the requirement for the degree, Master's in Forensic Practice.

Declaration by co-author

I, Tasleem Sayed, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation submitted by the student, Mrs. C J Louw complies with the requirements of the degree, Master's in Forensic Practice. I hereby grant permission for the student to submit this mini-dissertation for examination purposes.



Mrs. T. Sayed

Declaration by author (student)

I, Cecile Jo-anne Louw, ID no.: 8208230262082 hereby declare that this mini-dissertation is a product of my own work and that I have rightfully acknowledged all authors and sources in this mini-dissertation. I also declare that this mini-dissertation has not been submitted to any other university for examination purposes.



Ms. C. J. Louw

Preface: Background and orientation to the study

As previously indicated in the research outline and preface, this dissertation is written in article format in accordance with the 2018 General Academic Rules of the North-West University. In this section, the researcher proposes the planning of the first phase of the research process providing background to the manuscript that will be presented in article format in Chapter Two.

The aim of this rapid review is to identify the elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers. A six-step process was followed comprising an in-depth literature review to fit the requirements of the rigorous methodology.

The research proposal was developed by the researcher in collaboration with the supervisor and studied by several experts in the field of social work. The proposal was submitted to the various scientific panels for approval, such as the Community Psychosocial Research (COMPRES) and the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC), respectively.

Please note that there will be an overlap between research presented in Chapter One and Chapter Two due to the fact that these chapters describe the same research process in different stages. The manuscript presented in article format in Chapter Two serves as the final research report according to *Child Abuse Research a South African Journal (CARSA)*.

Chapter 1: Background and orientation

1.1 Scientific proposal

1.1.1 Elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers: A rapid review

Keywords: *forensic social work, critical thinking skills, forensic court report, elements*

Social work is a profession that requires a variety of emotional and psychological skills in addition to formal academic training. While knowledge and practices are what define the profession, some of the most important skills should be developed internally (Deal & Pittman, 2009: 87). Internally, practitioners should self-reflect and review their ideas, perspectives and opinions of others before deciding on the best way forward (Deal & Pittman, 2009: 87). Social workers must therefore develop skills to make nuanced decisions on complex dilemmas that have no clear or obvious solutions (Deal & Pittman, 2009: 87).

Critical thinking involves the critical appraisal of beliefs, arguments, claims and actions to arrive at well-reasoned judgments (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017: 5). Critical thinking, which implies that one is thinking with a purpose (Tilbury, Osmond & Scott: 2010: 31), is a series of skills that can be successfully taught and learned (Shirayev & Levy, 2010: 12). Smith (2014: 279) states that “the act of eliciting reliable and detailed information from children on events or situations, such as abuse, is a complex process that requires specialised skills in forensic interviewing.” Smith’s (2014: 279) view is consistent with the opinion of other researchers (APSAC, 2012: 3; Koocher, 2009: 83; Kuehnle, 1996: 27; Spies & Carstens, 2005: 40-41; Walker, 2002: 178) who state that in order to conduct forensic investigations, one must have specialised skills, training, knowledge and expertise.

Literature acknowledges that forensic social work is a relatively new specialised field of practice in South Africa, which requires effective training and skills to practise forensic social work proficiently (Mangezi: 2014: 15). The South African Council of Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2008), as cited in Mangezi (2014: 15), defines forensic social work as “a specialised area of social work that focuses on the interface between society’s legal and human systems and is characterized by the social workers’ primary function of providing expert testimonies in courts of law with the primary client being the judiciary system.” The distinctive characteristic of this definition is the focus on specialisation, as well as being an expert witness. Therefore, practising forensic social work requires highly specialised skills and knowledge relevant to civil and criminal court settings. It requires training and experience beyond that which is provided in social work educational programmes (Mangezi, 2014: 16).

Joubert and Van Wyk (2014: 500) advise that training in critical thinking and writing is highly recommended; however, critical thinking cannot be mastered only in education but requires practice as well. Given the fast pace and the radical decisions that forensic social workers must make, critical thinking can be seen as a challenging but essential skill required from them; it is purposeful thinking, making use of standards such as clarity and fairness to arrive at well-reasoned decisions (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017:5). Alternatively, ‘uncritical’ thinking is defined as thinking through accepting something too easily by displaying unwillingness or inability to criticise (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2013: 1706). Uncritical thinking is viewed as ineffective because it compromises problem-solving, as views and opinions are accepted uncritically (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017: 5), leading to lost opportunities to discover new insights and failed attempts at gaining in-depth understanding of people or information (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017:31). Forensic social workers gather information through forensic assessment with the intention of compiling a professional report. When such a report is compiled by an uncritical thinker, it comprises uncritical documentation that is defined as

“accepting a claim, based on vague, undocumented evidence” (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017:3) and can lead to a mistaken belief that if an idea is described or referred to by a person, the claim is true.

Particular to the context of forensic social work practice is the focus on information gathering, assessment and report writing, which all affect legal parameters (Sheehan, 2016: 727). Critical thinking helps the forensic social worker to examine the information gathered neutrally and to consider its importance and impact on the course of action, while maintaining a professional, non-biased attitude. Deal and Pittman (2009: 87) concur with this, “The ability to think critically has direct relevance for competent social work practice.”

Social workers in the field of forensic social work provide expert testimony in a criminal court and are expected to be both ethical and unbiased (Iffley, 2012: 37). Even before providing expert testimony, the forensic social worker should have essential knowledge of critical style elements in order to produce a well-written forensic assessment report (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 488). Joubert and Van Wyk (2014:488) elaborate that critical style elements include applying aspects of critical thinking as well as diagnostic reasoning in the content of the report.

Forensic social workers should possess good writing skills, as their reports may include a description of a crime, scope of the crime, as well as a discussion, an evaluation and identification of the effects of abuse (Mangezi, 2014:18). Joubert and Van Wyk (2014:489) state that information gathered during a forensic assessment must be evaluated by analysing the assessment outcome, reflecting and arguing what the gathered information means and providing alternative hypotheses for the findings. Good quality forensic court reports should be a combination of critical thinking skills and sound report-writing skills (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 500).

As a non-personal form of writing, Paul and Elder (2008) describe critical writing of the content of a forensic report as an

“...intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness”.

Gathering information in a forensic social work assessment using critical skill elements implies that this information should be evaluated by analysing the assessment outcome and determining what the information truly means, as well as providing alternative explanations for the findings (Feltham, 2010). This process of meaning-giving is crucial, as it reflects the originality of the written work (Hills, 2011).

The critical writing style elements in a forensic report need further discussion. Paul and Elder (2009) adapted elements to write forensic social work reports in a critical and evaluative manner as follows:

- ❖ Purpose: Clarify the purpose of the writing. This aspect will form part of the introductory section.
- ❖ Questions that need answers: The problem statement is formulated in the form of a question such as, “Was the child a victim of sexual abuse?” or “Are there alternative hypotheses?”
- ❖ Assumptions: The social worker must question and analyse every statement (Hills, 2011). One can apply the principle of reduction ad absurdum (‘reduction to absurdity’) to evaluate the conclusion by assuming the opposite. When the opposite leads to an

insupportable result, the conclusion can be accepted as valid (Weston, 2009). Inferences made in reports should be grounded in evidence-based information and evidence-based forensic assessment protocols (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014).

- ❖ Concepts or key ideas: Obtaining an understanding of matters requires one to utilise concepts and ideas. Good critical writers will be aware of the main ideas they use during their thinking process (Paul & Elder, 2009). The social worker will base the forensic report on theoretical concepts and key theoretical ideas, quoting the theorists to highlight particular issues. Bowker (2007:2) explains that when a writer passes judgement on a matter, it is expected that the writer would have consulted a published author's previous work to support their opinion. Ideally, the social worker should quote only evidence-based, peer-reviewed theoretical sources (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014).

Writing a quality forensic report requires critical thinking, time and thorough attention. Literature of experts must be used to strengthen arguments and give a grounding theoretical framework. The social worker's professional opinion must be heard and all information must be critically evaluated (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014). Critical thinking allows the forensic social worker to look beyond information obtained, to investigate and to reach an objective conclusion.

Currently, there are no models or frameworks specifically aimed at critical thinking for forensic social workers. Various other models and frameworks of critical thinking exist in fields such as education and social work. According to Kivanja (2015), one such model, namely De Bono's Six Thinking Hats model, teaches that applying critical thinking in a problem-solving situation implies that there is usually no one way to solve a problem and that one should attempt different approaches to advance thinking and problem-solving (Kivanja, 2015: 389). As social workers progress from novices to experts in the field of forensic social work, they gain

competence, confidence and assertiveness and develop their ability to think critically (Deal & Pittman, 2009; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017).

In report writing, critical thinking skills are applied (Bowker, 2007:2; Joubert & van Wyk, 2014:490). Providing alternative explanations in a report demonstrates to the court of law that the social worker engaged in critical thinking, was objective and did not take findings at face value (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 491). In the forensic practice setting, the social worker makes use of critical thinking skills in gathering information while conducting assessments and as output writes professional court reports by logically structuring information, presenting a clear, factual description and explanation of a sequence of events and how these can be argued or described as the occurrence of a criminal offence. Adopting a critical and analytic approach to social work would help by informing practice and the choice of interventions to achieve outcomes and enhance assessments and reports by moving beyond the descriptive. Samson (2016:148) points out that scholarly literature and research on critical thinking in social work are still quite scarce. Little is known about how social workers use critical thinking skills in a forensic social work setting. Studies have found that critical thinking encourages and is crucial to rational and thorough assessments, as well as demonstrating effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families and groups (CSWE, 2008:4; Deal & Pittman, 2009:87). Therefore, this study will search for evidence of critical thinking skills needed in writing effective court reports by social workers practising forensic social work. The results of this study will assist the researcher in identifying factors promoting critical thinking skills in the report writing of forensic social workers, which may guide future research.

1.2 Contribution of the study

The contribution of this study will be the identification of the key elements promoting critical thinking skills required for report writing by forensic social workers, which would assist and improve the development of these skills in their report writing. Understanding of the complex array of factors contributing to the effective use of critical thinking skills in report writing is rather limited and therefore the researcher intends to conduct this study to gather evidence that reflects the application of critical thinking skills in forensic report writing. This knowledge synthesis will guide future studies and contribute to the knowledge base of social work education and practice. Optimal use of critical thinking skills enables social workers to make purposeful judgement calls in critical and complex cases (Mathias, 2015: 462).

1.3 Review question

From the literature, what key elements in terms of critical thinking skills are needed for effective report writing for social workers practising forensic social work?

1.4 Aim of this study

The aim of this study is to gather evidence of the elements that promote critical thinking skills for effective report writing in forensic social work.

1.5 Review approach

This review approach will follow a qualitative analysis/synthesis. The proposed study will be conducted by means of a rapid review. The rapid review will follow some of the steps outlined in a systematic review. Rapid reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis that follow the systematic review process but components of the process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a timely manner (Khangura, Konnyu, Cushman, Grimshaw & Moher, 2012). However, a systematic review is considered to be the 'gold standard' that entails a

systematic, comprehensive review of literature sources to obtain evidence and inform decision-making beyond the borders of health sciences (Katikireddi, Egan, & Petticrew, 2015: 189).

The application of strategies as a specialised type of literature review will summarise research evidence related to the factors that promote critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers. Further bias will be limited to collection, appraisal and synthesis of all quality research related to the review question. A review makes use of rigorous research methodology to provide information and evidence-based answers to a specific research question (Ellemdeen, 2012:54).

A team of two reviewers were involved, namely Ms Cecile Louw and Mrs Tasleem Sayed, who will work independently, adhering to the principles of a rapid review and who will perform searches of the literature over a period.

1.6 Search strategy

The NWU's One Search database was used. One Search is a search engine that provides a fast, exact and inclusive search of 262 electronic databases. A scoping search has been done independently by both reviewers.

The keywords include:

FIELD	KEYWORDS
LEVEL ONE	“Critical thinking” OR “critical thinking skill+” OR “reflective judgement+” OR “mental synthesis” OR “logical thinking” OR “decision-making” OR “problem-solving” OR skill+ AND
	All text

LEVEL TWO **“Forensic social work*” OR “forensic practitioner+”** **All text**

AND

LEVEL THREE **“Report writing”** **All text**

1.6.1 Year / time range of publication

The time range was limited to 2018-11-30 as a method to gain effectiveness and compress the review time period (Patnode & Lin, 2018: 19).

1.6.2 Target participant / population

The target population for the study will be professionals in the field of health sciences compiling court reports.

1.6.1 Method of determining relevance

In order to determine relevance, titles and abstracts will be screened.

1.6.2 Method of determining quality / quality appraisal

The researcher conducted a rapid review. Conducting a review is aimed at searching all studies, critically appraising them and synthesising the best available evidence regarding the research question (Rubin & Babbie, 2013: 77). Even though a rapid review is conducted by one reviewer, for quality purposes the study leader will also conduct the six step process of evidence-informed decision making promoted by the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools as described by Dobbins (2017). This will be done to ensure quality and to guide the researcher.

1.6.3 Reviewers and their involvement in the research

This rapid review was done by two reviewers, Ms Cecile Louw and Mrs Tasleem Sayed. The first reviewer was the researcher, who conducted the six steps of the review process and wrote the report. Mrs Tasleem Sayed conducted the six steps independently from the researcher to ensure quality and eliminate potential bias. The study leader further ensured quality, as well as guided and assisted the researcher during the process.

1.6.4 Criteria used for appraisal

To conduct the quality appraisal, the researcher made use of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA). The PRISMA statement consists of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). See Figure 1 for the PRISMA flowchart completed for this study.

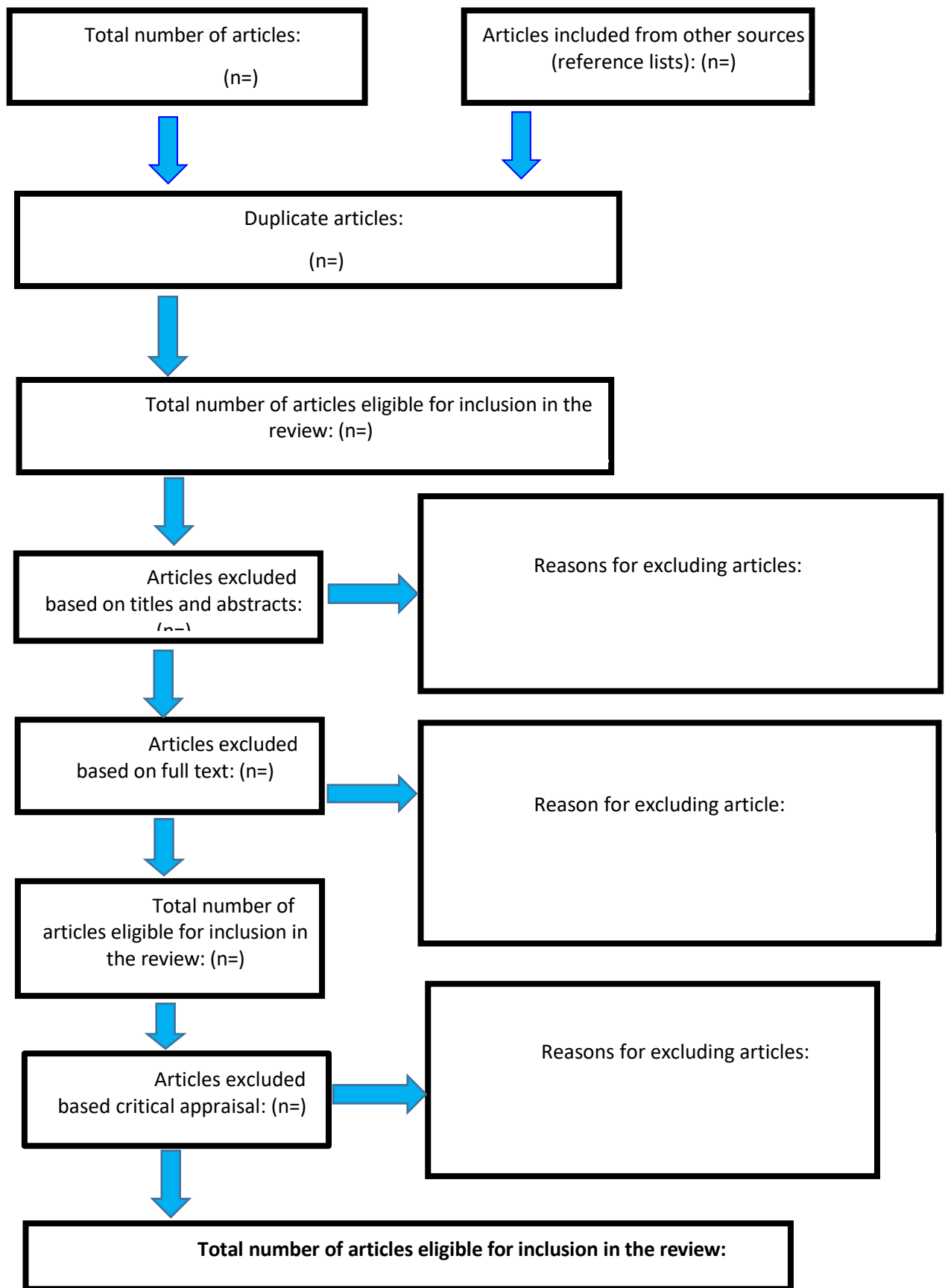


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

1.7 The process/steps to be followed for this rapid review

1.7.1 Step 1: Define a practice question

The first step of the rapid review process involves defining a question that is focused, clearly articulated and answerable (Dobbins, 2017). The reviewers have independently completed the first step and defined a question suitable for this study, which is: *From the literature, what key elements in terms of critical thinking skills are needed for effective report writing for social workers practising forensic social work?* Different frameworks can be used for defining a question. The Population Intervention Comparison Outcome (PICO) framework has been identified for the purpose of this study (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2017; Uman, 2011).

1.7.2 Step 2: Search for research evidence definition

Step two involves identifying literature that addresses the review question (Boland et al., 2017).

1.7.2.1 Step 2.1 Determine the database search strategy

During this step, the researcher identified the components according to the framework selected. The framework selected for this review is PICO; P is the population, I is the intervention, C is the comparison and O is the outcome.

Table 1: PICO Framework

Framework	Components
P – Population	Professionals in the field of health sciences compiling court reports
I – Intervention / phenomena of interest	Elements promoting critical thinking skills
C – Comparison (if any)	Comparisons can be made, but this study will not be investigating the comparisons at this stage
O – Outcome	Factors affecting critical thinking skills in report writing

1.7.2.2 Step 2.2. Conducting your search

Dobbins (2017) recommends that when conducting a rapid review, a librarian should be included to conduct the searches for the researcher. Librarians will search electronic databases, which are primarily populated with single studies, as well as additional sources containing evidence that may not be found in electronic databases (Dobbins, 2017). The NWU librarian has been valuable in searching for relevant articles for the purpose of this review.

1.7.2.3 Step 2.3. Saving your search

During this step, the researcher should document each source searched, the terms used and the results for each source (Dobbins, 2017). This step has already been completed by the researcher and the study leader; all records have been documented. This is an important step, as one may try many different combinations of search terms before finalising the search strategy. It will be important to capture the exact set of search terms and how they were specifically combined.

1.7.2.4 Step 2.4 Citation retrieved – assessing for relevance

Researchers are encouraged to save all citations in a reference management system (Dobbins, 2017). The researcher and the study leader have identified Mendeley as the citation manager. All articles have been exported to Mendeley. Mendeley is a free reference manager and an academic social network that help in arranging your research as well as discovering the latest research.

1.7.3 Step 3: Critically appraise the information sources

By this stage of the review process, the reviewers will have selected the full set of relevant studies to include in the review. The quality of every full-text paper included will then be examined and critically evaluated to ensure methodological quality, according to the general

critical appraisal guidelines and design-based quality assessment checklists (Khan, Kunz, Kleijnen, & Antes, 2003). The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme tool (CASP, 2018) will be used, as it has been designed for qualitative studies and suits the nature of the study. Using it will enable the reviewers to assess whether the studies included were designed, conducted and reported on in a reliable manner so that they can be regarded as eligible to provide significant answers to the review question and objectives (Boland et al., 2017).

In terms of bias, the Cochrane Collaboration Risk of Bias tool (Higgins & Green, 2011) will be used and adapted to evaluate the risk of bias. This will be done by both reviewers, independently (Rajendran, 2001).

1.7.4 Step 4: Synthesise the evidence – “Putting it all together”

Step 4 included several sub-steps, as described below.

1.7.4.1 Step 4.1 Data extraction

Uman (2011) suggests that a data extraction form be used to extract data. Due to the nature of the review, the researchers will adapt the data extraction form to fit the current review. During this step, data extraction and critical appraisal will be done simultaneously.

1.7.4.2 Step 4.2 Data synthesis

Synthesis answers the question, “What are the overall conclusions from all of the research included?” The researcher will use the results from the data extraction table to organise results and findings to simplify the process of drawing conclusions (Dobbins, 2017).

1.7.5 Step 5: Identify applicability and transferability issues for further consideration during the decision-making process

This step is crucial to determine if the research will be relevant and suitable in the local context, which would increase its chance of success. Adapting research evidence to the local context helps to answer the question, “Can this research be used with our population?” (Dobbins, 2017). This step should involve meeting with others on the team from the organisation who were involved in the rapid review’s development. The researcher will consider experts in the field of forensic social work and education to discuss the research findings.

1.7.6 Step 6: Writing up, editing and dissemination of findings

During this last step, the researchers will write up and send the review to experts for professional editing. Thereafter, the review will be submitted for examination purposes. Once the review has been examined it will be shared with various departments.

Table 2: Data extraction

DATA to be extracted	Brief motivation (how will each contribute in answering the review question?)
Author	This is important to include in the data extraction, as once themes emerge, the researchers know which article to identify / read
Title	For referencing purposes
Year	For referencing purposes
Journal	For referencing purposes
Any specific culture	If themes emerge, this can add value to certain cultural practices
Sample size	This will depend on the method used in each study
Age	The context of the review does not indicate age, as long as it fits the inclusion criteria of forensic social workers
Study design	This will determine what quality appraisal tools to use
Main objectives of the study	This will add to the themes
Main findings	This will add to the themes
Author conclusions	Recommendations

1.8 Data analysis/synthesis methods

1.8.1 Detailed description of analysis process.

Blundell (2014) states that an important phase in analysis is identifying the type of data represented. The nature of the data extracted will regulate the method of analysis to be used in the review study. Reviewing qualitative literature allows the researcher to explore and identify contextual gaps in literature and leads to comprehension of the specific review question (Boland et al., 2017). The researcher proposes qualitative synthesis of the extracted data by means of an inductive method of analysis. Qualitative synthesis of the information may lead to a greater level of understanding of what key elements of critical thinking skills are needed for effective report-writing for social workers practising forensic social work.

For the purpose of this qualitative analysis and synthesis, the researcher proposes the step-by-step approach of Braun and Clarke's process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013: 3). This method of analysis is a means of drawing together literature with the purpose of producing new theoretical understanding of the reviewed phenomena. According to Braun and Clarke (2013:3), thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyse and report on patterns within a particular data set. It is advisable that the process of thematic analysis be documented clearly to ensure transparency and clarity regarding the processes followed by the researcher (Sarantakos, 2013). Documenting this process will serve a dual purpose in that it will enhance the reliability of the proposed review and limit the potential of personal bias in the identification and reporting of themes. Documentation of the said limitations will take place, which is integral to this process of identifying themes. A data extraction form will be drawn up, which will be adapted by the reviewer to suit the needs of this particular study. Braun and Clarke (2013: 4) stipulate that six steps comprise the process of thematic analysis. The first step commences when researchers familiarise themselves with the specific data set to be analysed. Thereafter, the initial

coding of the data set is performed in terms of outstanding features or distinctiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2013:4). The performance of this coding occurs systematically across the entire data set while data is organised according to each code. Potential themes are generated during the third step of thematic analysis. The initial codes will be ordered into potential themes by gathering all the data relevant to each of the potential themes. The two codes considered in this study will be about critical thinking skills and their importance in report writing and how these are related and secondly, the background and learning factors that may be associated with effective critical thinking skills. Applying the fourth step requires the researcher to review and check the identified themes according to the coded extracts as well as the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013:4).

Based on the analysis of the data, a thematic map will be developed. During the fifth step the researcher will explore each theme in order to define the individual themes, refine the specifics of each theme and describe their particular relation to each other as well as the research question. To allow the researcher to present the identified themes, sufficient extract examples should be provided to support the basis of each individual theme. The authors Braun and Clarke (2013: 5) clarify that during this step, the researcher links the analysis back to the research question and the literature review to determine the relevance and accuracy of the thematic analysis.

1.9 Ethical aspects

This study will not make use of any human participants and therefore involves minimal risk. Ethical considerations will be kept in mind in the proposed study during the preparation and publishing of the review by adhering to the following guidelines.

Wager and Wiffen (2011:133) affirm that transparency is an important ethical issue during rapid and systematic reviews. Any potential conflict of interest will be declared by the

researcher. Transparency will also be ensured through accurate data extraction. The researcher will avoid the inclusion of unethical studies as far as possible. The methodology of each study included in the research will be evaluated for ethical irregularities (Vergnes, Marchal-Sixou, Nabet, Maret & Hamel, 2010: 771). The inclusion of only peer-reviewed articles in the study will also limit the inclusion of unethical studies.

The risk of bias (high / low / unclear) in studies included will be assessed by the researcher and the study leader, working independently (Higgins et al., 2011). This will minimise the degree of personal and researcher bias inherent in a review study, as two independent researchers will be involved in this rapid review study.

Proper acknowledgement will be given to contributors to this research and plagiarism will be avoided at all times. Appropriate citations when describing other people's research will be used in the review and the researcher will make use of her own words (Wager & Wiffen, 2011:131). The Health Research Ethical Committee will be notified of the nature of the research.

Only published research will be considered in this study and every effort will be made to maintain the integrity of the study by carefully considering issues pertaining to its reliability and validity. In ensuring validity and reliability of the data, the specific steps outlined in this proposal will be followed to ensure rigorous methodology of a rapid review (discussed above), as described by Boland et al. (2017:409), Dobbins (2017) and Uman (2011). Furthermore, strict adherence will be ensured by following the methodology prescribed for a rapid review. Reliability will be maintained, firstly in this proposal, clearly stipulating the aims, inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the methodology to be followed in a rapid review. Careful recording will take place of all processes in documenting all steps of the review. Reliability will be enhanced through meticulous documenting. To ensure internal validity, the researcher will guarantee careful selection of studies, focusing on the soundness and suitability of their

methodology. The reviewers intend to remain aware of the potential for bias by carefully recording every step of the process to ensure the consistency and overall validity of the study. (Ellemdeen, 2012:69).

1.10 Choice and structure of report

This mini-dissertation will be written in article format in accordance with CARSA guidelines.

Suggested outline (article format):

- Title page
- Abstract
- INTRODUCTION
- PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW
- METHODOLOGY
- SEARCH STRATEGY
- SELECTION OF STUDIES
- QUALITY REVIEW AND DATA EXTRACTION
- DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA SYNTHESIS
- RESULTS
- Discussion
- CONCLUSION
- LIST OF REFERENCES

1.11 Publication

The findings of this review will be offered in article format and will be submitted to CARSA for publication.

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Chapter 2: Manuscript in article format

Orientation to Chapter Two

Chapter Two presents a rapid review of the key elements of critical thinking skills in the report writing of forensic social workers. This article, entitled *Elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers: A rapid review*, was compiled in preparation for the *Child Abuse Research a South African Journal (CARSA)*, and written according to the journal guidelines. However, for the purpose of this mini-dissertation and the examination thereof, the pages are slightly more than specified by this journal.

**Elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers: A
rapid review**

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Abstract

This article is a Rapid review that synthesises the literature on elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of social workers practising forensic social work. It was undertaken to promote and improve the development of critical thinking skills in forensic report writing of social workers specialising in the field of forensic practice. Social work professionals may possess the necessary educational background, knowledge and skills but this does not guarantee their ability to critically reason and ultimately form opinions, while structuring and writing a quality forensic court report. This review was motivated by the desire to improve the quality of forensic reports, particularly enhancing the capacity of social workers to critically analyse and practise diverse forms of knowledge while writing forensic reports. Outlining key elements promoting critical thinking skills required in the process of forensic report writing would firstly raise awareness and secondly sensitise social workers in the field of forensic practice to the significance of applying critical thinking skills to produce a quality, objective and impartial forensic court report. The main findings of this rapid review illustrate that gathering relevant information is valuable as it gives an objective view of facts which should be accurately reflected in the forensic report in educating its reader. The opinions formulated in the forensic report must demonstrate that it is grounded in science. In attaining specific inferences and opinions, a scientific reasoning process should be followed reflecting that critical thinking skills was utilized in communicating unbiased findings in the forensic court report. The findings of this Rapid review offer insight that can be used to promote critical thinking skills when writing forensic reports in practice, however further research is needed within the South African context.

Key words: forensic social work, critical thinking skills, forensic court report, key elements, report writing

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a multifaceted profession that depends greatly on an individual's extensive knowledge foundation (Erbay & Akçay, 2013: 317). Social work is the practice of professional helping that follows a disciplined approach; this implies that the emphasis is on the needs of the client, therefore the social worker requires specific knowledge, skills and values to direct the helping activity (Holtzhausen & Artz, 2013: 9). In conjunction with the requirements of having a specific body of knowledge, values and skills that are unique to the profession, social workers should be skilled in social relations, social subtleties and management issues. Social work thus focuses on the person and the environment in collaboration. Social workers further attend to issues ranging from the individual needs to broader social policies (Holtzhausen, 2012: 3). The social worker is a professional person working with clients and having an input in social policies as well as other social concerns that affect communities, societies and families (Erbay & Akçay, 2013: 317).

The field of social work includes a vast range of interest such as child protection social work, forensic social work, probation services, community work and group work which highlight only a few applications relating to the profession (Erbay & Akçay, 2013: 318; Iffley, 2012: 28). Services rendered to client systems include assessments, counselling, client-centred advocacy, consultation and evaluation (Sheehan, 2016: 728). As social work has evolved over the years, various fields of sub-specialisations have developed (Holtzhausen, 2012: 2). One such practice specialty is forensic social work. Forensic social work involves legal and justice systems (Mangezi, 2014: 15; Robbins, Vaughan-Eden & Maschi, 2014). Sheehan (2016: 727) concur with the National Organisation of Forensic Social Work that forensic social work is "practice related to legal issues and litigation, both criminal and civil". In this particular context, this field of social work is focused on information gathering, assessment and providing an expert opinion that may affect legal parameters. The expectation is that the social worker practising forensic

social work understands laws and regulations, how they affect all levels of practice and most particularly groups likely to be victimised and criminalised (Sheehan, 2016: 728). The forensic social worker conducts interviews with children regarding the allegation of sexual abuse in the context of a forensic interview or assessment as the first step in the investigation process (Maschi & Leibowitz, 2018: 334), as child sexual abuse is a prominent issue that adversely influences the wellbeing and interest of children (UNICEF, 2013).

It has been stated that South Africa have one of the highest rates of child sexual abuse in the world (Wallace-Henry, 2015: 14). Child sexual abuse is increasingly being recognised as a significant problem as it affects families, communities and entire societies. Normally, it goes undetected, is under-reported and is poorly managed (Wallace-Henry, 2015: 13). During an episode of sexual abuse, the child is usually the only witness and the manner in which the child is questioned is regarded as the most critical component of the investigation process (APSAC, 2012: 3; Gagnon & Cyr, 2017: 109).

Therefore, conducting a forensic assessment requires particular skills. Smith (2014: 11) agrees that it is possible to obtain valuable information from a child but the social worker should have an awareness of the child's cognitive abilities and apply thorough investigation methods. Practicing forensic social work consequently requires specialised skills, knowledge and expertise in child development and interview skills to obtain an objective, unbiased account from the child in a developmentally sensitive manner (Hewitt, 2012: 100). The social worker should have specialised skills in forensic interviewing, knowledge obtained from specialised education, experience over time, professional guidelines and protocols (Smith, 2014: 171). In most cases of sexual abuse, physical evidence is rare and the psychological symptoms do not reliably differentiate between abused and non-abused children (Kuehnle & Connell, 2013).

After conducting the actual assessment, the expected outcome is writing a good quality, objective forensic report (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 488; Monosi, 2017: 1). To grasp the value

of the forensic report, it is important to note the difference between a forensic report and a report written for child protection social work. Social workers rendering child protection services, record information based on observation and interviews between the social worker and the client; this is a critical aspect on which decisions are based. Through written records in the form of process notes and court reports, accountability of the organisation's work is ensured for activities and results (Carnochan, Weissinger, Henry, Liner-Jigamian, & Austin, 2018: 9). Through report writing, the social worker provides an ongoing picture of the progress of the case in a child protection investigation, provides evidence of information gathered and decisions made and offers structured information. Finally, reports support supervision activities when seeking guidance from supervisors and inter-sectorial communication. Providing information in a court report gives justification and reasons as to why a child is seen as being in need of care and protection (Department of Social Development, 2013:147; Henry, Liner-Jigamian, Carnochan, Taylor, & Austin, 2018: 70). In the field of forensic social work it is an established practice that the social worker who conducted the forensic assessment of the child victim submit a written report to court (Iffley, 2012: 36). In the process of conducting a forensic assessment the social worker is expected to gather facts connected to the sexual offence regarding the case and eventually provide a legally sound professional opinion in the form of a forensic court report (Smith, 2014: 237). The value of the forensic report is central to the essence of its nature, as it guides different role players such as the children's court, prosecutors and criminal court in reaching decisions (Mangezi, 2014: 26). The court may consider the facts stated in the report to derive towards an appropriate sentencing (Holtzhausen, 2012:94).

Joubert and Van Wyk (2012: 31) emphasised core functions of the forensic court report as the "final product (scientifically-based court report) should portray advanced knowledge, skill and objectivity. It should be succinct and the social worker's expert testimony should withstand critical review from opposing parties". The forensic report as the final product of the forensic

assessment reflects vital information obtained from the child and collateral sources with the expert opinions from the social worker, which is significant for decisions on whether to proceed or withdraw a criminal matter (Gagnon & Cyr, 2017:109; Hughes-Scholes & Powell, 2015: 51).

W. Roestenburg (personal communication, 2018) concur that an effective forensic court report can be described as "... a logically constructed series of information that presents a clear, factual description and explanation of a sequence of events and how these can be described or argued as the occurrence of a criminal offence". In report writing, critical thinking skills are applied as authors concur that the content of a forensic report should be based on critical style elements within a certain framework (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 490; Shiraev & Levy, 2010: 32).

Critical style elements and knowledge thereof are imperative in order to produce a well-written forensic report. By implication while writing, the social worker of the forensic report must mentally argue in an abstract manner as well as during the writing process itself (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 489). The social worker compiling the forensic report should articulate their own arguments from different perspectives that entail thoughtful reasoning and writing on a meta-cognitive level (Joubert & Van Wyk, 2014: 490). Critical thinking is therefore essentially thinking "in a purposeful way using an array of standards such as clarity, fairness, precision, accuracy, logic and relevancy" (Tilbury, Osmond & Scott, 2010: 33).

Mathias (2015: 457) argues that one of the core competencies that should be refined in undergraduate and postgraduate social work students are critical thinking skills. In practice, applying critical thinking skills would imply scientific inquiring, synthesis and reasoning in order to form opinions and professional judgements (Mathias, 2015: 458). Shiraev and Levy (2010: 91) emphasise that critical thinking is an active and systematic cognitive strategy that involves components such as examining, evaluating, comprehending events, solving problems, and making decisions on the basis of sound reasoning and valid evidence. More specifically,

key activities in critical thinking involve maintaining an attitude that is both open-minded and dubious; differentiating between facts and theories; striving for factual accuracy and logical consistency; objectively gathering, weighing, and synthesising information and thereafter establishing reasonable inferences, judgments and conclusions (Malik, Setiawan, Suhandi, Permanasai, Nasrudin, Yuningsih & Rochman, 2017: 184). Alternative perspectives and explanations should be explored while probing for creative answers (Yuhaniz, Samsudin, Ismail & Zaki, 2018: 220).

Critical thinking is independent thinking and it implies taking accountability for claims made and arguments offered (Mathias, 2015: 458). As such, critical thinking is integral to discover problem-related circumstances and choosing effective practices. Further critical thinking assists in enabling one to avoid cognitive, motivational and affective biases in a given practice situation (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017: 30). Social work literature links critical thinking particularly to the element of evidence-based practice. The latter two are related but are distinct. As such, critical thinking inspires a consideration on how we reason and what makes us hold certain views. Further, it may require us to accept conclusions that do not fit our opinions or preferences (Tilbury et al, 2010:41)

The previous discussion clearly articulates the integral part of what critical thinking contributes to generic social work and especially in the high responsibility and fast pace environment of forensic social work. Different authors suggest that social workers in the forensic setting obtain particular skills, especially in negotiating and advocating by drawing on a strengths-based perspective (Cole, 2012; Sheehan, 2016: 729).

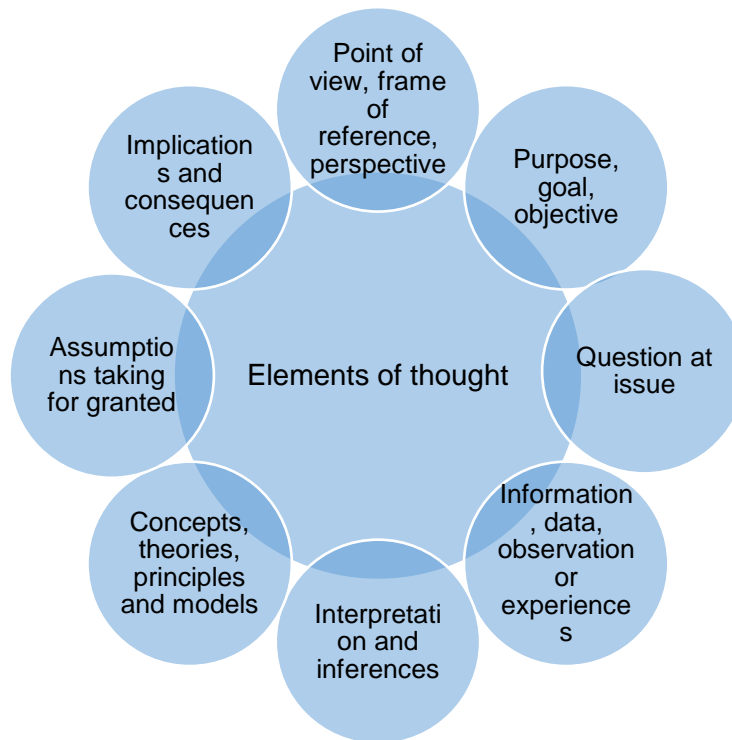


Figure 2: Elements and standards critical thinkers use to analyse a problem

(Paul & Elder, 2007: Foundation for Critical Thinking)

Figure 2 provides the elements of critical thinking skills (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2009; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017: 6). To think critically is to examine ideas, evaluate them against what you already know and make decisions about their merit. The aim of critical thinking is to try to maintain an ‘objective’ stance. When one thinks critically, one would weigh up all sides of an argument and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017:5).

It was confirmed that critical thinking can make better and more appropriate decisions in responding to information (As’ari, Nugroho, Nusantara, Sisworo & Hidayanto, 2018; Paul & Elder, 2014). Critical thinking skills are important in social work but specifically forensic social work practice. Critical-thinking skills are essential in today's challenging working environment in order to develop independent thinking and assist social workers practising forensic social work to effectively care for their clients and work efficiently for the justice system they serve. More so, critical thinking can be an asset while reasoning, purposefully writing and forming

objective, unbiased opinions in writing a forensic court report. Any professional person could possess knowledge in their field of practice. However, it does not guarantee they have the ability to think and reason well (Tilbury et al, 2010: 33).

Through a rapid review of the best available evidence in scientific literature, the aim of this study is to investigate and synthesise the findings to draw the relevant conclusions about the elements of critical thinking skills needed in writing effective forensic court reports by social workers practising forensic social work.

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is gathering evidence of those elements that promote critical thinking skills for effective report writing in forensic social work.

METHODOLOGY

Rapid reviews are considered “outputs of a knowledge synthesis approach that involves modifying or omitting some elements of a systematic review process due to either limited time or resources” (Grant & Booth, 2009: 95; O’Leary et al, 2017). The method of a rapid review is aimed at being rigorous and explicit and is undertaken to inform evidence-based practice in a logical manner (O’Leary et al, 2017: 742). Blakemore, Herbert, Arney and Parkinson (2017: 37) describe that, as a method, the rapid review results in a concise, well-timed and in-depth synthesis. The rapid review methodology seemed suitable for this research as it allowed the researcher to critically review, incorporate, merge and summarise findings from research studies globally. This study was approved by the Community Psychosocial Research (COMPRES) committee. The Ethics committee were informed of the study at the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

The six steps of the rapid review process as described by Dobbins (2017) were followed by two independent researchers to ensure quality and inter-relater reliability. The reviewers

independently completed the first step by defining the research question and developed a review title (Uman, 2011). In order to define the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the PICO acronym was used to answer the following questions: P (Population – include professionals in the field of health sciences compiling court reports); I (Intervention/ Phenomena of interest - Elements promoting critical thinking skills); C (Comparison (if any) - There can be comparisons, but this study will not be investigating the comparisons at this stage) and O (Outcome - Factors contributing to critical thinking skills in report writing). For the purpose of this review, the population of interest was professionals in the field of health sciences compiling court reports. To gather a broad sense of the literature, articles included were not limited to specific designs. Publications from January 1980 to 30 November 2018 were considered for this review. The reason for including this date limiter was to narrow the scope of the review as forensic social work is a relatively new field of specialisation.

SEARCH STRATEGY

The search strategy for this review aimed at identifying full text journal studies, peer reviewed studies, qualitative studies that identify elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of social workers practising forensic social work. Literature searches were initially conducted in October 2018 and concluding on 30th November 2018.

Two researchers independently conducted a comprehensive literature search. The search string was applied to the North-West University One Search databases. One Search is a search engine that provides a fast, precise and comprehensive search of 262 electronic databases. The initial search criteria were broad to ensure that as many articles as possible were obtained according to the quest for relevance of the review. The search strategy, including several keywords are presented in Figure 3. Boolean configuration were incorporated in order to limit searches and specify search parameters (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2017).

Figure 3: Search strategy

("Forensic" OR "Social work" OR "Forensic social workers") AND ("report writing") AND ("forensic assessment" OR "forensic interview") AND ("purpose" OR "assumptions" OR "key ideas")

The Universities' librarian searched additional electronic databases for the purposes of this review but no additional sources were found.

SELECTION OF STUDIES

Two researchers independently screened the titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria. Records were excluded if they did not relate, describe and document key elements in terms of critical thinking skills for effective report writing in forensic social work. Full text articles were screened to determine whether articles were eligible for inclusion in this rapid review. After duplicates were removed, 54 sources were screened by the researchers for relevance. Of these sources, only eight sources documented, described or related to elements of critical thinking skills in report writing.

QUALITY REVIEW AND DATA EXTRACTION

The researcher performed the critical appraisal first and thereafter data extraction was done. Uman (2011) suggests that a data extraction form be used to extract data. Due to the nature of the review, the researcher adapted the data extraction form to fit the current review. Full text articles were critically appraised for methodological quality using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (CASP, 2018) for qualitative articles. In terms of bias, the Cochrane Collaboration Risk of Bias tool (Higgins & Green, 2011) was used and adapted to evaluate the risk of bias and was completed by both researchers, independently (Rajendran, 2001). A data-extraction form was structured (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2014) by adapting the NOTARI (Appendix C) and MASTARI (Appendix D) data extraction tools (Joanna Briggs Institution, 2014) by expanding it according to primary research outcomes in relation to the

purpose of the study. The purpose of the latter was to ensure quality of included articles and to verify accuracy of the extracted data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA SYNTHESIS

Each article was reread numerous times in extracting the most essential and applicable information. The relevant information was analysed and entered into the pre-specified data-extraction form. The researcher used the results from the data extraction table to organise results and findings to simplify the process of drawing conclusions (Dobbins, 2017). Identifying applicability and transferability issues was crucial in determining if the research would be relevant and suitable in the local context. The articles found relevant to this study were qualitatively analysed according to the step-by-step approach of Braun and Clarke's process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013: 3). This analysis focused on identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns in a specific data set.

Sarantakos (2013) advised that this process be clearly documented to ensure transparency and clarity. In the steps followed, the researcher familiarised herself with the data through attentive reading of the articles. Initial coding was done according to distinct aspects or features (Braun & Clarke, 2013: 4). Thereafter, the researcher identified potential themes. In this review, the two initial codes concentrated on critical thinking skills and their significance in report writing and how these are connected, as well as what the background and factors that may be linked with effective critical thinking skills were. Accordingly, the researcher reviewed and checked the identified themes with a focus on the coded extracts and the entire data set. The researcher explored each theme so as to define individual themes, refine their specifics and to describe their particular relation to each other and the research question. In presenting the identified themes, extract examples were provided as a supportive basis. Braun and Clarke (2013: 5) clarified the importance of the researcher linking the analysis back to the research

question and the literature review to determine the relevance and accuracy of the thematic analysis. This linking was displayed in the discussion of the various themes identified.

RESULTS

Figure 4 is the PRISMA flow diagram of the search for studies of elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers, as shown below. A total number of 65 academic journal articles were found through the search string. 10 Books were found when the search string was applied. A total number of 75 relevant sources were found. 21 of these sources were duplicate articles, which left 54 articles eligible for inclusion in the review. 29 Articles were excluded based on scrutinizing the titles and abstracts. A further 17 articles were excluded based on a full text screening. The number of articles that were eligible for this rapid review was 8 in total.

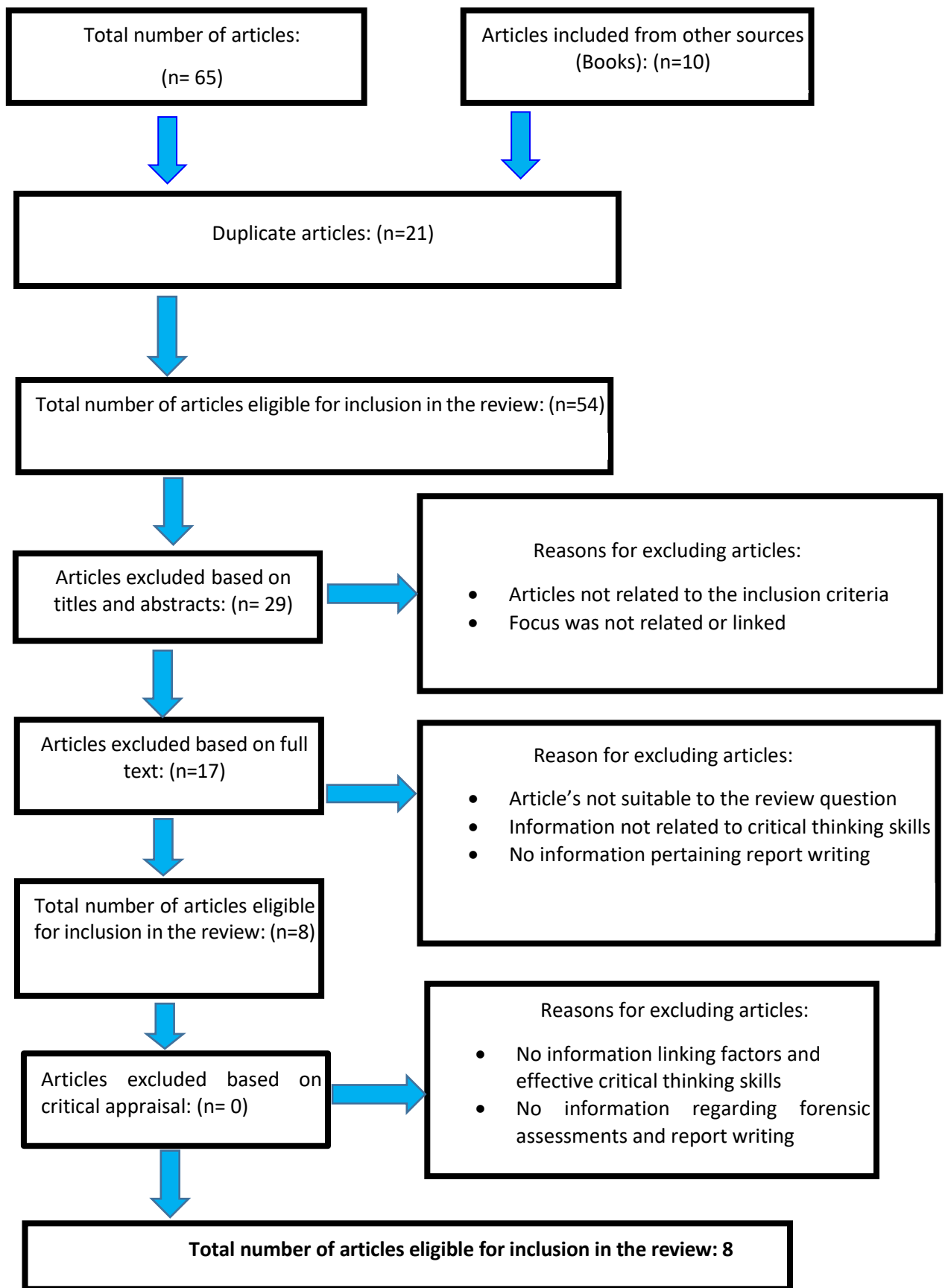


Figure 4: PRISMA Flow Diagram

According to Figure 4, a total of eight articles that met the inclusion criteria formed part of the rapid review. Eight articles were retrieved from the electronic searches. Out of these, seven were journal articles and one was a chapter from a published book. Resources included in this review will be referred to as articles to ease reading.

Demographic characteristics

Table 4 reveals a summary of the demographic characteristics. According to Table 4, the articles investigated stemmed from Auckland, New Zealand (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000), Australia (Allan & Grisso, 2014; Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013; Skellern & Donald, 2014), France (Combalbert, Andronikof, Armand, Robin & Bazex, 2014), Maine, USA (Hecker & Scoular, 2004), Hawaii (Robinson & Acklin, 2010) and Canada (Young, 2016).

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of included studies

Author	Title of article	Year	Journal	Country
1. Allnut and Chaplow	General principles of forensic report writing	2000	Journal of Psychiatry	Auckland, New Zealand
2. Allan and Grisso	Ethical principles and the communication of forensic mental health assessments	2014	Ethics and Behavior	Australia
3. Combalbert, Andronikof, Armand, Robin and Bazex	Forensic mental health assessment in France: Recommendations for quality improvement	2014	International Journal of Law and Psychiatry	France
4. Goodman-Delahunty and Dhimi	A forensic examination of court reports	2013	Australian Psychologist	Australia

5. Hecker and Scoular	Chapter 4: Forensic report writing	2004	Handbook of Forensic Psychology	Maine, United States of America
6. Robinson and Acklin	Fitness in paradise: Quality of forensic reports submitted to the Hawaii Judiciary	2010	International Journal of Law and Psychiatry	Hawaii, United States of America
7. Skellern and Donald	The relevance of the Goudge inquiry to the practice of child protection/forensic paediatrics	2014	Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine	Australia
8. Young	Psychiatric/psychological forensic report writing	2016	International Journal of Law and Psychiatry	Canada

Table 4 provides a summary of the main findings from the included articles.

Table 4: Main findings of study

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
1.	Allnutt and Chaplow	2000	Systematic review	Updated version regarding the principles of forensic report writing to guide professionals working in the forensic field.	<p>Report writing is a specialised activity embarked on by psychiatrists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report is a depiction of the professional’s views. • Information in reports should be accurate, relevant and ethical. <p>In writing medico-legal reports, psychiatry differs</p>	It is important that psychiatrists who write reports have a good understanding of the process of compiling reports and behave ethically and competently.

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					from traditional medical ethics.	
2.	Allan and Grisso	2014	Systematic review	Depicts a demonstration on how forensic report writing can be enhanced by using professional ethical principles as a guide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principles described provide a concise conceptual framework. These can be employed to critically reflect on current practice and reaching practice decisions. Acknowledge ethical principles in the context of forensic report writing that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuing the importance of the ethical principles in the context of forensic report writing is one way to exercise the ability to critically reflect on current practice.

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					can in turn guide best practice.	
3.	Combalbert, Andronikof, Armand, Robin and Bazex	2014	Systematic review	Reasons for the poor quality of mental forensic health assessments and reports are explored. Factors which contribute to poor quality and inconsistency between experts in forensic assessments are emphasised. The outcome stipulates recommendations to improve the quality of work and reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in the French criminal justice policies led to a rise in demand for forensic psychiatrists and psychologists by the judiciary to assess both perpetrators and victims of crime. • Due to no legal guidelines supporting expert witnesses as well as no consensus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a detailed analysis of the factors which may contribute to the disparity in the quality of mental health reports by forensic experts in France, recommendations were proposed namely informing judges and lawyers about the scope and limits of psychological science. • Also providing specialised training to psychologists

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					<p>among professionals about methods and tools to use, the quality of forensic assessments has been strongly impacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various countries called for improvements in mental health forensic reports and provided models integrating structural changes. 	<p>and psychiatrists who want to become expert witnesses in the fields of evidence-based approaches, ethics, criminology and victimology.</p>

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
4.	Goodman-Delahunty and Dhimi	2013	Systematic review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research is reviewed on professionals who conduct forensic evaluations. The professionals report in light of theories and findings from the field of decision science to critically evaluate limitations that may impact report writers and end users to use heuristic rather than subjective additive decision strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From the existing evidence from within and outside the legal domain the rational actor model does not accurately describe people's decision making. Legal decision makers are human and the human mind is characterised by limited attention, memory and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing field of literature does not support the assumption that the report writer or the trier of fact relatively weights and integrates the relevant information contained in a report to form a conclusion and that the conclusion itself is weighted and integrated with other evidence to form a final judgement in a case. The latter lies in both the limitation of the human

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations are made on ways to structure and format expert reports as to improve their overall quality. 	<p>information-processing capacities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unaided human judgement cannot resist the demands of compensatory decision strategies as well as strategies that reduce cognitive effort. The ability of legal decision makers to perform well is likely to be hindered by the fact that the law does 	<p>mind and the constraints of the particular decision-making task.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts to improve forensic expert report writing and legal decision making included that the expert reports should be directed at both helping the decision maker by providing decision aids and at minimising the constraints of the decision-making task.

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					not provide sufficient guidance on how decisions should be made.	
5.	Hecker and Scoular	2004	Qualitative synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report writing is an essential activity and has several functions and unique features which are discussed. • Discussions regarding the content of the forensic report which include seven guidelines for effective forensic report writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General guidelines to forensic report writing are: • Advocating for the data not the case • Organise the report • Minimise clinical jargon • Write concisely • Cite sources • Be detailed enough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forensic report writing can be a lonely process which could benefit from feedback and revision. • Critically review your report after a few days. • Obtain constructive criticism from a colleague. • Seek feedback from the end users like judges, attorneys

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather feedback 	<p>or other professionals who use your work routinely.</p>
6.	Robinson and Acklin	2010	Qualitative synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing the quality of Hawaii’s forensic reports, comparisons to other jurisdictions, and proposing improvements in report quality since the 1970s and 1980s. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of forensic reports in Hawaii is comparable to those in other states. Improvement is always needed as 66% of reports failed to document ethically mandated notice of limits of confidentiality, general lack of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory attendance at training may be required to ensure consistent report quality. Using checklists for quality elements and report formatting may assist to standardise and improve report quality. A critical issue is definitional criteria with a focus on statements by judges such as “we are

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					<p>attention to quality elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In improving the quality of reports, feedback is important. • Reports of community-based evaluators who attended the March 2005 annual training with focus on legal criteria, standardised procedures and reporting showed a 	<p>interested in the thinking underlying your opinion” is very important.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using CST-related forensic assessment instruments has been shown to improve report quality and to enhance inter-rater reliability.

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					<p>significant improvement in report quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on definitional criteria, procedures and standardisation of report format to promote thoroughness and consistency enhanced report quality. 	
7.	Skellern and Donald	2014	Qualitative analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining the inquiry recommendations leads to an application of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection/forensic paediatric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concluded with an adaptation of key recommendations directly

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
				<p>in relation to child protection/forensic paediatrics by discussing forensic medicine and its legal context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How interpretation of published reports and data should be used in opinion formulation; issues of ‘diagnosis’ versus ‘opinion’; and issues specific to child protection paediatrics; quality control; aspects of report writing and 	<p>practitioners need specific training in addition to what is currently considered necessary in general paediatric training programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pressing need surfaced for a uniform scale of confidence to be developed and applied by clinicians in their forensic work. 	<p>from those of Goudge, applied to the context of paediatric forensic medicine undertaken in child protection assessments.</p>

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
				terminological considerations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The experts' reasoning leads to their opinion. In fields of medicine which are interpretive disciplines reasoning can be evaluated, debated and challenged. • Aspects of report writing include language that is clear in conveying findings and reasoning should 	

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					be reflected in their opinions.	
8.	Young	2016	Systematic review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad principles to professionals are clarified in the fields of psychiatry, psychology and related mental health disciplines, in forensic report writing which is more global and fewer in number compared to prior lists. • Based on publications of the author's work related to ethics and good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health report writing is varied, the area needs a new model which is categorised with meta-principles or overarching concepts as well as intermediate principles leading to standards and guidelines related to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of the 4 D's needed in forensic practice proved important in the structuring of the myriad standards and rules into a coherent model with a reduces set of principles. • The four principles are dignity, distance, data collection and determination. • The four principles are explained as conducting

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
				<p>practice in forensics, new ideas are presented on principles in forensic report writing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An applicable term as an overarching principle in forensic report writing is “Integrity in Ethics, Law and Science”. This term stand at the top of the hierarchical approach in understanding forensic report writing. In forensic report writing issues of objectivity and 	<p>oneself with dignity and with a thoughtful distance from the adversarial divide, comprehensiveness in data gathering and interpreting the data thoughtfully.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The latter helped elaborate a new model of forensic report writing that is hierarchically organised with a meta-principle related to ethics, science, law; the four D’s and finally the multiple principles on Forensic

	Author	Year	Study design	Main objectives of the study	Main findings	Author conclusion
					<p>honesty stand out and a scientifically- informed approach to forensic report writing can assist greatly.</p>	<p>Mental Health Assessment as applied to psychiatric/psychological forensic report writing.</p>

According to Table 5, the eight included articles were qualitative in nature (Hecker & Scoular, 2004; Robinson & Acklin, 2010; Skellern & Donald, 2014) as well as systematic reviews (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000; Allan & Grisso, 2014; Combalbert et al, 2014; Goodman-Delahunty & Dhimi, 2013; Young, 2016) These sources emanated from Auckland, New Zealand (n= 1), Australia (n = 3), France (n = 1), Maine (n = 1), Hawaii (n = 1) and Canada (n = 1).

Even though the articles found were of a different nature to Social Work e.g. Psychiatry, it was included and relevant to this rapid review because the nature of report writing is applicable and relevant in all disciplines.

Table 5: Risk of bias summary of eligible sources – using an adapted version of the Cochrane Collaboration Risk of Bias tool (Hassim, 2016).

Electronic sources by author & date	Allnutt and Chaplow (2000)	Allan and Grisso (2014)	Combalbert et al. (2014)	Goodman-deleahunty et al (2013)	Hecker and Scoular (2004)	Robinson and Acklin (2010)	Skellern and Donald (2014)	Young (2016)
Selection bias								
<i>(Bias in the participant selection process. Taking into account the sampling size & sampling method.)</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Attrition bias								
<i>(Completeness of outcome data.)</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reporting bias								
<i>(Selective reporting in the sense of significant & non-significant results.)</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other sources of bias								
<i>(Interviewer / researcher / interviewee bias)</i>	-	-	+	-	-	-	?	-
Key								
Low risk – Possible bias unlikely to alter results seriously.	-							
High risk - Possible bias raising some doubt about the results.	+							
Unclear risk – Possible bias seriously weakening confidence in the result.	?							

The eight included studies were appraised for methodological quality against the criteria of the CASP (CASP, 2018) for qualitative studies. To ensure methodological quality, the reviewers ensued an appraisal of the relevant studies based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria from the rapid review to improve both the reliability and validity of this study.

Table 6 provides a summary of the bias identified in all included studies. One article had a high risk of bias and another article had indicated unclear risk of bias. Even though these articles indicated possible bias that raised some doubt regarding the results, the researchers deemed the findings appropriate and necessary to the review. For the purposes of this study, all articles were included, taking into account that other articles supported their findings.

Discussion

This rapid review was aimed at identifying key elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers. Malik et al (2017:184) hold the premise that critical thinking skills “includes the skills to propose predictions, explain possible events, identify interrelationships, making valid conclusions, establishing rational decisions, and solving context-rich issues.” This research was aimed to gather information on report writing for forensic social workers, however articles were yielded mainly from psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health professionals and the field of forensic medicine. The articles discussed types of forensic reports, the activity and quality of writing reports, ethical practice and the content or style of forensic mental health report writing. Therefore, the researchers are reporting on the articles gathered as report writing occurs across disciplines and these can also contribute to forensic social work because the literature reports on forensic report writing in psychiatry, psychology and allied disciplines in mental health as well as social work.

Young (2016: 214) emphasises ethical principles of one’s profession and applying them to forensic work. This, in turn, was incorporated in aspects of forensic report writing.

Combalbert et al (2014: 629) and authors from the literature sources gave an overview of forensic work that included assessment both with offenders as well as child victims (Skellern & Donald, 2014: 36). Allan and Grisso (2014: 467) reiterated the importance of adhering to ethical principles, standards and guidelines of different professional bodies, especially when communicating findings and opinions in forensic reports. Literature also made mention that report writing extends to compiling reports in matters of abuse and neglect of children and the value and content of such reports (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 980). Furthermore, various recommendations were made to improve the quality of expert reports (Combalbert et al, 2014: 632). Goodman-Delahunty and Dhami (2013: 32) conceded that the written forensic report was the product of a forensic assessment, noting that forensic report writing comprised a fundamental skill that can be enhanced by non-informational aspects, such as report structure and presentation. Lastly, report writing as an activity served a crucial function, especially for psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers in the legal arena, when an attentive approach to report writing was taken considering the distinctive features of forensic reports (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 63 – 80). The literature identified an emphasis on how these professionals can improve their quality of work, applying theories and findings from the field of decision science in extending their application on forensic reports, how forensic reports serve varied essential functions, required skills and circumstances needed in the field of forensic work and assessing evaluators experiences and their implications for child forensic practice.

Obtaining relevant information

In conducting the rapid review, an element which appeared very significant in compiling a forensic report pertaining child neglect and abuse was gathering socio-emotional information as well as sufficient collateral information (Robinson & Acklin, 2010: 132). Allnut and Chaplow (2000: 984) have repeatedly reported a strong association that a thorough, perceptive and

impartial understanding should be gained from the familial, social and systemic environment of the child, including the association between these and the presenting symptoms. This should be reflected accordingly in writing. Gathering collateral information with regard to the child and their environment and reviewing other sources of information can substantiate clinical facts, as well as clarify, support or refute information obtained from the child victim (Hecker & Scoular, 2004:74; Skellern & Donald, 2014: 36; Young, 2016: 215). The forensic report would entail a combination of information from several diverse sources including interviews, observations, third parties and official records (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013: 33). For this reason the forensic report received acknowledgement for its complex nature and distinct role of communicating information of both the victim and the expert compiling the report (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 67). The relevance of these effects in the forensic setting relate to the premise that failing to document relevant information impacts the outcome of the report significantly as this lack of documentation inevitably leads to an inability to consciously make informed decisions. This proved relevant as forensic reports encompass assembled information answering to a particular referral question posed by a court of law (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013: 36).

Accuracy of facts

Research demonstrated that a forensic report serves an important purpose as it assists the court to make a suitable judgement in a criminal matter (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 983). As such, it should be a well-crafted, comprehensive, straightforward readable document (Leonard, 2015: 181). The review further highlighted that accuracy of facts and appropriate language in terms of drafting the report were essential in concluding the final opinion or facts (Skellern & Donald, 2014: 37). Principles of precision, conciseness, simplicity and humanity are emphasized

as noteworthy factors to be taken into consideration when writing a forensic report (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 984).

The aspect of clarity was achieved by adequately explaining terms and avoiding technical terminology and vagueness. The report should reflect accuracy of facts and communicate findings properly. The factual and clinical data should be written in the past tense, whereas the opinion should be written in the present tense (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 77). Preferably short words, paragraphs and sentences should be used in order to achieve conciseness. Using simple words as far as possible will capture the essence of what one wants to convey. Writing in a manner that allows one to read out loud comfortably and avoiding ambiguity as well as technical terminology were reinforced (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 984; Allan & Grisso, 2014: 470; Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 65; Skellern & Donald, 2014: 37). Essentially, the report as a product should be easily understood by any layperson not familiar with forensic work and should be well organised around specific issues for readers to grasp the information (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 64). It is advisable to have clear outlines with headings and subheadings. The principle of integrity with the focus on openness emphasises the importance of revealing all relevant data in a forensic report. This in turn would promote transparency as the writer would give a view not only consistent with their conclusions (Allan & Grisso, 2014: 472; Combalbert et al, 2014: 632). In Young's study (2016: 216) writers were advised against exaggeration and distortion when writing forensic reports. The American Psychological Association advocate the principle of respecting both the rights and dignity of people. Therefore, authors alluded that the forensic report was a form of communication to educate the reader thereof and to convey opinions and conclusions as concisely as possible (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhimi, 2013: 37; Hecker & Scoular, 2004:78).

Critically evaluate claims

Literature illustrates that in a forensic report, questions should be answered comprehensively through solid arguments. The issues being addressed must be appraised critically and ultimately corroborated or contradicted (Combalbert et al, 2014: 632). In one article, the rational actor model suggested people employ compensatory decision strategies (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013: 34). This implies that all available information is assessed and combined to make a certain decision (Young, 2016: 219). People do not always use this model to make decisions as they are human and sometimes choose to employ strategies that reduce cognitive effort. However, not all information presented in a forensic report will be given due consideration as individuals also make use of heuristic approaches which are non-compensatory (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013: 34). Another finding further suggests that in order to constructively criticise a report, the writer should leave the forensic report after completion in order for the writer to critically review it within a few days (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 8). Constructive feedback can be obtained from a colleague where one reviews and critiques another's work. Hecker and Scoular (2004: 80) suggest seeking feedback from consumers using your work and perusing your forensic report. An article on the quality of forensic reports submitted to the Hawaii judiciary agree that feedback is important to improve report quality (Robinson & Acklin, 2010: 136).

Skellern and Donald's (2014) study reiterates the value of reasoning which informs conclusions. Reasoning as a principle implies information can be assessed, argued and challenged, which is of value in the fields of medicine (Skellern & Donald, 2014: 38). Young (2016: 215) further specified the importance of the principle of scientific reasoning when constructing forensic reports. The forensic assessor should assess the connecting link between the evaluatee's clinical condition and functional capabilities. The link between an incident or traumatic stressor at hand and the resulting psychological condition leading to functional

impairment (if any) should be clearly described. Scientific reasoning involves acknowledging of all options and information assembled, logically choosing and using scientific findings and research in hypothesising and interpreting all the information gathered in the assessment process. As such, the reports should clearly relay information to the court and talk to legal questions accordingly as allowed (Young, 2016: 219).

Opinions

The evidence of this review suggests that in a forensic report, opinions should have a factual stance as it is the part of the report of most interest and relevance to the court (Young, 2016: 217). Opinions formulated should clearly demonstrate the reasoning process followed by the writer (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 985). Again, it was clarified that conclusions, facts and opinions should be clearly distinguished (Young, 2016: 217). Opinions uttered in the forensic report must be grounded in sound knowledge (Combalbert et al, 2014:632). Reflections of adhering to this suggestion relate to using reliable and applicable evidence to support proffered opinions by demonstrating how the multitude of evidence is consistent with the opinion, while further evidence will fit alternative hypotheses (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 74; Young, 2016: 217). The information in a forensic report should allow the reader to follow arguments and test the logic of their reasoning (Allan & Grisso, 2014: 475). Skellern and Donald (2014: 36) warn experts to form their opinions neutrally and autonomously and to guide against the misuse of findings to support their pre-conceptions.

Opinions should give due consideration to all the available information including collateral information relating to the matter (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 74). Formulating an opinion must reflect its impartial nature, in that neither side should be favoured (Allnut & Chaplow, 2000: 985). It is important that contradictory evidence stipulated should be commented about in the final opinion with awareness that if new information comes to light,

opinions must be adjusted (Skellern & Donald, 2014: 37). In the study pertaining to the quality of forensic reports, Robinson and Acklin (2010: 136) conclude that the likely clearest type of reasoning for forensic opinions is grounded in linking clinical data, functional legal impairment and forensic opinion. Goodman-Delahunty and Dhami (2013: 38) come to the conclusion that explanations for experts and report writers failing to evaluate and integrate the relevant information to reach an inference, and who do not support their opinions with existent literature, lie in both the confines created by the human mind as well as the restraints of the specific decision making task. Further, the same authors advised that in order to improve forensic expert report writing and decision making for the triers of fact, professionals should be assisted in overcoming their cognitive limitations and reducing the limitations of the decision-making task (Goodman-Delahunty & Dhami, 2013: 38). This stance speaks to instances where the social worker practising forensic social work does not have access to all relevant information and has limited time.

Objectivity

From the review it became apparent that in conducting forensic work and concluding the work with a forensic report, the professional should endeavour to uphold an unbiased and objective position (Combalbert et al, 2014: 632). Hecker and Scoular (2004: 76) caution mental health professionals not to get caught up in the adversarial nature of forensic work. Professionals are encouraged to remain neutral pertaining the legal decisions and matters they are involved in (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 76). Impartiality does not allude to passiveness but rather the professional being strong advocates for their findings and conclusions written up in the forensic reports. Effectively advocating your work is ensuring that you clearly communicate your findings in a forensic report (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 77). Essentially, the professional's credibility is generally enhanced when it is seen that one is an advocate for one's findings, including both strengths and limitations (Hecker & Scoular, 2004: 77).

Objectivity entails that evidence contained in the forensic report should not favour the side that has instructed the expert (Skellern & Donald, 2014: 36). As the aim is to produce a balanced, impartial report, this formal vehicle of communication between professionals should not be biased to either the defence or the prosecution. Young (2016: 216) explains that forensic report writing should be grounded in ethics and professionals should adhere to a scientifically-informed approach to focus on critical issues such as objectivity and honesty. Once again, the professional should avoid biases in the adversarial divide, implying that throughout the assessment process and compiling the forensic report, awareness must be present (Combalbert et al, 2014: 632). In their impartiality, the professional should be vigilant and watch out for confirmation bias and others that might apply (Young, 2016: 219).

CONCLUSION

This rapid review aimed at searching for evidence and identifying key elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of social workers practising forensic social work. It can be concluded that writing a forensic report entails much more than organising all the information gathered in appropriate sections and providing the appropriate content. This study identified the elements of gathering relevant information, accuracy of facts, critically evaluating claims, formulating opinions and objectivity that stimulate critical thinking when conducting the task of report writing. These elements should not be viewed in isolation but rather in conjunction, as each one forms an integral part in producing a quality report, grounded by the underlying ethical, practice and impartiality principles. Incorporating all the elements while writing the forensic report requires the writer to be in a state of mind where one takes cognisance of all data, accurately organises content, deliberately scrutinises and separates relevant from irrelevant facts. The writer should interact with the content of the report and the process implying attention to data structuring, synthesis and reasoning in formulating objective opinions to assist the court of law.

Articles identified in this study mainly included literature reviews and systematic reviews. The researcher therefore concludes that elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing should be further explored locally amongst social workers practising forensic social work in order to establish focus group insights into professional's experiences of compiling forensic reports.

The researcher received a bursary from the North-West University in completing this study.

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Chapter 3: Conclusion, limitations, research brief, reflections and recommendations

Chapter Three draws on the conclusion and acknowledges the limitations within this study. Further, this chapter also presents a research brief highlighting critical thinking skills and their importance in report writing of social workers practicing forensic social work. The researcher will reflect on the research process and learning experience throughout the study. Finally, recommendations are made for studies that could be done in the future.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify key elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of social workers practising forensic social work. Working towards achieving this goal, the PICO acronym was employed to address the research question. Through the electronic searches, eight articles were included and provided valuable information on factors promoting critical thinking skills in report writing.

Evidence indicated that gathering relevant and sufficient collateral information from various sources proves valuable in report writing as it serves an encompassing view of facts and opinions stated in the forensic report. In a forensic report, all information should be documented accordingly, as failure to do so can greatly impact decisions made as a result of perusing the information from the report. As much as the information contained in the report should be comprehensive, it should also accurately reflect the facts and convey information that should be understood by any layperson. The content of the report should generally educate its reader to make informed decisions. It was identified that the professional opinion, an imperative part of the forensic report, should have a factual standpoint. Formulated opinions must indicate the reasoning process followed and should be grounded in sound science. Not only should the articulating opinion be impartial but it must consider all relevant information sources. The

reasoning process followed should demonstrate the relation of information, as well as contemplate and integrate information in reaching a precise inference or conclusion. It was discovered that even though as individuals we employ thinking strategies which employ minimal cognitive effort, in answering legal questions to the court of law scientific reasoning should be employed. This entails the process of attentiveness, gathering and taking cognisance of all opinions and information, employing sound reasoning and making use of scientific research findings to understand and conceptualise information obtained from the forensic assessment. Finally, upholding an unbiased position in voicing one's opinion in the adversarial nature of forensic work gives an opportunity to provide the professional's stance. The professional communicate their findings through the vehicle of report writing enabling them to advocate in their findings both strengths and limitations.

Limitations of this study

Upon interpreting and discussing the results of this review, the reader should take note that the researcher acknowledges certain limitations which surfaced in this review.

- The focus of the review was specific to elements of critical thinking skills in report writing which limited the search, as it is not a greatly researched area in the field of social work or forensic social work.
- As a rapid review, this study is limited in comprehensiveness and coverage, as it was constrained to specific terms. The short timeframe for the review implies that more recent evidence may not have been included.
- The eight articles found and which were included in this review, only account as a small amount of literature but served valuable to this study as they were appropriate and available, found through the search strategy. However, this limits generalising the findings drawn from them.

- Studies mainly examined the forensic reports of psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health professionals, forensic neuropsychologists and child protection/forensic paediatrics in countries outside South Africa. Even though these studies were different to social work, they are still related and applicable as report writing is important and applied to all disciplines. The content of the articles was of great value to the rapid review.

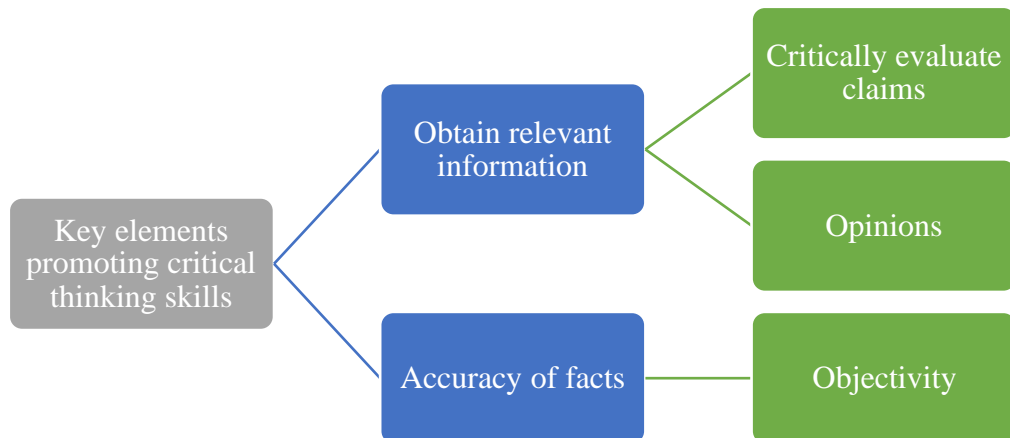
Research brief

The aim of the research brief is primarily to highlight the significance of applying key elements of critical thinking skills in the process of report writing.

RESEARCH BRIEF

Elements promoting critical thinking skills in the report writing of forensic social workers: A rapid review

The model below illustrates key elements identified through this rapid review which promote critical thinking skills in the report writing of social workers practicing forensic social work.



Main findings

- + Gathering relevant and sufficient information is valuable in report writing as it gives a broad view of facts.
- + Facts should be accurately reflected to educate its reader.
- + Opinions formulated in the forensic report should demonstrate its reasoning process and be grounded in science.
- + Scientific reasoning should be employed in attaining inferences and opinions.
- + It is important to uphold an unbiased stance in communicating findings in report writing.

Future recommendations

- Further research within the South African context with social workers practising forensic social work, to explore their engagement and experience when compiling reports.
- Elements identified in this research can likely be linked to other elements in enabling a generalisation to a greater number of professionals about key elements promoting critical thinking skills in the report writing of forensic social workers.

Reflections

The researcher was very nervous and excited when she started this Master's degree in 2015. She learned different new concepts, protocols, ways of assessing children and enforced information she already had pertaining practising forensic social work. The researcher read, read and she read some more to equip herself with the knowledge she needed in writing up her first proposal for her research dissertation. Reminiscing now, she realises that the excitement of doing research made her accept the challenge gracefully.

As in any given task or responsibility, she gave her best. She accepted constructive criticism because she believed that we learn every day of our lives. However, from her second year she experienced great challenges. Continuously she felt like she was hitting brick walls and huge stumbling blocks prevented her from completing this dissertation. The researcher, however, maintained positivity and hard work. The great people and support networks in her life assisted immensely with inspiring her to continue working hard. After writing several proposals and questioning her capabilities and abilities in completing this degree, she continued her studies under the guidance and supervision of her current supervisor.

It fills her with joy and gratitude because a very strong woman backed her all the way, Mrs. Tasleem Sayed. The researcher remembers the countless times that she felt she couldn't and did not want to continue. She had a person telling her 'you can and have the ability to complete this dissertation'. The researcher do not think there is are words which encompass her heartfelt gratitude. She can just humbly say THANK YOU TASLEEM! In this process of completing her research she learned a lot about the process of a rapid review. She also realizes the importance of having a supervisor who constructively criticises, asks questions that enhance your abilities but more so, that brings the best out of you as a researcher.

Practising forensic social work for the past eight years, interacting and communicating with colleagues in the same field of practice, gave vast insights in how they view the process of report writing. Report writing is considered a problematic, tricky activity, where one's credibility and professionalism are often questioned and scrutinised. These instances leave social workers practising forensic social work demotivated to compile yet another report for court purposes. Sometimes, due to negative feedback from fellow colleagues, prosecutors and defence attorneys, the effort to write the next forensic report seems challenging, difficult and yet another character-testing experience.

The findings of this review are essential for social workers and other professionals conducting forensic work. Experts should be aware that when writing a forensic report, the elements of critical thinking should be followed from the onset of writing the report to the conclusion. Maintaining a mind-set that embraces continuous critical appraisal of all information at your disposal stimulates your reasoning and enhances accuracy while critically evaluating claims (Jackson, 2008). Compiling a forensic report should be seen as succinctly putting different pieces of a puzzle together to create a balanced end product that would inform and educate its reader.

The significance of gathering all the relevant information, emphasises the content of the forensic report that coincides with accuracy of facts and reasoning. An expert which has this information demonstrates awareness and consideration for the views and opinions of various sources. Accuracy of facts is achieved by being attentive when structuring the content and conveying information in a clear manner that would capture any reader not familiar with the field of forensic social work. In writing up the forensic report, claims are critically evaluated, implying a conscious reasoning process at work. Information is linked and weighed up against scientific reasoning and inferring claims against existing evidence. Ultimately, the expert will form an opinion.

Opinions should never be formulated in isolation as reasoning and deliberation of all relevant sources and literature must be the foundation of neutral, informing opinions that will educate the court of law. Lastly, the element of objectivity accentuates the ability of the professional to remain non-aligned throughout concluding the forensic report, in a deliberate state of putting forth all information and acknowledging both its strengths and weaknesses. All these elements stimulate critical thinking in report writing, as they encourage dedication to every effort and process in formulating a forensic report, which urges constructive and critical thinking in producing a written outcome of outstanding quality.

Recommendations

Acknowledging the noted limitations and gaps, the findings of this review offer insight that can be used to promote critical thinking skills when writing forensic reports in practice. This rapid review has found that every aspect of writing effective forensic court reports, requires elements of critical thinking and continuous cognitive effort while engaging in writing. As this review found evidence of these elements, greater research is needed within the South African context with social workers practicing forensic social work in order to explore their engagement and experience in forensic report writing. These and other identified elements can likely be generalised and applied to a large number of professionals that would promote critical thinking skills in report writing and that would be vastly insightful to the field of forensic social work practice.

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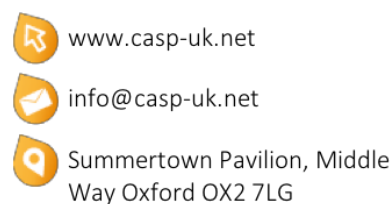
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APPENDICES

ADDENDUM A: CRITICAL APPRAISAL SKILLS PROGRAM (CASP) TOOL



CASP Checklist: 10 questions to help you make sense of a **Qualitative** research

How to use this appraisal tool: Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a qualitative study:

- Are the results of the study valid? (Section A)
- What are the results? (Section B)
- Will the results help locally? (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically. The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is “yes”, it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions. There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a “yes”, “no” or “can’t tell” to most of the questions. A number of italicized prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

About: These checklists were designed to be used as educational pedagogic tools, as part of a workshop setting, therefore we do not suggest a scoring system. The core CASP checklists (randomized controlled trial & systematic review) were based on JAMA 'Users' guides to the medical literature 1994 (adapted from Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, and Cook DJ), and piloted with health care practitioners.

For each new checklist, a group of experts was assembled to develop and pilot the checklist and the workshop format with which it would be used. Over the years overall adjustments have been made to the format, but a recent survey of checklist users reiterated that the basic format continues to be useful and appropriate.

Referencing: we recommend using the Harvard style citation, i.e.: *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP (insert name of checklist i.e. Qualitative) Checklist. [online] Available at: URL. Accessed: Date Accessed.*

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www.casp-uk.net

Paper for appraisal and reference:

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>HINT: Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the goal of the research? • Why it was thought important • Its relevance.
	Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments:

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>HINT: Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants? • Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?
	Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments:

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>HINT: Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the research has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)
	Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Comments:

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected.
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study.
- If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments:

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider

- If the setting for the data collection was justified.
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.).
- If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen.
- If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why?
- If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.).
- If the researcher has discussed saturation of data.

Comments:

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location.
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design.

Comments:

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes
Can't Tell
No

HINT: Consider

- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained.
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee.

Comments:

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Can't Tell	Yes
	No

HINT: Consider

- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process.
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data?
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process.
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings.
- To what extent contradictory data are taken into account.
- Whether the researcher critically examined their role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation.

Comments:

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Can't Tell	Yes
	No

HINT: Consider

- If the findings are explicit.
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments.
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question.

Comments:

Section C: Will the results help locally?

1. How valuable is the research?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<input type="checkbox"/> No

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research based literature.
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary.
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used.

Comments:

ADDENDUM B: RISK OF BIAS TOOL

The Cochrane Collaboration's risk of bias tool, as adapted by Hassim (2016) for use in qualitative and quantitative will be applied.

Risk of bias	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4	Article 5	Article 6
Selection bias <i>(Bias in participant selection. Taking into account the sampling size and sampling method)</i>						
Attrition bias <i>(Completeness of outcome data)</i>						
Reporting bias <i>(Selective reporting in the sense of significant and non-significant results)</i>						
Other sources of bias <i>(Interviewer / researcher / interviewee bias)</i>						

Key	
Low risk A possible bias that is unlikely to seriously alter the results	
High risk A possible bias that raises some doubt about the results	
Unclear risk A possible bias that seriously weakens confidence in the results.	

ADDENDUM C: TURNITIN DIGITAL RECEIPT

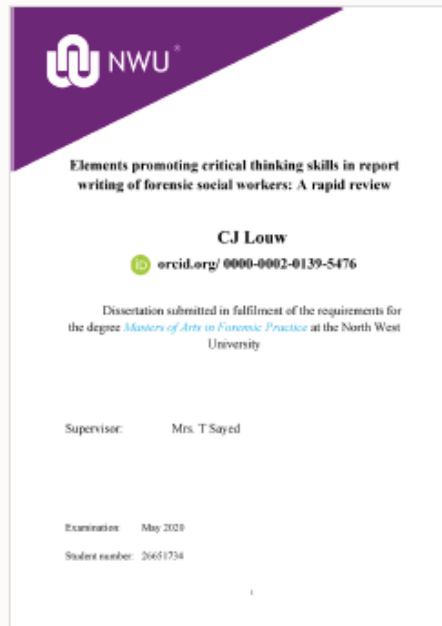


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ADDENDUM D: LANGUAGE EDITING

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Date of Edit: 15 November 2019

Edit: Cecile Louw

To whom it may concern,

I, Marielle Tappan, trading under the name MT Editorial, hereby confirm that I am a language editor.

I have extensive experience in the field of language and publishing and received my Bachelors of Information Science in Publishing from the University of Pretoria. I am also a registered member of the Southern African Freelancer's Association.

I hereby declare that the editing done for any client is done with the utmost diligence and the full appreciation of the English language and all of its intricacies, as was done for edited sections of this paper.

If there are any other queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards,

Marielle Tappan
Owner, MT Editorial
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SAF03058, SAFREA

Marielle Tappan

ADDENDUM E: QUALITY CONTROL: REFERENCING PROTOCOL

QUALITY CONTROL: REFERENCING PROTOCOL

To whom it may concern


I, Elsa Maria Esterhuizen, hereby declare that the quality control of the referencing style according to the NWU APA guidelines (with Chapter 2 according to the CARSA author guidelines), as used in the dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Arts in Forensic Practice at the North-West University

by

C.J. Louw (Orcid.org/0000-0002-0139-5476):

Elements promoting critical thinking skills in report writing of forensic social workers: A rapid review

was conducted and completed on 30 October 2019.



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