

**FAMILY PLAY THERAPY  
IN THE CONTEXT  
OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE:  
AN ECOLOGICAL AND GESTALT  
FIELD APPROACH MODEL**

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**Previous qualification (MSD Play therapy)**

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
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at the  
Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University**

**Promoter: Dr M van der Merwe**

**November 2013**

## PREFACE

This manuscript is presented in an article format in accordance with Rules A.11.5.3 and A.11.5.4 of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) Yearbook. The context and technical requirements of the accredited professional journals *Social work practitioner-researcher/Maatskaplike werk navorsers-praktisyn*, *Families in society: A journal of contemporary social services*, *Child abuse research: A South African journal* were used as basis to formulate the articles. Additional comments on this research are:

- Article 1 was submitted for review to the *Social work practitioner-researcher*
- Article 2 will be submitted for review to the *Child abuse research: A South African journal*
- Article 3 will be submitted for review to *Families in society: The journal of contemporary social sciences*

The Harvard method is used according to the requirement of North-West University; however, each individual article followed its own specific author guidelines.

Historical resources such as Finkelhor and Browne (1984, 1987, 1988, 1994), Germain and Gitterman (1980), Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) and Axline (1969) were utilised and in some instances provided an extensive knowledge foundation, not because the researcher could not find more recent resources, but because the content and the value and the contribution to social work practice of these resources were deemed as important and profound for the goals and title of this research study.

In the opinion of the researcher, the social work educational curriculums should include such historical sources as they provide a straightforward explanation and foundational knowledge base for social work theory and practice.

The tables and figures that are part of article 3 will be included in the article for the purpose of this research report; however, the author guidelines of the journal, *Families in society* require for the figures and tables to be included as addendums. The researcher will submit the article according to the author guidelines and specifications of the journal.

One literature source, Jones-Smith, E. (2014) *Strength-based therapy. Connecting theory, practice, and skills*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, has a copyright date – 2014. This book is already available in the NWU-library and the 2014 date has been used in this research report.

# DECLARATION

I, Arina Fourie, declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own, original work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of references. I also declare that I have not previously submitted this dissertation or any part of it to any university in order to obtain a degree.

*Signed:*

---

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## LETTER OF PERMISSION

The candidate opted to write articles with the support of her promoter. I, the promoter, declare that the input and effort of Arina Fourie in writing these articles reflect research done by her. I hereby grant permission that she may submit the three articles for examination purposes in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *PhD in Social Work*.

M. van der Merwe .

Dr. Mariette van der Merwe

**PROMOTER**

# EDITOR'S LETTER (LANGUAGE)

To whom it may concern

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5 November 2013

Dear Mr / Ms

Re: Language editing of manuscript: Family play therapy in the context of child sexual abuse: an ecological and Gestalt field approach model

I hereby declare that I language edited the above-mentioned thesis by Ms Arina Fourie (student number: 23277920) during the latter part of 2013. I also handled the technical editing of the manuscript according to the specifications of the North-West University as well as the different journals that the articles were submitted to.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any enquiries.

Kind regards

Cecile van Zyl

BA (PU for CHE); BA honours (PU for CHE); MA (NWU)  
Language practitioner

**EDITOR'S LETTER  
(TECHNICAL FORMATTING)**

**To whom it may concern**

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7 November 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

I hereby declare that the thesis of Ms Arina Fourie:

*Language editing of manuscript: Family play therapy in the context of child sexual abuse: an ecological and Gestalt field approach model* was technically formatted by me.

Regards

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "CD Park". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

CD Park

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest gratitude goes to the following:

- To God for giving me the courage, strength and perseverance to complete this study. Also for keeping me safe to reach this dream.
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## SUMMARY

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a major concern in the South African society. Although policies and legislation are directed at the protection of children, the high incidence of child sexual abuse is indicative of problems in society which cannot be addressed adequately with current service delivery. Individual interventions with children directly affected with CSA are still the norm, and even such services are inadequate to accommodate the high numbers of children affected by CSA. There is a polarity in terms of the shortage of social workers versus the need for intervention for this vulnerable group. Innovative and effective approaches to intervention for families affected by CSA were clearly needed. Based on practical experience in the field of CSA the researcher was interested in family play therapy as a possible approach to address CSA. Not only would more people be reached with limited services, but by involving family members in intervention it was envisaged that family systems would be strengthened, family members would be more attuned to each other and that the family would be more able to provide a safe space for the direct victim between sessions. Furthermore family members would be enabled to attend to their own processes of integration regarding the CSA.

Intervention research guided this study aimed at developing tools for the helping profession. The research question focused on what the typical components would be of an integrated family play therapy approach. Participant groups included professionals working in the field of CSA. Focus groups and discussion groups with such professionals and also a literature review helped the researcher to identify functional elements to be included in a preliminary family play therapy model that was applied to four families who were affected by CSA. During the family play therapy sessions rich information was obtained on the experiences of families. Based on the data collection from the various participant groups an integrated family play therapy model was developed. Findings are reported in three articles. Article 1 outlines the views of professionals on family play therapy within the context of child sexual abuse in South Africa. The professional participants agreed that individual intervention in the context of CSA is not the ideal and that systemic, Gestalt-based family play therapy may offer avenues for trauma integration for family members. They also indicated that they do not have adequate knowledge and skills to engage in family play therapy. They made some suggestions for the incorporation of play in family play therapy interventions. The second article captured the experiences of family members as expressed in the family play therapy context and article 3 outlined an integrated family play therapy model based on the previous phases of the intervention research.

**Key words:** Child sexual abuse, field theory, family play therapy, Gestalt therapy

# OPSOMMING

Die seksuele mishandeling van kinders (SMK) is 'n groot kommer in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Hoewel beleide en wetgewing gerig word op die beskerming van kinders, is die hoë voorvalkoers van die seksuele mishandeling van kinders 'n aanduiding van probleme in die samelewing wat nie genoegsaam met die huidige dienslewering aangespreek kan word nie. Individuele intervensies met kinders wat direk deur SMK geaffekteer word, is steeds die norm, en selfs hierdie dienste is onvoldoende om die hoë aantal kinders wat deur SMK geaffekteer word, te akkommodeer. 'n Polariteit bestaan ten opsigte van die tekort aan maatskaplike werkers teenoor die behoefte aan intervensie vir hierdie kwesbare groep. Innoverende en effektiewe benaderings tot intervensie vir families wat deur SMK geaffekteer is, is duidelik nodig. Gebaseer op praktiese ervaring in die veld van SMK was die navorser geïnteresseerd in familie-speltherapie as 'n moontlike benadering om SMK aan te spreek. Nie net sal meer mense geraak word deur beperkte dienste nie, maar deur familieledede by die intervensie te betrek, is die moontlikheid daargestel dat familiestelsels versterk sal word, dat familieledede meer tot mekaar ingestel sal wees en dat dit vir die familie meer moontlik sal wees om 'n veilige ruimte vir die direkte slagoffer tussen sessies te verskaf. Verder sal dit vir familieledede moontlik wees om hul eie integrasieprosesse ten opsigte van die SMK aan te spreek.

Intervensienavorsing het hierdie studie, gerig op die ontwikkeling van hulpmiddels vir die hulpverleningsprofessie, gelei. Die navorsingsvraag het gefokus op wat die tipiese komponente van 'n geïntegreerde familie-speltherapie-benadering sal wees. Deelnemende groepe het professionele persone wat werk in die SMK veld ingesluit. Fokusgroepe en besprekingsgroepe met hierdie professionele persone sowel as 'n literatuuoroorsig het die navorser gehelp om die funksionele elemente wat in die voorlopige familie-speltherapie model ingesluit moet word, te bepaal, wat op vier families wat deur SMK geaffekteer is, toegepas is. Gedurende die familie-speltherapie-sessies is ryke inligting ten opsigte van die ervarings van die families bekom. Gebaseer op die data-insameling vanaf die verskeie deelnemende groepe is 'n geïntegreerde familie-speltherapiemodel ontwikkel. Die bevindinge word in drie artikels gerapporteer. Artikel 1 omlin die sienings van professionele persone oor familie-speltherapie binne die konteks van die seksuele mishandeling van kinders in Suid-Afrika. Die professionele deelnemers het saamgestem dat individuele intervensie binne die konteks van SMK nie die ideaal is nie en dat sistemiese, Gestalt-gebaseerde familie-speltherapie moontlik weë kan bied vir trauma-integrasie vir familieledede. Hulle het ook aangetoon dat hulle nie oor voldoende kennis en vaardighede beskik om familie-speltherapie toe te pas nie. Hulle het 'n

aantal aanbevelings gemaak vir die inkorporasie van speel in familie-speltherapie-intervensies. Die tweede artikel het die ervarings van familielede, soos uitgedruk gedurende die familie-speltherapie-kontaksessies, vasgevang, en artikel 3 het 'n oorsig verskaf oor 'n geïntegreerde familie-spelterapiemodel, gebaseer op die vorige fases van die intervensienavorsing.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Seksuele mishandeling van kinders, veldteorie, familie-speltherapie, Gestalt-terapie

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