

**The use of the Nine Figure Picture Story within
Gestalt play therapy for
adolescent survivors of sexual trauma**

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Declaration by researcher

I declare that “The use of the Nine Figure Picture Story within Gestalt play therapy for adolescent survivors of sexual trauma” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Susanchen Maria Fourie

October 2011

Declaration by language editor

I declare that I have language edited and proof read the dissertation “The use of the Nine Figure Picture Story within Gestalt play therapy for adolescent survivors of sexual trauma” by Susanchen Maria Fourie for the degree MA in Psychology. I am an English lecturer at the Polytechnic of Namibia and a freelance language editor.



Jeanne Hunter

July 2011

Some of the sources used and referred to in this research might be considered ‘old’. These sources have been included and not been substituted by more recent materials because they are considered seminal and essential to this study.

Van die bronne gebruik en aangehaal in hierdie studie mag as ‘verouderd’ beskou word. Die bronne is egter ingesluit en nie met hersiene materiaal vervang nie, omdat hulle as seminal of onontbeerlik tot hierdie studie beskou kan word.

Abstract

The use of the Nine Figure Picture Story within Gestalt play therapy for adolescent survivors of sexual trauma

Sexual abuse of children and adolescents has reached pandemic proportions in Namibia. It is widely recognised that this traumagenic experience could have a profound and long-lasting effect on survivors. Nevertheless, few survivors in Namibia access therapy; often because of non-disclosure or non-reporting, being socioeconomically disadvantaged and the overburdened public sector therapists. This study set out to explore how adolescent survivors use the *Nine Figure Picture Story (9FPS)* embedded within the context of Gestalt *Healing tasks*. A variety of play therapy experiments was used to raise the clients' awareness and to evoke their therapy stories (as these relate to Gestalt therapy) and their trauma stories (by means of the *9FPS*). The researcher-therapist hoped that the study would enhance the understanding of the meaning-making of sexually abused adolescent clients, and in doing so, contribute to therapeutic practice in Namibia and elsewhere.

Research which aims to uncover personal meaning-making and hear the voice of the participants already suggests that the qualitative paradigm would be apposite. An exploratory case study was conducted in Namibia between August 2010 and November 2010. Two adolescent survivors of sexual abuse who met the eligibility criteria were drawn from the population by means of non-probability sampling. The sample was heterogeneous: one participant was a survivor of chronic intrafamilial rape; the other of a single incident, extrafamilial child sexual abuse (CSA). The *data corpus* included six and ten recorded therapeutic sessions with the two clients respectively; transcribed intake and termination semi-structured interviews with the parents; the researcher's process and observation notes; and the clients' *objets d'art* and *Therapy diaries*. To capture the tapestry of CSA accurately and holistically, the stories of the two participants were first analysed individually and thereafter synthesised into a theoretical comparative analysis. Trustworthiness was enhanced by means of investigator, theory, data and methodological triangulation. A number of safety, beneficence and non-maleficence measures contributed to the ethicality of this sensitive research.

The research uncovered that, despite their differences, the two participants presented with posttraumatic signs and patterns often reported in the literature. Most insightful was how the survivors disavowed the CSA to become "not me" (Joyce & Sills, 2006: 92). As it relates to neurobiological hypotheses, it was revealed that the tactile and visuospatial Gestalt play therapy, specifically the *9FPS*, seemed to access and address the fragmented, non-sequenced and non-verbal trauma memory. It was found that the *9FPSs* gave the unfinished business from the past a miniaturised dimension in the present and that the "differentiated unity" (Reynolds, 2005: 162) enhanced its assimilation into the self.

Key words: Qualitative research; Gestalt play therapy; Child sexual abuse; Adolescence; Neurobiology of trauma; *Nine Figure Picture Story*; Namibia

Uittreksel

Die gebruik van die Nege-figuur Prentjieverhaal binne Gestalt speltherapie vir adolessente oorlewendes van seksuele trauma

In Namibië het die seksuele molestering van kinders en adolessente (KSM) pandemiese proporsies bereik. Dit word algemeen aanvaar dat hierdie traumageniese ervaring 'n diepgaande en langtermyn invloed kan hê op oorlewendes. Desnieteenstaande ontvang min oorlewendes terapie. Nie-onthulling en nie-rapportering van KSM, die sosiaal-ekonomiese nood waarin die oorlewendes en hul ouers verkeer en oorwerkte terapeute in die publieke sector, onderlê dié dienslewering-tekorte. Hierdie studie eksploreer hoe tienderjarige oorlewendes die *Nege-figuur Prentjieverhaal (9FPS)* in die konteks van Gestalt Helingstake aanwend. 'n Verskeidenheid spelterapeutiese eksperimente is gebruik om die kliënte se bewustheid te verhoog, en om hul terapie-stories en trauma-stories te ontlok. Die navorser-terapeut hoop om begrip vir die betekenisgewing van seksueel gemolesteerde adolessente te bevorder en sodoende 'n bydrae te lewer tot terapeutiese praktyke in Namibië en elders.

Wanneer navorsing poog om persoonlike betekenisgewing te ontlok, is kwalitatiewe navorsing aangewese. 'n Eksplorerende gevallestudie is tussen Augustus en November 2010 in Namibië onderneem. Twee adolessente, wat KSM deurgemaak en wat aan die insluitingskriteria voldoen het, is deur middel van nie-waarskynlikheidsteekproeftrekking uit die populasie onttrek. Die steekproef was heterogeen: een deelnemer het kroniese intrafamiliale verkraging oorleef, die ander was 'n slagoffer van 'n enkele voorval van ekstrasfamiliale seksuele molestering. Die *data corpus* sluit in: onderskeidelik ses en tien terapeutiese sessies met twee dogters, getranskribeerde inname- en terminasie-onderhoude met die ouers, die navorser se proses- en observasienotas en die kliënte se *objets d'art* en terapie-dagboeke. Ten einde die stories van die twee deelnemers akkuraat en holisties vas te lê, is die stories eers apart geanaliseer en daarna gesintetiseer tot 'n teoreties vergelykende analise. Die geloofwaardigheid van die studie is verhoog deur middel van ondersoeker-, teoretiese-, data- en metodologiese triangulasie. 'n Aantal veiligheids-, weldadigheids- en nie-skadelike maatreëls is toegepas om die etiese begronding van hierdie sensitiewe studie te verhoog.

Daar is bevind dat die deelnemers, ten spyte van hul heterogeniteit, met van die posttraumatiese tekens en patrone wat in die literatuur beskryf word, presenteer het. Die mees insiggewende bevinding was die manier waarop die oorlewendes nie die KSM geassimileer het nie en 'n 'nie-ek'-identiteit aangeneem het. Ten opsigte van neurobiologiese aannames is bevind dat die taktiele en visio-ruimtelike Gestalt spelterapeutiese tegnieke (spesifiek die *9FPS*) die gefragmenteerde, nie-openvolgende en nie-verbale traumaherinnering toeganklik maak. Deur middel van die *9FPS* het die onafgehandelde besigheid (van die verlede) 'n miniatuur-dimensie (in die hede) aangeneem. Daarbenewens het die gedifferensieerde trauma-storie die assimilasië daarvan bevorder.

Sleutelbegrippe: Kwalitatiewe navorsing; Gestalt speltherapie; kinder-seksuele molestering; adolessensie; die neurobiologie van trauma; *Nege-figuur Prentjieverhaal*; Namibië.

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In 2003 Sister Silke-Andrea Mallmann – at that time from St Mary’s Hospital, Mariannhill, Kwa-Zulu Natal – presented a course on Bereavement Counselling to all School Counsellors from the Ministry of Education, Namibia. She enquired whether she could bring her friend to Namibia and suggested that this friend might also present some modules. The friend turned out to be Dr Gisela Perren-Klinger of the Swiss Institute for Psychotrauma. Thank you, Sister Silke and Dr Gisela, for the huge impact you had and still have on those counsellors that you trained in February 2003. Thanks for providing us with the *Nine Figure Picture Story* with which we have been able to assist many Namibian learners to rise above traumatic experiences and which has formed the impetus for this research.

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My family and friends who – yet again – had to excuse me from birthdays, anniversaries and other celebrations.

Uamii’s poem

Flowers

flowers have a lot of meanings
 two of them are –
 they are life’s beginnings
 and are shaped like stars
 but not too fond
 of ants and wasps
 sometimes they’re sad and down
 and lie and cry on the ground
 but with a little bit of sun
 she stands right up
 and shakes off the dust
 she brightens up
 and gives us all a great big smile

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