

Reasons why children recant the disclosure of sexual abuse

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- Mrs Marietjie Du Toit for formatting.

STATEMENT

I, Asanda Mabusela hereby state that the manuscript with the title:

Reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse

is my own work.

.....

A. Mabusela

.....

Date

SUMMARY

Reasons why children recant the disclosures of sexual abuse

Keywords: Recanting, Child, Sexual Abuse, Retraction, Rape, Trauma, Disclosure

Recanting is a recognized phenomenon in child sexual abuse cases, particularly in cases of incest. When children report cases of sexual abuse, it often set motions in their environment to safeguard them from experiencing further abuse. Children may decide to take back their allegations, in most cases leading to recanting. When children recant, it may be a way to attempt to put their world back to the way it was before anyone found out about the abuse. This behaviour is often misunderstood by professionals who may conclude prematurely that the abuse never occurred in the first place. The child may want the abuse to end but never imagined the consequences of the disclosure for them and the family.

The aim of this research is to find out the reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse.

The study suggests that there are various reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse ranging from fear, socio economic reasons, threats and disbelief from their parents or caregivers. It also suggests that there is a need for social workers to be trained on dealing with children who have recanted their disclosures of sexual abuse and to emphasize on getting therapy for the child that has recanted the sexual abuse allegations.

OPSOMMING

Redes waarom kinders die openbaarmaking van seksuele misbruik herroep

Sleutelwoorde: Kind, herroep, openbaarmaking, seksuele misbruik, trauma

Die herroep (terugtrek) van klagtes van seksuele misbruik is 'n aanvaarde fenomeen in seksuele misbruik sake. Wanneer kinders sake van seksuele misbruik aanmeld, sit dit dikwels in hulle omgewing bewegings aan die gang om hulle teen verdere seksuele misbruik te beskerm. Wanneer kinders klagtes herroep (terugtrek), mag dit 'n poging wees om hulle leëwêreld terug te plaas op dieselfde wyse voordat iemand van die misbruik uitgevind het. Hierdie gedrag word deur professionele persone verkeerd verstaan wat oorhaastig tot die slotsom kom dat die misbruik nooit in die eerste plek voorgekom het nie. Die kind wil hê dat die misbruik moet eindig maar het nooit die gevolge van die aanmelding vir hom/haar en die familie besef nie.

Die doel van hierdie navorsing is om vas te stel wat die redes is waarom kinders hulle openbaarmaking van seksuele misbruik herroep (terugtrek). Volgens hierdie studie is daar verskeie faktore waarom kinders die openbaarmaking van seksuele misbruik herroep (terugtrek). Faktore wissel van vrees, sosio-ekonomiese redes, dreigemente en ongeloof van die ouers of versorgers. Daar word ook voorgestel dat opgeleide maatskaplike werkers kinders moet bystaan in hulle openbaarmaking van seksuele misbruik herroeping (terugtrek) en sulke kinders vir terapie moet verwys.

FOREWORD

The article format was chosen in accordance with regulations A.11.2.5 for the degree MA (Social Work in Forensic Practice). The article will comply with the requirements of the Journal, Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk.

INSTRUCTION TO THE AUTHORS

SOCIAL WORK/ MAATSKAPLIKE WERK

The journal publishes articles, brief communications, book reviews and commentary articles already published from the field of Social Work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style of presentation does not conform to the practice. Commentary on articles already published in the journal must be submitted with appropriate captions, the name(s) and address (es) of the author(s), preferably not exceeding 5 pages. The entire manuscript must be submitted, plus one clear copy as well as a diskette with all the text, preferably in MS Word (Word Perfect) or ASSII. Manuscripts must be typed, double spaced on the one side of the A4 paper only. Use the Harvard system for references. Short reference in the text: When word for word quotations, facts or arguments from references from other sources are cited, the surname(s), year of publication and the page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g., "..."(Berger,1979:12). More details concerning sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to surnames of authors.

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REASONS WHY CHILDREN RECENT THE DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that sexual abuse of children is a major concern especially in South Africa (Pillay & Sargent, 2000:9; Spies, 2006a:44). Sexually abused children do not easily disclose their abuse and even if they do they sometimes recant them (Faller, 2007:184).

Recanting refers to the child's retraction of statement of allegations formally made and maintained over a period of time (Sorenson & Snow, 1991:23). Recantations occur when someone such as a child denies or withdraws an earlier allegation such as sexual abuse (Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 1984:705). Recanting is quite a complex subject and in most cases it has led to situations where there is no conclusive evidence on the prosecution of the alleged perpetrator. There are according to Olafson and Lederman (2006:27), fewer studies on recantation than on delay, non-disclosure, and disclosure. One cannot agree with the statement by London *et al.* (2005:217) cited in Olafson and Lederman (2006:27) that only a small percentage of children in these studies recant. It is more accurate to state that one simply do not yet know how often and why children recant their statements about actually having been sexually abused (Olafson & Lederman, 2006:27).

Recanting may happen after a child has disclosed his or her experience repeatedly. The way children disclose and also to whom may eventually lead into recanting. Disclosure of sexual abuse is often a dynamic process and not a one-time event (Faller, 2007:187).. Victims may initially deny their abuse, then later provide a

minimized account and disclose more abuse over time, especially if they find the environment conducive.

Recantation rates in various studies range from 4% to 22% (Sorenson & Snow, 1991:4). Most studies of recantation rates contain serious methodological flaws. Therefore, we cannot agree with the statement by London et al. (2005:217) that “only a small percentage of children in these studies recant”. It is more accurate to state that we simply do not yet know why children recant their statements about actually having been sexually abused.

Children recant for a number of reasons which may vary depending on the nature of exposure. These may be fear of separation and rejection, lack of support from non-offending parents to name a few. It is also not known how many children are being sexually abused as the incidents are underreported or kept as a secret.

1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sexual abuse against women and children is a tremendous problem in South Africa which has been branded as the “rape capital of the world” (Calitz, 2011:66; Goosen, 2012:1; Mengel, 2008:1). Richter (2004:6) notes that child sexual abuse is not new in South Africa. It has been occurring throughout history and in many cultures. According to Van As (2008:1), of all the sexual offences reported to the police, almost half are child sexual abuse cases. In South Africa as in all contexts, it is difficult to obtain accurate figures on child abuse due to the conspiracy and silence that surrounds violence against children (Vermeulen & Fouché, 2006:14). According to South African Police Services Crime Statistics Overview 2013 (SA, 2013) the total sexual offences have been reduced by 0.4% during the past financial year (2012/2013). The total sexual offences in particular in Gauteng has decreased by 10.0%. The secrecy surrounding the social challenge is placing child protection officials in difficult position and makes it almost impossible to protect children (Goodenough, 2003:1).

Recanting is not a new phenomenon and South Africa is not alone in the challenges that it faces in this regard. With the advent of democracy and the new constitution in this country, everyone’s rights to equal protection and benefit of the law are being promoted. A few professionals and lay persons would disagree that children have a

right to be heard, the right to privacy and the right to be represented legally or that children are persons not property (Kruger & Spies 2006:157). Burkhart (2013) points out that every professional in the child arena will be faced with a child recanting allegations of sexual abuse. Recanting occurs at various stages during the investigation or prosecution of the child abuse case. A recantation may derail a case pre-trial, during the trial or even subsequent to a verdict being rendered (Faller, 2007:186). In terms of section 110 of the Children's Act no 38 of 2005 (SA, 2005) it is stipulated that anyone who knows of child abuse should report it to a police official or a designated child protection organization. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 Of 2007 section 54 (SA, 2007) also states that any person who has the knowledge of a sexual crime against a child or a mentally disabled person must report it to the police.

Malloy *et al.* (2007:162) randomly selected 257 files from all substantiated cases resulting in dependency court filing between 1999 and 2000. Recantation was scored across formal and informal interviews. Those abused by a parent figure and lacked support from non-offending caregivers were more likely to recant. They further stated that recantation is not a false report, but rather children who have been sexually abused and who were influenced by the perpetrator with ideas such as police involvement, foster care placements and disruption of the family, can be greatly impacted by their disclosures (Goodyear-Brown, 2012:7). In these cases, taking back their disclosures may be a way of the child to re-establish normalization in their lives. When children recant, child welfare systems have difficulties ensuring the child's safety.

A child may recant for a variety of reasons, including secrecy, inducements by perpetrators, lack of support from the non-offending caregiver, societal attitudes regarding the sexual abuse of children, or the child's interactions with professionals within the criminal justice system (Kuehnle & Connell, 2009:309). Fouché (2006:211) reports that some victims do not disclose due to threats of physical harm to the victim and to the victims loved ones. Some victims do not disclose because they are protecting the perpetrator. Sometimes the perpetrator is the loved one, a relative or a friend. Also grooming process used by many perpetrators serves to inhibit disclosure (Fouché & Yssel, 2006:249). Victims usually have mixed feelings,

they may be uncomfortable, confused or even repulsed by the sexual activity but nevertheless love the offender and do not want to get him or her into trouble.

When children report allegations of sexual abuse, it often sets in motion in actions in their environment to safeguard them from experiencing further abuse. For some reasons they decide to take back their allegations of sexual abuse, and in most cases leading to recanting (Malloy *et.al.* 2007:162). Goodman-Brown *et al.* (2003:195) states that some sexually abused children do disclose their abuse but later recant their allegations due to the following:

- Children fail to reveal their abuse in the first place.
- Negative reactions to the disclosure.
- Child separation from the family.
- Threats by perpetrator or others to recant.
- Stress associated with involvement in legal system.

Carnes (2000:21) and Sorenson and Snow (1991:41), reports that many children's disclosure of sexual abuse is a process not an event, which might also include recanting. This disclosure process includes the following: accidental disclosure, purposeful disclosure, denial, tentative and active disclosures, recantations and reaffirmation. Many sexually abused children feel at least partially responsible for their own abuse. For many sexually abused children disclosing their abuse rather feels like confessing to their sins, than reporting a crime. Fears of separation and rejection can inhibit disclosure, for instance separation from loved ones including the perpetrator, loved ones are angry for not telling earlier or for seducing the perpetrator and causing family hardships by disclosing the abuse (Fouché, 2006:212).

Models of Recantations

Recantation has three models according to Summit (1983:177-193). Summit's (1983:177) original model was based on disclosure patterns of children that were victims of familial abuse. Thus one would expect that children abused by family members would less likely to disclose than children who were abused by non-familial perpetrators. Paine and Hansen (2002:277) described the model of Summit as a stage-based model. This model has five components, namely: secrecy,

helplessness, entrapment and accommodation, delayed unconvincing disclosure and retraction.

Malloy *et al.* (2007:147) suggests that recantation is an indicator of serious psychological distress and does not indicate a reason to close the case. The implications of recanting can be a blow in that:

- The victim may be returned to the abusive environment, unprotected.
- Victims may have no support or access to mental health professionals.
- It reinforces stereotypes that children lie about abuse all the time.
- The unlikelihood that victims will disclose in future.
- The offender is not made to take responsibility for actions and the blame is put on the child.

The researcher is working for a Child Welfare Organisation in Johannesburg in a sexual abuse unit as a therapist and it has come to her attention that a large number of cases of sexual abuse do not progress because of the children who recant. The alleged sexually abused children do not readily disclose their abuse and when they do they commonly recant those disclosures. For social workers that do assessments with the sexually abused child, it is important to know the reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse. If the social workers know why the children recant their allegations of sexual abuse they can help these children and prepare them for what is to be expected in the court case against the perpetrator.

Research question

What are the reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse?

2 AIM

The aim of the research is to explore the reasons why children recant their allegations of sexual abuse in order to provide recommendations to social workers on how to assess children in not recanting disclosures of sexual abuse.

3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

If social workers have insight into the reasons why children recant their allegations of sexual abuse, social workers will know how to provide assessment for the child and prevent the recanting of the child's allegations in order to prosecute more perpetrators.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative research method. According to Morse (2003) cited in Botma *et al.* (2010:182) qualitative methodology is used for example when little is known about the topic, the research context is poorly understood or the nature of the problem is not clear.

4.1 Literature review

Fouché and Delport (2011:134) consider the literature review to be "*aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified*". The preliminary reading on the proposed topic was important to acquaint the researcher with the necessary knowledge (Fouché, 2005:117). Although the study searched for South African sources, very little research has been done locally on the factors contributing to children recanting their disclosures of sexual abuse. A literature review was conducted by the researcher on concepts such as sexual abuse, recanting of allegations of sexual abuse as well as factors contributing to why children recant allegations of sexual abuse.

Databases the candidate has already used are EBSCO Host Web, and South African and international journals and books. The researcher will also use other data bases such as Google, Google Scholar, and Sciences Direct and Sage publications. The findings of the study will be compared with other literature (Fouché & Delport, 2005:124).

4.2 Empirical Research

4.2.1 Pilot study

A pilot study is a small scale preliminary study conducted before the main research in order to check the feasibility or to improve the design of the research. The purpose is to determine whether the relevant data can be obtained from

respondents (Royse, 1995:172). The researcher made use of a pilot study by conducting two preliminary face to face interviews with two social workers at Johannesburg Child Welfare Organisation to ensure that the questions of the interview schedule would be understood by the participants.

4.2.2 Research design

Grinnell (2001:231) defines research design as a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study from conceptualization of the problem to the dissemination of findings. The researcher followed the qualitative research design (Botma *et al.*, 2010:42-43). Exploratory research was used because little is known about the reasons why children recant the disclosure of sexual abuse and the researcher wanted to explore and identify the reasons for the recanting (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). For any research the selection of an appropriate research design is crucial in enabling the researcher to arrive at valid findings, comparisons and conclusion (Kumar, 1999:16). The research was qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2007:37). Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to collect data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study. The researcher has explored why children recant allegations of sexual abuse and how they have dealt with the phenomenon.

This often relies on qualitative approaches such as informal discussions with professionals, and more formal approaches through interviews, focus groups, projective methods, case studies or pilot studies.

4.2.3 Participants

The participants were selected on the basis of their relevance to the topic under study (Babbie, 2007:308; Greeff, 2011:366). The qualitative researcher according to Strydom (2005:192-193) and (Botma *et al.*, 2010:199) seeks out individuals, groups and settings where the specific topic being studied are mostly to occur.

Social workers who have more than three years of experience in the recanting of allegations by sexual abused children in the Gauteng area were included in the research. For the purpose of this research the participants were social workers in the Gauteng area. The participants were selected on the basis of their relevance towards the topic under study namely their experiences regarding the recanting of allegations of sexual abuse by children (Babbie, 2007:308; Greeff, 2011:366).

The researcher made use of a purposive sampling. Strydom (2005a:202) state that this type of sampling is based on the judgement of the researcher in that the sample is composed of elements that contain most characteristics, representatives or typical attributes of population that serve the purpose of the study best. The researcher thus chooses individuals by asking who can give the most and best information on the topic of recanting allegations of sexual abuse of a child (Botma *et al.*, 2010:199).

The researcher used the following **inclusion criteria**:

- Social workers in the Gauteng area that have more than three years of experience in assessing children who were sexually abused and recant the allegations of sexual abuse.
- Social workers in the Gauteng area that have more than three years of experience in assessing children who were sexually abused and recant the allegations of sexual abuse that can speak and understand English and who are prepared to be interviewed on tape.
- A purposeful selection of social workers in the Gauteng area with more than three years of experience in the recanting of allegations of sexual abuse, by children, was done with social workers until data saturation. Data saturation according to Polit and Beck (Botma *et al.*, 2010:330) and Strydom and Delpont, 2011:393) is the collection of data to the point where a sense of closure is attained because new data yield redundant information. The researcher has to evaluate all collected data in order to know when saturation has been reached.

4.3 Data collection

The qualitative method was used for collecting the data in this research. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect the data (Collins, 1998:1; Greeff, 2005:296). The interview schedule consisted of closed-ended questions to gain biographical data from the participants as well as open-ended questions to gain the data regarding the recanting of allegations of sexual abuse (Greeff, 2005:292-293). **(Annexure 4)** The main aim with the semi-structured interview was to gain a detailed picture of the reasons why children recant the allegations of sexual abuse. With the semi-structured interview the researcher had a set of not more than 6 predetermined open questions on the interview schedule (Botma *et al.*, 2010:207; Greeff, 2005:297). All the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the

participants (Greeff, 2011:404). Field notes were written directly after the interviews to ensure that the richest data was documented (Greeff, 2005:298).

4.3.1 Procedures

- Permission was obtained from the Directorate of Johannesburg Child Welfare Organisation. **(Annexure 1)**
- Written permission was also obtained from the participants in the study who were interviewed by the researcher. **(Annexure 2)**
- The interviews with the social workers were in the office of the social workers.
- The place and time of each interview was scheduled with the participants.
- The aim of the research was explained to the participants before they gave their consent.
- The data will be collected in themes and verified by the participants after the finalization of the report (member checking).

4.3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis must represent the reality of the experiences of the participants. The researcher looked for trends and patterns that reappeared within the different schedules (Greeff, 2011:373). In analysing the data the researcher considered the words, context, frequency of comments, specificity of comments, what was said and what was not, as well as finding the main idea (Greeff, 2011:373). All the audio tape recordings were transcribed to analyse the data (Botma, 2010:220).

The researcher analysed the data according to Tesch's approach (De Vos, 1998:342-344) and the following steps were followed:

- Organized all the data.
- Allocated codes to the first set of field notes drawn from observations, interviews or document reviews.
- Noted personal reflections or other comments in the margin.
- Sorted and sifted through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences.
- Identified patterns and processes, commonalities and differences and took them

out to the field in the next wave of data.

- Began elaborating on a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database.
- Examined those generalizations in light of a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

The researcher made use of a tape recorder to ensure the accuracy of the data and also verify the correctness by listening to the recorded data and working through the reports (Botma *et al.*, 2010:221. In this regard the qualitative data was analysed in the form of themes (Creswell, 2009:184).

5 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Strydom (2005b:58) explains that ethics is a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group and is subsequently accepted. This offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents.

- **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Neuman (2003:124) and (Strydom, 2005b:59) caution researchers by saying that nobody should ever be forced into participating in a research project, because participation must be voluntary. Anyone involved in research needs to be aware of the general agreement about what is proper and improper in scientific research (Babbie, 2001:42). Grinnell and Unrau (2008:18) states that respect for persons requires that subjects be afforded the opportunity to choose what should or should not happen to them.

- **Informed consent**

Monette *et al.* (2005:53) explain that, informed consent “refers to telling potential research participants about all aspects of the research that might reasonably influence the decision to participate”. Participants should be informed in advance in understandable terms of any potential risks, inconvenience or obligations concerning the research. Consent was requested from participants simply because this involves negotiation as the researcher is likely to attain greater access to data. Consent from the participants was also requested in a written agreement where they

were asked to sign the consent form when they agreed with the terms and conditions. Participants were informed that they could freely participate in the study and were able to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences (Butz, 2008:249-250).

- **Confidentiality**

The researcher preserved the confidentiality of the participants' identity and data. Anonymity of participants was kept when revealing information during the research process. It is the researcher's responsibility to make it clear to participants that the research is confidential. The researcher used numbers and not the names of the participants on the schedules (Strydom, 2011:119-120). The participants were informed of the confidentiality that would apply to the participants and also of their identity and the organization they work for. The interviews were in the office of each social worker where confidentiality was possible.

- **Protection from harm**

The researcher made every effort to minimize the risks of any harm arising for the participants (Babbie, 2007:27). Contact information was made available to the participants in case any unforeseen challenges arose.

The research proposal was approved by the AUTHeR Research Unit of the Faculty of Health Sciences. Written permission **NWU-0027-09-A1** was obtained from the Ethics Committee for the main research project Forensic Social Work Practice. **(Annexure 3)**

6 TERMINOLOGY

- **Recant**

Recant according to the Free Dictionary (2013) is "to make a formal retraction or disavowal of a statement or belief to which one has previously committed oneself. Recanting is thus the withdrawing of an active disclosure that has been maintained over a period of time. It is the retraction of the child's previous allegations of abuse. It is when a victim later states that his/her report of abuse was untrue and minimizes the extent of abuse.

- **Child**

The Children's Act (38 of 2005) (SA, 2005) describes a child as a person under the age of 18 years.

- **Sexual abuse**

According to the Children's Act no 38 of 2005 (SA, 2005), sexual abuse can be defined as:

- a) Sexually molesting or assaulting a child or allowing a child to be molested or assaulted.
- b) Encouraging, inducing or forcing child to be used for sexual gratification of another person.
- c) Using a child or deliberately exposing a child to sexual activities or pornography or procuring or allowing a child to be procured for commercial sex.
- d) Sexual exploitation or in any way participating or assisting in the commercial sexual exploitation of a child.

Faller (2003:20-21) distinguishes between the following types of sexual abuse:

TABLE 1: TYPES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

CONTACT ABUSE	NON-CONTACT ABUSE
Fondling: • Touching the child's private parts. • Inducing the child to touch the suspect's private parts. • Fondling on top or beneath the clothes.	• Sexual comments to a child. • Exposure of the private parts e.g. breasts, genitals and anus (flashing). • Voyeurism (peeping or watching). • Fetishism e.g. having sexual fixation on clothing or body parts. • Obscene phone calls.

Digital or object penetration: • Finger in the vagina or anus. • Inducing the child to put finger in suspect's vagina or anus. • Placing of an object in the vagina or anus.	
Oral sex: • Tongue kissing. • Breast sucking, licking, kissing or biting. • Kissing, licking or biting of other body parts. • Licking, kissing, biting or sucking of the vagina or placement of tongue in vaginal opening (Cunnilingus). • Licking, kissing, sucking or biting the penis (Fellatio). • Licking the anal or opening (Analingus). • The suspect can force the victim to do one or all the above acts on him/her.	
Penile penetration: • Vaginal sex (penis into vagina). • Anal sex (penis into anus).	

(Faller, 2003:20-21).

- **Trauma**

Trauma can be described as a horrific event “beyond the scope of normal human experience” (Greenwald, 2005: 9). To qualify as traumatic, an event should be subjectively perceived as threatening to a person's life or physical integrity, and

should include a sense of helplessness along with fear, horror or disgust (Greenwald, 2005: 9).

7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The literature that was reviewed was mostly international because currently a few literature exists in South Africa on the topic of recanting of allegations of child sexual abuse..
- The researcher had difficulty with the participants as they found it hard to schedule their interviews as they had other unforeseen commitments.

8 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

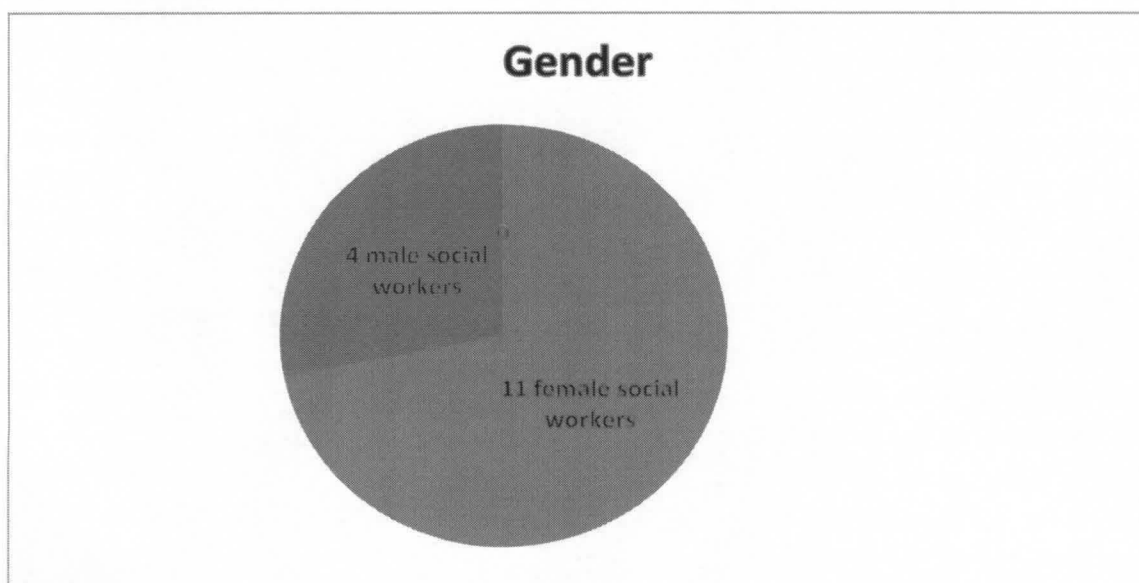
Empirical data was analyzed and organized in accordance with themes and are subsequently discussed.

8.1 Identifying data of the participants

Biographical details of participants were drawn from the following aspects, gender, work experience with sexually abused children, highest qualification, position in the organization where the participants are working.

- **Gender of the participants**

FIGURE 1: GENDER OF PARTICIPANTS



Out of the 15 participants in the research study, four (26.7%) were males and eleven (73.3%) were females. This could be the fact that in the profession of social work there are more females than males especially in the Non-Government Organisations (NGO's).

- **Social work experience in child sexual abuse**

For this research it was important to know what work experiences the participants have in working with sexually abused children.

TABLE 2: WORK EXPERIENCE N=15

Years of experience	f	%
3-5 years	6	40
6-10 years	5	33.3
11-15 years	4	26.7

According to the table above, the largest number of social workers 9 (60%) in this study, fall in the group of 6-15 years of experience with sexually abused children. It was surprising to see that there are social workers with so much experience still in practice especially in the field of child sexual abuse because social workers leave the social work profession for many reasons (Schenck, 2004:158; Van der Westhuizen, 2011:82). Because of their experience with the sexually abused child they could give answers to why children recant allegations of the sexual abuse.

- **Position in the organization**

Thirteen (86.8%) of the social workers were working for Non-Government Organisations, one (6.6%) was working for the South African Police Service and one (6.6%) social worker was in private practice.

TABLE 3: POSITION IN THE ORGANIZATION N=15

Position	f	%
Social worker	5	33.4
Senior social worker	6	40
Supervisor	3	20
Training manager	1	6.6

Most of the participants 9 (60%) in this research are senior social workers. The remaining numbers of participants are either a social worker or a training manager. However all the participants had experience in field work and especially with the sexually abused child.

- **Qualification of respondents**

The researcher wanted to know what are the participant's qualification and especially other qualifications in the field of the sexually abused child.

TABLE 4: HIGHEST QUALIFICATION N=15

Qualification	f	%
BA Social Work	8	53.3
Honns Social Work	5	33.4
MA Forensic Social Work	2	13.3

From the data above most of the participants have a BA degree and two a MA in Forensic Social Work from the North-West University. Two participants have certificates which they achieved by attending a short course in child abuse.

8.2 Themes and sub-themes regarding recantation

THEME 1: Gender of the child who recants allegations of sexual abuse the most

Participants were asked who recants disclosures of sexual abuse the most, boys or girls? Three participants responded that it is boys. The following answers were obtained for boys.

'I think there is some kind of stigma surrounding sexual abuse and a boy that has been sexually abused cooperates at a later stage because of culture or the view of society so they tend to recant so that they can distance themselves from the sexual abuse'. [P3]

"It is mainly boys and the reason might be that if they disclose the abuse they could be seen as cowards and that people will judge them". [P4]

"Boys are afraid that people will laugh at them and that people will judge them". [15]

A study by Jewkes *et al.* (2002:319–20) revealed that sexual abuse of girls is a problem worldwide, and a growing concern in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Watt and Zimmerman (2002:1232), most child victims of sexual offences are girls. The researcher came to the conclusion that in South Africa girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and rape incidents than boys. Alaggia (2004:1213) suggests that gender differences have been identified as impacting on the disclosure of sexual abuse too. Alaggia (2004:1213) found that boys recant because they fear being stigmatized as homosexuals. Although boys fear being stigmatized there are similarities between boys and girls in how they feel about fear, guilt and shame.

According to Olafson and Lederman (2006:35) there are suggestions that boys may be more reluctant to disclose than girls, although other abuse-specific variables may influence gender differences. The State of the World's Girls' Report, (Anon, 2011:6) accepted gender norms and stereotypes create unreasonable expectations and behaviour demands from boys and men, such as being aggressive or violent, or being exclusively responsible for the economic security of the family, which the society they live in may lead them to adopt. These demands and expectations have a very harmful impact not only on men and boys but also, by extension and more obviously, on girls and women (State of the World's Girls' Report, 2011:6).

According to participants that reported that it is mostly girls, is because the cases that are reported to the police are mostly cases of girls. The answers received from them were:

"I think its girls because most reported cases of sexual abuse are girls. They recant because the process of going out and disclose as well as going to court takes too long and the victims feel they are threatened by the offender if the offender are placed back into the community when waiting to be prosecuted". [P1]

"I think it is girls because it appears that it is more girls that are being abused and less boys. Culturally boys cannot be sexually abused and when that happens they are seen as weak, they are seen as cowards and may also be seen or labelled as being gay." [P2]

"Mostly I would say girls because I have never came across a boy who recants". [P5]

“It is mostly girls. I think because they report the cases more or there are not much boys being sexually abused. ”. [P6]

“It is girls because when I was working as forensic social worker I saw a lot of girls cases that recant. Boys would also come but I did not experience recanting with them”. [P7]

“It is girls. There are a number of reasons and one is that family members pressurize girls to recant when the father is the perpetrator because of economic reasons. Sometimes the mother is close to the father and does not believe the child. A rare case I handled was where the child recants because she believed that the family was better off if they did not have the criminal charge against them. Even though the family was supporting her in the process she felt it was hurting the family”. [P8]

“Girls think they are taking responsibility of what has happened to them. They think it is normal for girls to have sex and therefore will be regarded as loose or being promiscuous”. [P9]

“It is girls because there is a stigma attached to sexual abuse of a girl. There is a wrong perception that maybe the girl does something to cause her being abused, that she asked for it by wearing a miniskirt, low neckline blouse or very tight clothing”. [P12]

“Girls do not get appropriate support during the process. In some instances they are intimidated by either perpetrators or their own family members”. [P14]

The third group of participants, two out of the fifteen reported that it depends on other factors. They reported that they cannot say it is girls or boys as there are other factors involved.

“In my experience I cannot really differentiate between the two, for me it is the same, I would not say its girls or boys”. [P10]

“I have not found a significant difference between who are most likely, my experience and opinion is that it depends more on the socio- emotional and situational than gender. [P13]

“I think for me it is difficult to say boys or girls in my experience because you find out that actually boys and girls recant for various reasons and for a boy child it is more

difficult to talk about them being sexually abused because of the stigma attached to it". [P11]

Violence, exploitation and abuse affect millions of girls worldwide and may occur in their communities, schools, workplaces or homes according to the Secretary-General of the United Nations sixty-eight General Assembly (2013:7). "Girls are at much greater risk of sexual violence than boys. Both girls and boys suffer from harmful practices" (Secretary-General of the United Nations sixty-eight General Assembly, 2013:7). According to the State of the World's Girls' Report (2011:2), "girls continue to be raised in households where they are expected to shoulder the burden of household labour alongside their mothers: they spend between 33 and 85 per cent more time on unpaid care work than boys. Thousands of girls marry at a very young age, before their bodies are fully formed and early pregnancy and childbirth is detrimental to their health. For example, in Bangladesh, the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea and Niger over 60 per cent of girls marry before they are 18 years old".

THEME 2: Age of children who recant

The participants were further asked about the ages they think most children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse. Two participants, 8 and 1, responded that there is no specific age and that it depends on the situation at hand. The majority of the participants responded that children from seven years upwards tend to recant most.

"Between 7-9 years. The younger the child the change for them to recant whereas the older the child they will rather not disclose and not recant". [P2]

"Ages 7 to 9 years because they are afraid and do not understand the process of assessment and the court process". [P3]

"At an age when they can understand what can happen to the perpetrator or them".[P9]

"Children of all ages when certain socio-emotional or situational factors are present. However older children, late primary school, and teenagers sometimes are more likely to recant". [P10]

"Between 11-15 years"". [P7] [P11] [P12]

"All ages but normally from 3 years upwards when they are able to verbalize and to be influenced by their parents". [P6] [P13]

"Teenagers from 13-19 years", [P4] [P5] [P14]

Retrospective surveys indicate that victims first abused during adolescence are more likely to disclose than are younger children, and they are more likely to disclose first to another adolescent than to a caregiver. Retrospective surveys also indicate that school-aged children are more likely first to reveal child sexual abuse to a parent than to another child (London et al., 2005:201). Adolescents sometimes tend to be manipulative and would disclose because they want something and at the end would recant their statements to make sure that they get what wanted. There is no certainty according to authors about the age children mainly recant the allegations of sexual abuse. Several studies according to Faller (2007:185), "supports a conclusion that a substantial minority of children recant actual abuse after initially admitting".

THEME 3: Reasons for recanting allegations of sexual abuse

The aim of the research study itself was to find out the reasons why children recant their disclosure of sexual abuse. There were several reasons according to participants that will be discussed now.

Sub-Theme 1: Threats and intimidation from the alleged perpetrator and community

Nearly half of the participants in the study responded that children recant their disclosures because of threats and intimidation from the alleged perpetrator and also from the community. In cases of intra-familial abuse the non-offending or even the alleged perpetrator may threaten the child when abusing her/him.

"Victims feel that they are threatened by the offender when they go to jail and when in trial they are always placed back in the community where threats would also continue". [P3] [P10] [P14]

"The perpetrator grooms the child and manipulate the child by saying you said you love me and how can you say I sexually abused you". [P6]

"It can also be because of threats in the community, or the family itself may be threatened by the perpetrator and may end up influencing the child to recant their disclosure of sexual abuse for their own safety". [P3]

"I think threats, let us say the mother's boyfriend is the alleged perpetrator. The alleged perpetrator would threaten the child and say she is going to kill the child or the mother because the child has told".

"There is also fear of the perpetrator sometimes the children are coached not to tell and when they do tell they are threatened and they tend to recant". [P11] [12]

Hershkowitz *et al.* (2006: 99) report that some victims recant due to threats of physical harm and usually to the victim's loved one. This corroborates with what the respondents have stated. This is in line with Malloy *et al.* (2007:162) when they state that if the alleged perpetrator is a breadwinner, the child is likely to recant and this might be because the child is threatened by the perpetrator or that the alleged perpetrator has promised the child something to the child if s/he recanted. Children according to Van Dam (2006:43), "wait longer to disclose abuse when the perpetrator has groomed them and established a close relationship"

Sub-theme 2: Pressure, threats and no support from family members

According to seven participants children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse because there is pressure at home and a lack of support.

"It has to do with the relationship between the child and the perpetrator. If the perpetrator is the father for instance, then the removal of him to jail puts the family in jeopardy which means that there might be pressure from the family or relatives on the child to recant" [P2] [P7] [P8]

"Children are scared that they will not be believed by their parents, if the person being accused is a breadwinner, then the support from the non-offending parent will not be found and the child will be pressurized to recant". [P8]

"It could be a lot of pressure from their family members. Maybe the uncle is the perpetrator the child gets pressured by the mother not to say anything to the social worker because something might happen to the uncle. Family tends not to want their dirty laundry aired". [P6]

"If the alleged perpetrator is a breadwinner the mother will not believe the child, sometimes mothers who are close to the alleged perpetrator and could not believe that the perpetrator can do that then they pressure the child to recant". [P9]

"If the child was close to the perpetrator and the child or the perpetrator will be removed from the house, the child will rather recant". [P9]

"With lack of support, love, and acceptance from the non-offending parent and within the family the child tends to recant". [P10] [P12] [P14]

"Some people with influence in the community may place undue influence on the victim to recant and may offer the family that is poor and may think that the money would add a highly needed income to their poverty". [P13]

According Faller (2007:186) predictors of full recantation were younger victim age, closer relationships with the male perpetrator and a lack of maternal support. Victims most vulnerable to familial adult influences such as younger children who were abused by a parent figure and those who lacked support from the non-offending caregiver were the most at risk for recanting their claims of child sexual abuse (Kuehnle & Connell, 2009:286).

Sub-Theme 3: Fear

According to participants when children disclose their abuse it is to let the abuse to stop, but they end up being the ones that are removed from their homes. To children they tend to internalize it as them who have done something wrong.

"They fear their parents did not believe them so they are placed in a children's home or foster care or the offender will be placed back into the community where the child is". [P1]

"They think they are the reason why the family is falling apart and there are no guarantees what will happen to them and how everything will be like when they are removed from the house. [P11]

"Children recant because they think that they are going to be removed from their families, and they feel that their parents do not love them". [P15]

"The children are so attached to the parents and when they disclose the abuse, a whole lot of them do not say please take me away, they want the abuse to stop, but after assessments the child is removed from her parents and loved ones and is put

in a temporary safe care where the parents are not allowed contact with the child. They therefore think that they have made a mistake by disclosing so they rather recant". [P5]

Large surveys according to Goodyear-Brown (2012:101), conducted with adults who were promised anonymity document that the majority of people abused as children never report during childhood. The participants articulated a variety of factors that influenced children's reluctance to disclose including factors such as a close relationship with the abuser, fear not to be believed, embarrassment and shame, as well as concern for the welfare of others (Goodyear-Brown, 2012:101).

Sub-theme 4: People involved and services rendered to the child

They have to repeat their disclosure to too many people such as the teacher, social worker, then to the doctor and the nurse. At the end they feel no one is listening to them". [P1]

"The child finds the process very alien. It's something that involves lawyers, social workers and a whole lot of other people like forensic social workers, doctors and psychologists. For them they could be overwhelmed easily". [P3]

"It can be the services they get especially in the beginning of the process such as from the police who do the charges. If these people do a shoddy job, you find out that the child will lose their trust and confidence in the process". [P3]

"The longer it takes for cases to be finalised has a huge impact on the child and also on the child's memory". [P13]

"Children recant because of the lengthy court cases where everything takes time and the child gets tired of waiting without progress". [P14]

According to the South Africa Human Rights Commission and UNICEF South Africa (2011:6), "violence against children is pervasive in the country. Over 56,500 children were reported to be victims of violent crime in 2009/10, yet many more crimes remain unreported. People closest to them perpetrate the majority of cases of child sexual and physical abuse". In practice parents are afraid of the disclosure of allegations of sexual abuse of their child and therefore the parent want the child to recant these allegations because of reasons such according to Motshegoa (2011:18) and NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010:28-35) as:

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- Feelings of disloyalty to the family.
 - Feelings of concern about the alleged perpetrator.
 - Anger from other family members.
 - Fears of what may happen.

Because of these matters social workers play an important role in assisting the parent and the child to disclose the sexual abuse. The involvement of the social worker in child sexual abuse cases holds benefits of collaboration, which includes according to Motshegoa (2011:21), “faster and more proactive responses, more holistic services, reduced family separations and lower levels of anxiety for the children, parents and social works”. The role of the forensic social worker is crucial because in practice this social worker according to Barker (2003:166), focuses on the law, legal issues, and litigation, both criminal and civil, including issues in child welfare, custody of children, divorce, juvenile delinquency, non- support, relatives responsibility, welfare rights, mandated treatment, and legal competency”. The forensic social worker is able to act as an expert witness in court and “not any professional person working with child sexual abuse can give expert testimony” (Spies & Carstens, 2005:35).

The explosion of cases involving allegations of child sexual abuse exceeds according to Spies and Carstens (2005:35) the resources available to deal with the problem and many professionals lack the specific training in this area to deal with the problem. According to them the legal profession is often confronted with an array of self-identified experts who have emerged to fill the void. If conclusions are drawn on the basis of inadequate or insufficient information, the child may be harmed, the relationship between child and parent seriously damaged. Spies and Carstens (2005:43) argued that the “best way to protect the rights of people is to conduct investigations in a responsible manner”. According to Scheepers (2006:153), regrettably “South Africa is often found that the assessment of complainants in cases of alleged sexual abuse is either not done or done unscrupulously”.

Sub-theme 5: Stigmatisation and guilt feelings

Stigmatisation was according to two participants another reason why children recant the allegations of sexual abuse. Their answers were:

“It could also be because of stigmatisation associated with sexual abuse and the child could be labelled and sometimes the peers or the family and community would end up saying the child was abused because he/she was promiscuous.” [P3]

“Stigma is also a major factor because some children blame the victim for what happened”. [P13]

Social stigma regarding sexual abuse of a child and social workers engaging in services to the child and family may result in the low self-esteem of the people involved and complicate the client's responses (DuBois & Mikey, 2005:202). Child sexual abuse is characterized by secrecy. The fact that many cases of childhood sexual abuse often involve incest creates according to Dutchevici (2012:1), an aversion to discussing it. Whatever the reason for their avoidance they need to talk about it. Professionals need to allow relatives and patients to openly discuss the trauma and not to suffer in silence. The secrecy of childhood sexual abuse contributes to the victim's inability to move on and to realize that she/he was not at fault. To be able to move from victim to survivor, someone who has suffered childhood sexual abuse has to understand the trauma, process it, and turn it into a memory (Dutchevici, 2012:1). The role of the media according to Whittier (2009:111) play an important role in breaking the associated stigma of child sexual abuse by making it more visible and encouraging both adults and children who had been sexually abused to come forward.

Feelings of guilt also play a role why children recant. Some sexually abused children according to Goodyear-Brown, (2012:390), often internalise false cognitions of humiliation and guilt. They believe the abuse was their fault and that they should have been able to stop it. When assessing the sexually abused child the presence of behaviour problems such as shame and guilt and parent-child relationship must be taken into consideration (Faller, 2007:217). The following answers were received from the participants:

“It could be because the child feels guilty of what happened”. [P4]

"Children recant their disclosures because they feel guilty of what the disclosure is doing to their families. All of a sudden the family falls apart because of their disclosure. They also feel ashamed". [P12]

Sub-theme 6: Emotional trauma

According to participants, children display signs of trauma such as not being able to remember all the details, withdrawal and guilt when it comes to narrating their stories of abuse. Sexual abuse according to Phyllis and Joshua (2003:113), "may result in a traumatic event in which a child can often be engaged in self-destructive behaviors to regulate their emotional states". Spies (2006a:53) stated that these traumatic experiences are internal map based on internal experiences which influence children who are sexually abused to recant their disclosures. The following were answers participants gave:

"When children have to go to court, they get traumatized by seeing the alleged perpetrator and for some the alleged perpetrator is their father, so the trauma makes them recant". [P5]

"I think it is overwhelming for a child to disclose and I think they might forget details or get details mixed up and the child ends up recanting their statements". [P8]

"The moment a child sees a lawyer or a law enforcer s/he thinks that s/he has done something wrong and the child recants ". [P9]

"The moment the child is seeing the alleged perpetrator every day and nothing was done about it traumatizes the child because children tend to internalize everything and tend to think that they were not believed". [P12]

Sub-theme 7: Coaching and lying

Two of the participants in the study raised the issue of children being coached by their families to recant or even lie about their sexual abuse so as not to be shamed and embarrassed in the community.

"It happens, children are coached by their family members, the child was told by her grandmother to say that she was abused by her grandfather. This happened because the grandmother wanted custody of the child". [P4]

"All I can say is that coaching can be negative and positive at the same time. Family members coach their children into recanting for various reasons. Children also lie

about being sexually abused and they realize that once they have told one lie it will lead to lots of them and they end up recanting their disclosures of sexual abuse".

[P7]

London *et al.* (2005:195) agree with one of the participants that cases involving disputes in child custody, coaching takes place and the child ends up lying. According to Fouché (2006:210), that "although children are prone to lie to get themselves out of trouble, it does indeed happen that a child might invent an event such an allegation without any intimidation or conspiracy from a significant person in his or her life". Other more suggestible children will respond to strong suggestions of the child sexual abuse having been experienced by them by accepting such suggestions as true. Most children are told according to Spies (2006b:273) not to talk about the abuse because nobody must know what happens in and with the family. These lies can go into adulthood.

According to Faller (2007:70), during assessment sessions it is important for the forensic social worker to determine if a child can understand the difference between the truth and a lie. "This component takes a prominent place in many interview structures because if the child eventually testifies in court, he/she will probably have to promise to tell the truth" (Faller, 2007:71).

Sub-theme 8: Processes followed is too long

According to two participants, children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse because of the process that it followed. The child meets with many professionals such as police, doctors, forensic social workers and social workers. The child has to keep repeating her statement to each and every professional. In this process the child would think that she is not believed and then will recant his or her statement.

"I think recanting happens when they come to realize that they have embarked on a particular route and now they see a large number of people who have now become involved all of a sudden. Children are asked the same questions. Some are overwhelmed by the questions and movements they have to do. When it comes to the court process that is when children get intimidated because they see lawyers and would recant their disclosures". **[P4]**

"For children the court case takes a long time and they therefore want the burden to go away so they opt to recant because the process is dragging". **[P14]**

The primary focus of the investigative interviews, are to obtain accurate information that will be used in the criminal process of determining guilt beyond reasonable doubt (Fouché, 2006:206). According to Eastwood *et al.* (2006:1), the successful criminal prosecution of a sexual offence against a child is very difficult and in countries like Australia, just a small number of reported cases against children result in convictions. This is also the case in South Africa according to Eastwood *et al.* (2006:2). In a study done by Loffell (2000:6) about effective service delivery towards child sexual abuse cases in South Africa, she experienced problems such as the management of these cases by the police, continued delay of court proceedings, and the absence of coordination between the different role players in these cases.

In research done by Ntlatleng (2011:24-25) in the Tembisa area of South Africa, data received from the participants indicated low numbers of qualified forensic social workers, their struggle with heavy caseloads as well as the procedures of handling child sexual abuse cases itself as such a long process that some victims end up withdrawing the case. According to Roux *et al.* (2010:51), one must bear in mind that, although the procedure of handling sexual abuse cases is long, social workers and other role players in the field of child sexual abuse, have a responsibility towards their clients and the community to deliver their best service to the community as well as the sexually abused child in the shortest time possible.

Sub-theme 9: Cultural Influences

Some participants responded that culture does influence the recanting of sexual abuse by children, two said no and four were not quite sure if culture influences the recanting of sexual abuse.

"Lots of communities do not want their dirty laundry aired and they will keep the abuse as a secret and they would rather pay the other family damages and that they keep it as a secret". [P3]

"Men are supposed to be portrayed as masculine, strong and there is some kind of shame associated with men being sexually abused". [P4]

"In a way, with boys if they disclose the abuse they are seen as weak because of the socialization that some things do not happen to boys unless they are homosexual". [P13]

Although race and culture do not appear according to Faller (2007:164), to be risk factors for sexual abuse, children's backgrounds may play a role in their as well as their families' reactions to child sexual abuse. Professionals must be aware of how culture impacts in their perceptions of others and themselves and should understand what subjects are considered taboo to the family (Meyers, 2011:328). Members of a certain cultural group might interpret and responded to unwanted sexual behaviours based in their specific cultural norms. Cultures may differ in degree in which children are taught by adults and it may be according to Kuehnle and Connell (2009:191), harder to establish rapport and trust when an interviewer and child come from different cultures.

All professionals working in the field of child protection and maltreatment must keep in mind that ethnic minority groups too often suffer discrimination and conflict with the majority culture (Meyers, 2011:329). According to Horwath (2007:119-120) and Webb *et al.* (2002:405), professionals providing services to people from cultures different from them have to be culturally sensitive without tipping the scale on the one hand towards colour blindness or in the other hand towards accepting a lower or different standard through cultural stereotyping.

THEME 4: Impact of recanting the disclosures of sexual abuse on legal aspect

All fifteen participants agreed that there is some impact on the legal aspect. According to them once there is no disclosure the case cannot continue and most probably the offender will get away and do it again. The legal process comes to a halt, cases are thrown out of court and there is a low prosecution rate. Courts sometimes do not believe the children and they feel children cannot be credible witnesses. The average age for a child witness are children between 10-12 years according to Faller (2007:20) and they generally show only small differences from average adults in terms of suggestibility when suggestibility is defined in terms of memory alone. According to Meyers (2011:244), in the process of determining whether abuse or sexual abuse occurred, professionals weed out cases in which children fail to disclose or recant or in which the report is unconvincing. Recantations tend to compromise the child's credibility and complicate the legal response to sexual abuse allegations.

According to Olafson and Lederman (2006:36-37), it is not unusual for the victim to disclose little by little over a period of time. It can happen that the child victim will recant. In any other prosecution for any other crime, these actions would be considered indicative of unreliability or lack of truthfulness and would be legal and factual impediments to conviction. Indeed, a denial of abuse by the alleged victim would prevent prosecution. According to some experts such as London *et al.* (2005:196) reported that a major problem with relying on children's statements in forensic investigations is that many sexually abused children remain silent about abuse; they may deny that abuse ever occurred, or they may produce a series of disclosures of abuse followed by recantations of these disclosures.

In dependency cases, the court is bound to protect the health and safety of the child while balancing the rights of the parents (Olafson & Lederman, 2006:37). It is important that judges understand the science so that they can do justice when the defence lawyer argues, "It did not happen because the child recanted"; "It did not happen because the child's disclosures were not made close to the event"; "It did not happen because the child kept adding new information." As in domestic violence, the often frustrating behaviour of the victim needs to be explained to the trier of fact from the victim's perspective, by those who have studied this behaviour.

When justice is not done in a sexual abuse case, the harm can be devastating. No jurist wants to take a child from her home and break up a family when abuse has not occurred. No jurist wants to leave a child unprotected in an abusive family. The reality is that it is very often difficult for a judge presiding over a child sexual abuse case to feel certain about his or her decision and interpretation of the facts. Many judges spend sleepless nights worrying about the ramifications of their decisions.

THEME 5: Social workers involvement in preventing recanting of sexual abuse

The majority of the social workers that participated in the study suggested that the long court processes that come along with sexual abuse need to be shortened. They further suggested that the Thuthuzela Centres should play a very big role if used to their capacity in that every professional involved will be available and when the child discloses they are all there as a multi-disciplinary team. This would shorten the process of disclosure of the child.

Participants suggested the social worker needs to involve the family and the child on what to expect and what will happen in the case of sexual abuse. A concrete rapport needs to be built in order to take out the issues of trust. Family support also goes a long way, if the family sees that they are being supported they will support the child. Two of the participants did not see much that could be done to prevent children from recanting their disclosures of sexual abuse.

The responses of the social workers were:

"May be they try to make the court process shorter and try to help the victim not to repeat the story over and over again to minimize the people that the victim is supposed to disclose to. Yes the doctor should be told why the child was brought but the child does not have to disclose to the doctor, may be the social worker can tell the doctor. And I think the police should be told about the disclosures of abuse".

[P1]

"There is not much that the social worker can do as a group or individually, because the society itself has not recognised the importance of social workers in the society. Therefore when there is a problem with removing the child the social worker has to call the police but social workers by themselves do not have enough status, political clout or status muscle power to do state activities by themselves whereas when police go you see from the virtue of their uniforms or the kind of transport they are using that they carry authority of the state with them, whereas social workers are seen as to be no good people who are interested in interfering in other people's business. That would be their attitude of society towards them. So anything that social workers can do either than research like this to try and get more information and hopefully get a remedy. There is not much remedy that I think social workers can do unless they are presented with a particular issue or problem then they can apply their minds and get a resolution but at the moment I do not think there is much they can do". **[P2]**

"I do not think there is much that we can do". **[P5]**

"Very little". **[P15]**

"There is quite a lot they can do to prevent this like dealing with issues of sexual abuse is a long process and the best they can do is make sure they provide a concrete service to the child especially at the first assessment stage, they need to

sit down with the child and explain all the “nitty gritty” associated with the case and it does not have to start and end at the first assessment stage, they also need to do quite of work like home visits and be there to support the child through thick and thin, and by being available to the child and offering counselling services to the child. I think they can do a lot and also engage the wider family and probably the communities as well because when a child is struggling with issues of sexual abuse it does not affect the child alone, it affects the family, friends and I think all these people need to be in counselling because they may be the one who end up labelling the child as being loose or somebody of questionable morals and they need to be brought into focus about what is going on”. [P3]

“I think all social workers can do is to encourage the child to be honest without forcing. I think social workers are in a delicate position because they can easily influence the child, so we need to support the child without prejudice. We need to encourage the family to remain supportive but have boundaries in terms of what they say to the child, try to be neutral in a very difficult situation in the family and that they do not influence the child”. [P6]

“It is difficult but the only thing that can be done is to conduct awareness campaigns and professionals to stop blaming children when conducting assessment. Social workers need to be involved in every step that is happening”. [P7]

“Yes, I think if we can empower children to be more preserving for us to say they come first and mom second. It teaches them to stand up for themselves. I think is important that you build a rapport with the child and that the child sees you as capable of having their interest at heart, they have to believe in you from the first session. Do not make promises you cannot keep and do not lie”. [P8]

“I think what would be the right thing would be when the child discloses, the person that the child discloses to, the response is a very important aspect to how the child is going to handle the case whether they recant or not. If the person is going to be angry or shocked that will determine how the child is going to handle the case. Social workers also need to empower the child from the time they know that the father is going to be removed and explain that it is the best interest of the child”. [P9]

"It is very difficult because it is often caused by factors outside of control of social workers. The social worker needs to ensure safety from further abuse and threats or intimidation from abuser. Minimize losses in the child's life and neutral placement if non offending caregiver is not supportive". [P10]

"Normalize the fears that the child would have. Try to prepare the child on what they can expect like now that you have disclosed these are the steps that will be taken and this would put them at ease. We need to also help the family to understand the effect or impact of sexual abuse on the child and let them be aware of what to expect so that they do not put pressure on the child". [P11]

"By ensuring that a multi-professional team or specialists in dealing with child sexual abuse, deal with the child from the start and all parties involved. The child needs to feel secure, safe, protected and accepted". [P12]

"To lobby for more protection and more support for the family of the abused children. Another option is to place these children under witness protection unit during the course of the trial. These cases should not drag for more than 12 months". [P13]

"Placing the child in a temporary safe care placement, far away from his/her family of origin, ensuring that the child does not have contact with the alleged perpetrator until the court process is finalised. Providing therapy services to both the child and the entire family". [P14]

From the above responses received from social workers it is obvious that there are a need for support for the sexual abused child from parents, family and especially also professionals to minimised recantation in order to prosecute more perpetrators. According to the NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010: 34) practice show that when there is on-going communication and support of the family, the risk of recantation is lower as well as the risk of not disclosing.

Faller (2003:19) advises that professionals need to assure the child is prepared and has appropriate expectations. This goes in line with one of the participant's response where social workers need to explain steps that are going to be taken after the child has disclosed so as to put the child and the family at ease. According to Lamers–Winkleman cited in Grobbelaar (2007:7), children who are being interviewed by an empathetic interviewer will give more accurate answers than

children who are interviewed by formal type of interviewer. The researcher is of the opinion that the environment of the judicial system is formal and that a good rapport building skills are essential to help make the child feel at ease. This corroborates with one of the participants who said that children need to be put at ease.

Marx (1996:219-234) has proposed a number of guidelines which can be used by a helping professional to minimize the likelihood of recantations. The guidelines are in line with what the participants in whom he agrees that a multidisciplinary team needs to be used, that is the professional needs to be involved and sharing information. Professionals need to be trained. Therapy for the non-offending parent or family needs to be put into place. The protection of the child needs to take priority at all times.

9 CONCLUSION

The research study that was undertaken involved fifteen social workers that have been purposefully selected. The participants were interviewed face to face and tape recorded. The participants reside around Gauteng. The main goal of the research study was to establish reasons why children recant the disclosures of sexual abuse.

Various reasons have been mentioned which have been formulated into themes. Such themes include parent's lack of support and not believing their children, losses the children experience when they disclose, threats from the alleged perpetrator and the community at large, cultural practices, long processes and children being coached. These may be seen as a betrayal to the family (Hershkowitz *et al.*, 2006). Elliott and Carnes (2001) states that insufficient support from non-offending parents may be due to various reasons ranging from a perpetrator being a breadwinner.

According to literature, children disclose when their motive is to stop the abuse but it ends up destroying the family. Additionally, the justice system will tend to allow the child to be removed from the family which would imply to the child that s/he has done something wrong. It is the opinion of the researcher that boys tend to recant their disclosures of sexual abuse because of the way they are socialized as they were growing up, boys are told that they are expected to be strong and crying for them is always seen as a weakness.

The researcher is of the opinion that procedures for children in court are weak, not only is this harmful to the child it impacts on the ability of the child to give evidence which contributes to the low conviction rate for offences against children. They take a long time to get the child to testify against the offender and sometimes they forget the some of the details because of the long waiting of the court dates.

The participants have reported that South Africa is very patriarchal, men are the ones that are in power, they have the authority and girl children are taught from a very young age that they have to submit towards men. Society allows men to be abusive.

Sexually abused children face secondary trauma in the crisis of discovery, their efforts to reconcile their private experiences usually leaves them abandoned and isolated. Children experience severe fear and anxiety when the alleged perpetrator is present. Children might feel threatened and might also recant because of trauma from the abuse and what he/she has been threatened with.

The researcher is of the opinion that children recant because many reasons such as the losses that are involved. Social workers in the Gauteng area have experienced a lot of cases where children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse. At this stage there are no guidelines on what to do when the child recants their disclosures.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the view of the findings of the research study, the following recommendations are made:

- To reduce the likelihood of recantation the social workers need to support children or victims by educating them from the onset of what is going to happen.
- It is further recommended that the child be prepared on what the child can expect like now that s/he has disclosed and be informed that these are the steps that will be taken so as to ease the anxiety on their part.
- The social worker needs to build rapport with the child from the first contact. The child has to be engaged so that a relationship of trust could be developed.
- The child needs to be empowered by the social worker so that the child feels secure, safe and protected.

-
- The social worker needs to focus on family members including non-offending parents and resources that are available for supporting the child, ensuring his/her safety. There needs to be a safety planning intervention and assessment.
 - Because investigations are very traumatic for the child and family, it is important from the start to support the family and for the social worker to normalize the fears that the child and the family would have.
 - It is recommended that a multi-professional team deal with child sexual abuse. The establishment of the Thuthuzela Centres has centralized services that ensure that sexually abused children will have access to services and they need to be used to their full capacity.
 - Referrals for therapy or counselling for both the child and the non-offending parents. The social worker needs to maintain frequent contact with the family.
 - Guidelines on what to do when a child recants needs to be put in order: The social worker needs to follow the following,
 - The social worker needs to clarify information related to the child's recantation by finding out who did the child recant to.
 - An interview of the sources to which the child recanted to assess the credibility of the person.
 - Review the evidence by:
 - reviewing the first investigation in looking at the details of the disclosure;
 - which official did the child disclose to;
 - the demeanour of the child at the time of disclosure;
 - circumstances of the disclosure;
 - the need to re-interview the source;
 - safety factors at home and the role the family may play in the child's recantation.
 - Get together with the multi –disciplinary team members.
 - Re-interview the child and refer the child to a forensic evaluation.
 - Interview family members and other concerned parties. NYC Administration for Children's Services (2010).

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- The social workers who are dealing with child sexual abuse recantations need to get more training in dealing with this challenge.

The guidelines mentioned above could be adopted in the South Africa and be used when dealing with children in this country.

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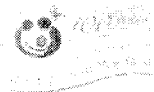
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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE 1: PERMISSION FROM CHILD WELFARE



University of North West

5th November 2013

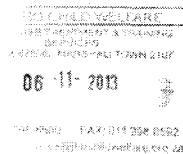
To whom it may concern

Re: Research Proposal – Axanda Mabusea

Joburg Child Welfare was approached by Axanda to do her research proposal with our organisation. The research is relevant both to the work that Axanda does, and to the work of Joburg Child Welfare and we would be happy to give permission for her to do the research here.

Yours faithfully


Chris Beane
Assistant Director



Postal Address: P.O. Box 10000, Waterfall, 2070. Tel: 011 298 0582. Fax: 011 298 0582. Email: info@joburgchildwelfare.org.za. Website: www.joburgchildwelfare.org.za. The above details of the Department of Social Services are for information only.

ANNEXURE 2: WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM PARTICIPANTS

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Reasons why children recant the disclosures of sexual abuse.

RESEARCHER: Ms Asanda Mabusela MA Social Work: Forensic Practice Student

SUPERVISOR: Dr Adrie Roux

DECLARATION:

Iagree that I have been informed about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study. I agree to take part in the study. I understand that even if I participate in this study I can stop at any time and the records will remain private.

I give permission that the interview be recorded and I understand that that the recorded material will be made available to the researcher and her study leader. The recorded interview will be used to help in the interpretation and analysis of data and will be destroyed afterwards.

The researcher informed me of the following aspects:

Purpose: To learn more about the challenges and issues related to children recanting their disclosures of sexual abuse.

Confidentiality: Information given in the study will be handled in a way that will protect your identity and ensure that your answers will remain confidential. In addition, no personal information will be made available to people outside the research team.

Discomfort and Risks: Some questions during interview may cause some discomfort but there is no wrong and right answer, the researcher only wants

opinions. The information given will not be linked to your identity and is strictly confidential.

Benefits: The taking part in this study may not benefit you directly, but it may benefit individuals and organizations that provide support and services to children who have recanted their disclosures of sexual abuse.

SIGNATURES

PARTICIPANT

_____ **DATE** _____ **PLACE** _____

RESEARCHER

_____ **DATE** _____ **PLACE** _____

WITNESS

_____ **DATE** _____ **PLACE** _____

ANNEXURE 3: ETHICAL PERMISSION FOR MAIN PROJECT



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

Tel: (018) 299-4900
Faks: (018) 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Ethics Committee

Tel +27 18 299 4850
Fax +27 18 293 5329
Email Ethics@nwu.ac.za

2009-09-25

Dr.C Wessels

ETHICS APPROVAL OF PROJECT

The North-West University Ethics Committee (NWU-EC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-EC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title The development and evaluation of programs and a protocol in Forensic Social Work

**Ethics
number:**

N	W	U	-	0	0	0	2	7	-	0	9	-	A	1
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Institution

Project Number

Year

Status

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P =
Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Approval date: 12 August 2009 **Expiry date:** 11 August 2014

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- *The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-EC:*
 - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project,*
 - *without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the NWU-EC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-EC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-EC retains the right to:*
 - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;*
 - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
 - *any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,*
 - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-EC or that information has been false or misrepresented,*
 - *the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done*

timely and accurately,

- *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*

The Ethics Committee would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Committee for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof Amanda Lourens
(*chair NWU Ethics Committee*)

ANNEXURE 4: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Research title: Reasons why children recant their disclosures of sexual abuse.

INTRODUCTION

The social worker, A Mabusela is launching a research project to find the reasons why children recant the disclosures of sexual abuse.

The research project is important so as to establish the reasons of children recanting their disclosure of sexual abuse.

Results of the research project will also used to find out if there are things to be done prevent a child from recanting disclosures of sexual abuse.

The results of this research project will be used by Ms Mabusela to fulfil the requirements of the North West University (Potchefstroom campus) to require her Masters Social Work in Forensic Practice degree.

Thank you for your friendly co-operation. Your inputs and time are highly appreciated.

Please answer the following questions with honesty and to the fullest. There are no wrong and right answers.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE SOCIAL WORKER?

1. Sex

Female		Male	
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2. Your work experience with sexually abused children? (Cross only one)

1-5 years	
6-10 years	
11-15 years	
16-20 years	
21-25 years	
26-30 years	
More than 31 years	

3. Your highest qualification (Cross only one)

Diploma in Social work	
BA Social Work	
Honns. Social Work	
MA Social Work	
MA Forensic Social work	
PhD (DPhil)	
Other (specify)	

4. Your position in the organization

1.Social worker	
2.Senior social worker	
3.Chief social worker	
4.Programme manager	
5. Office Head	
6. Other (specify)	

SECTION B: RECANTING OF DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

1. Who in your experience as Social worker (boys or girls) is recanting the disclosures of sexual abuse more?

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2. Why do you think they recant more?

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3. At what stages do children normally recant disclosures of sexual abuse?

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4. Why, according to you do children recant disclosures of sexual abuse?

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5. In your experience during which stage of the forensic assessment does a child usually recant the disclosure of the sexual abuse? (Cross only one)

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6. What do you think are the reasons for recanting in this stage?

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7. How do the parents react on the child's recanting of the disclosure of sexual abuse?

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8. What is the impact of recanting disclosure of sexual abuse on the legal process?

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9. What can the social worker do in preventing the recant the disclosure of sexual abuse?

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10. What role do professionals need to play, starting from disclosure until the involvement of other sectors such as the police, therapists and courts? Please take into account multiple disclosures.

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11. Explain how does cultural practices influence recanting of disclosures of sexual abuse?

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12. In your opinion does trauma play a role in influencing children to recant their disclosures of sexual abuse?

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13. Any other remarks?

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14. Researcher's observations

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Thank you for your participation.

Mabusela

Student: MA Social Work: Forensic Practice

North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.

ANNEXURE 5: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

ANNEXURE 5: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I Lloyd M Gwatidzo, Id BN 833978, hereby declare that I have edited the masters degree dissertation of A Mabusela entitled: REASONS WHY CHILDREN RECANT DISCLOSURES OF SEXUAL ABUSE.

Regards

Lloyd M Gwatidzo