

**GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS REGARDING THE FIRST  
INTERVIEW WITH THE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD**

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**Manuscript submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**MAGISTER ARTIUM  
(SOCIAL WORK IN FORENSIC PRACTICE)**

**in the**

**FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES**

**at the**

**POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS OF THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY**

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**Potchefstroom**

**November 2008**

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**2008**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all who contributed to making this research possible. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the contribution made by the following:

- God Almighty for giving me the strength and ability to come this far.
- Dr AA Roux for her dedication, support, professionalism and guidance. I hope she realizes how much I appreciate her help.
- My supervisor, Elizabeth Mogosetsi, for her patience, support, meaningful contributions and motivation that added value to my accomplishments.
- All my colleagues for their unconditional support and encouragement that added value to my accomplishments, with special thanks to Motshabi Motshegoa and David Masongwini for their computer skills.
- My son, Omphile, who has endured so much inconvenience and has patiently been there for me, supporting and urging me, and my daughter Omphemetse (Banyana) for bringing that needed support and smile in my face when I needed it most.
- The respondents who participated in this study.
- Mrs L Vos who helped me with the literature search.
- Dr Suria Ellis who helped me with the questionnaire.
- Mrs Cecilia van der Walt who did the editing.

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## **SUMMARY**

**TITLE: Guidelines for social workers regarding the first interview with the sexually abused child.**

**Key words: Child, sexual abuse, interview, guidelines, social worker**

Child sexual abuse is more prevalent than can be expected. It is in one way damaging and the trauma does not end when the abuse stops. The problem rarely occurs in isolation and frequently interacts with other aspects of a child's family and social environment, as a result placing a heavier burden of care and support on social workers and families.

The involvement of skilled social workers who can react responsively and professionally to victims in their initial assessment is important because the assessment of sexually abused children needs to be dealt with discretely.

Social workers use different approaches for intervention, which results in different ways of understanding and ineffective service.

Developing reader-friendly and informative guidelines which motivate effective service delivery can assist in lessening the trauma on the victims and enable them to work towards a healthy lifestyle. An understanding of the techniques and the intervention strategies social workers apply for assessment, particularly for the initial assessment, should be an ongoing area of research.

There have been few systematic attempts to explore the importance of the initial assessment of sexually abused children; consequently very little data is available.

In this regard, a North West-based study (Madibeng Municipality), which was a quantitative study, was conducted. The **aim** of the study was to develop guidelines for social workers to have a common approach in their initial assessment of sexually abused children. A self-administered questionnaire based on the expected intervention procedures and roles was developed with a view of confirming the allegations and giving future direction the profession needs to consider, given the local context.

From the research it was evident that the scope for such intervention did exist and the imperative thereof was rooted in the general knowledge and skills of social workers in

working with sexually abused children in general, and their specific role in the initial assessment.

Guidelines for assessment of sexually abused children were formulated, addressing the above-mentioned themes. The information may be of use to professionals involved with sexually abused children so that victims can be effectively assessed after such painful events.

## OPSOMMING

**TITEL: Riglyne vir maatskaplike werkers met betrekking tot die eerste onderhoud met die seksueel misbruikte kind.**

**Sleutelwoorde: Kind, seksuele misbruik, onderhoud, riglyne, maatskaplike werker**

Seksuele misbruik van kinders kom meer dikwels voor as wat verwag word. In die een opsig is dit skadelik en die trauma verdwyn nie wanneer die misbruik ophou nie. Die probleem kom selde in isolasie voor en werk gereeld in op ander aspekte van 'n kind se familie en sosiale omgewing, wat gevolglik 'n swaarder versorgings- en ondersteuningslas op maatskaplike werkers en families plaas.

Die betrokkenheid van vaardige maatskaplike werkers wat responsief en professioneel kan reageer op slagoffers in hul aanvanklike assessering is belangrik, want die assessering van seksueel misbruikte kinders moet diskreet hanteer word.

Verskillende maatskaplike werkers pas verskillende benaderings vir intervensie toe, en dit bring 'n verskeidenheid interpretasiemoontlikhede mee; gevolglik ook ondoeltreffende dienslewering..

Deur lesersvriendelike en inliggende riglyne te formuleer wat doeltreffende dienslewering motiveer, kan meehelp om die trauma wat die slagoffers deurmaak, te verlig en hulle in staat stel om te werk in die rigting van 'n gesonde leefstyl. Begrip van die tegnieke en die intervensiestrategieë wat maatskaplike werkers vir assessering toepas, veral vir die aanvanklike assessering, behoort 'n voortgesette navorsingsgebied uit te maak.

Min stelselmatige pogings is aangewend om die belangrikheid van die aanvanklike assessering van misbruikte kinders te ondersoek; gevolglik is besonder min data beskikbaar.

In hierdie opsig is 'n Noord Wes gebaseerde studie uitgevoer (Madibeng Munisipaliteit), wat 'n kwantitatiewe studie was. Die **doel** van die studie was om riglyne vir maatskaplike werkers te ontwikkel om 'n gemeenskaplike benadering te hê met betrekking tot hul aanvanklike assessering van misbruikte kinders. 'n Self-ingevalde vraelys wat op die verwagte intervensieprosedures en -rolle gebaseer is, is

ontwikkel met die oog daarop om die bewerings te staaf en om toekomstige rigting te gee wat die professie moet oorweeg, gegewe die plaaslike konteks.

Uit die navorsing is dit duidelik dat die geleentheid vir sodanige intervensie bestaan het en die dringendheid daarvan was gegrond in die algemene kennis en vaardighede van maatskaplike werkers wanneer hulle in die algemeen met misbruikte kinders werk, en hulle spesifieke rolle in die aanvanklike assessering.

Riglyne is geformuleer vir die assessering van misbruikte kinders, wat bogenoemde temas aansny. Die inligting kan moontlik van nut wees vir professionele persone wat betrokke is by misbruikte kinders, sodat slagoffers doeltreffend geassesseer kan word

## FOREWORD

The article format was chosen in accordance with regulations A.11.2.5 for the degree MA (In Forensic Social Work). The article will comply with the requirements of the journal in social work, titled *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*.

## INSTRUCTIONS 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 ACSII. Manuscripts must be typed, double spaced on the side of the A4 paper only. Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word- for- word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s), year of publication and the page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "...” (Berger, 1976:12). 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 the surnames of the authors.

## SECTION A

### **GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS REGARDING THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD**

Mogole, JM, Roux, AA & Wessels, CC (Ms Mogole JM is a student, Dr AA Roux and Dr CC Wessels senior lecturers in the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences: Social Work Division, Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University).

#### **1. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Child sexual abuse is not new to contemporary society. It is a reality and happens to children of every class, culture, race, religion, age and gender (Spies, 2006:45). It is a traumatic experience (Van Rensburg & Barnard, 2005:1). The trauma does not end when the abuse stops. All children who are abused will be left with some scars because the abuse has a remarkably injurious effect on human development (Berlinger, 2003:14), yet only very few receive specialized attention which in most instances is rendered by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and accessed by those who are financially stable. As a result, child sexual abuse will remain a pressing social concern (Fouché, 2001:15) because the people directly involved are staggered.

The monthly statistics for Madibeng Municipality obtained from South African Police Services Child Protection Unit for the period January 2007 to December 2008 revealed that 108 children were raped and 18 assaulted within that period. The number of unreported instances might be far higher than the statistics reflected because some children are afraid of disclosing due to various reasons. This makes child sexual abuse in Madibeng a great concern.

Victims are frequently the only available source of information and strategies that can elicit accurate and complete account need to be applied (Pipe *et al.*, 2007:115). Even when sexual abuse has really occurred, experiencing the way the system deals with the victim, can for some children be worse than the actual abuse itself (Bagley & Mallick, 1990:31).



Both the South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare (1992:58) and Spies (2006:59) agree that the sexually abused child cannot heal without the support of people who really care for him/her and understood his pain. If the counsellor does not handle disclosure skilfully, it can have deleterious effects on the child (Draucker & Martshof, 2006:44). Previous disclosure of the abuse may have evoked negative responses in the child's life, leaving the child reluctant (Wicham & West 2002:16).

The biggest challenge for professionals dealing with child abuse lies in the first interview. According to Stern and Walsh (1997:10), effectively interviewing a child suspected of being a victim of sexual abuse is a difficult task that requires special skills and sensitivity. Professionals, such as social workers, must take note at all times that they are not interviewing sexually abused children but children who probably have been sexually abused. Most organizations have no guidelines and norms for social workers rendering services in this regard. According to Langan (1990:101), much of social work intervention is unstructured and vague in its intentions which causes social workers to make mistakes in assessing the degree of risk in a particular case because they are inadequately equipped and do not regard themselves adequately skilled to handle sexually abused children, since their skill and knowledge in this area is poor.

Inadequate or improper interviewing leads to errors in decision making regarding child safety and prosecution (Briere *et al.*, 1996:1). Most victims do not disclose within the first interviews and there is no effective method of obtaining information from them (Pipe *et al.*, 2007:150).

The system within which professionals work has tragically failed both the victims who are never identified and occasionally even those children who are identified (Bolen, 2001:219). Kruger and Spies (2006:170) point out that the South African Human Rights Commission, through its research, also found the system to be hostile and that it traumatizes children further, especially children with disabilities, because an enabling environment has not been created to respond to their special needs. Langan (1990:101) says that the initial assessment of the sexually abused child is very sensitive and crucial to the child and therefore great care has to be taken. Kuehnle (1996:27) is of opinion that a specific case management style for social workers according to which they should render services to sexually abused children needs to be developed.

Questions to be asked are the following:

- What is the role of the social worker regarding the first interview with the sexually abused child?
- What guidelines can be given to social workers to address the needs of sexually abused children during the first interview?

## **2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the research is to develop guidelines for social workers to address the needs of sexually abused children during their first interview with the child.

The objectives of the research are the following:

- To investigate the role of the social worker during his/her first interview with the sexually abused child.
- To provide guidelines to social workers to address the needs of sexually abused children during the first interview.

## **3. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION**

Social workers play an important role in providing services in an attempt to address the needs of sexually abused children.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methods used for investigation were a literature study and empirical research.

### **4.1 Literature review**

According to Fouché and Delpont (2005:123), a literature study “is aimed at contributing towards clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified”. The main focus of the study was interviewing strategies employed by social workers in assessing sexually abused children. The central focus was the impact of the first interview on the abused child.

Though much has been written on this social problem, it is clear that some problems still exist. There is a considerable amount of literature on child abuse and child sexual abuse in particular (Pipe *et al.*, 2007; Spies, 2006; Wazir & Van Oudenhoven, 1996), but not much on the importance of the initial assessment on victims and of the role of social workers in this context. Professionals in the field of child protection have been slow to recognize the problem and research studies have thus far been neglected.

## 4.2 Empirical Research

The survey procedure was used to investigate the role of the social worker regarding the first interview with the sexually abused child. The study undertaken fell within the scope of applied research because the findings obtained from the study contributed to the practice of social work. De Vos *et al.* (1998:8) explain that applied research addresses immediate problems facing the professional in practice.

- **Research Design**

A research design, says Grinnell (2001:547), is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study from the conceptualization of the problem right through to the dissemination of findings. The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:53) defines research design as the plan of a research project through which data is gathered in order to investigate the hypothesis or to realize the aim.

Fouché and De Vos (2005:101) mention that the researcher must assess the suitability of either the qualitative, quantitative or combined qualitative-quantitative research design for the topic selected. According to Fouché (2005:269), a qualitative strategy differs inherently from the quantitative research design in that it does not usually provide the researcher with a step by step plan or a fixed recipe to follow.

For purposes of this study a combination of the qualitative and the quantitative approach was applied.

The study was thus of an explorative nature (Grinnell & Williams, 1990:140; Neuman, 2000:21; De Vos *et al.*, 2005:106) in order to provide insight into the initial assessment of the sexually abused children in South Africa and attempt to provide an answer to what methods and strategies social workers in the Madibeng Municipality use in their intervention.

Neuman (in De Vos *et al.*, 2005:106) sees an exploratory research to be the first stage in a sequence of studies. The choice thus correlates with the researcher's objective because currently there are no investigations done on the importance of the initial assessment by social workers, for sexually abused children.

An exploratory study has the purpose of gaining insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:420).

- **Participants**

A reconnaissance survey was conducted for purposes of this research. Strydom (2005c:200) explains that surveys are studies on which samples of people who are representatives of a larger population are asked a series of prepared questions. As a result, only social workers who have had experience in interviewing sexually abused children were identified to be representative of all social workers.

The respondents were selected by means of a purposive sampling method. As a result, non-probability sampling was utilized for the study, since the researcher gave preference to those social workers who had previous experience of interviewing sexually abused children (Strydom, 2005c:202), as they would contribute positively to the outcome of the study.

The researcher selected social workers who provided contrasting experiences which helped in developing ideas. The procedure utilized in the study involved a total population of 30 social workers who had had an experience of interviewing sexually abused children. The sample consisted of social workers and probation officers from the Department of Social Development, forensic social workers from SAPS and social workers from the Department of Health in the Madibeng Municipality.

The chosen sample required less time and financial expenditure because they were within reach as they were all situated within Madibeng Municipality (Strydom, 2005:195). A working relationship built on trust had already existed between the researcher and respondents; hence facilitation of their participation in the study was not problematic.

- **Measuring instruments**

Following the literature study, a self-administered questionnaire for social workers containing appropriate open-ended and closed-ended questions was compiled and used as a tool to collect data (see Annexure 1).

The questionnaire was an essential part of this study. A questionnaire is defined as a set of questions on a form that is completed by the respondent in respect of a specific research project (New Dictionary of Social Work, 1995:51).

The questionnaire was approved by Dr Suria Ellis of the Department of Statistical Consultation Services of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University.

Self-administered questionnaires formed the larger component of the research as they were found to be most suitable and it was possible to distribute them within the Municipal area, making the exercise cost effective.

Open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to enable respondents to have a common understanding of some aspects and to let them comment so that a plan of action or a better intervention strategy could be sought (Delpont, 2005:174-175).

Some of the open-ended questions solicited qualitative data, amongst others, to gauge the respondents' experience and perception of aspects of the initial assessment, which have previously been found to be associated with negative outcomes of the victims' development and conduct. Some of the closed-ended questions served as a guide upon which the identifying information of respondents to the initial assessment's actual activities was built (Delpont, 2005:174-174).

- **Research procedure**

The researcher did the following:

- Permission to do the research at Madibeng Service point was verbally obtained from the Department of Social Development in Madibeng Municipality, where the researcher is active as a social worker,.
- Permission was also obtained from a qualified forensic social worker at SAPS and a medical social worker from the Department of Health, practicing in the Madibeng Local Municipality.
- Questionnaires were distributed to these social workers to respond in their own time then return it to the researcher. Thirty questionnaires were distributed throughout Madibeng Local Municipality of which 27 were returned, some of which were not fully completed.

- **Ethical issues**

Ethics is a set of moral principles which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, etc. (Strydom, 2005b:57). The researcher ought to evaluate his/her own conduct in accordance with ethical guidelines, which also serve as standards. Strydom (2005b:57) is of opinion that ethical principles should thus be internalized in the personality of the researcher.

The following ethical agreements were taken into account (Strydom, 2005b:58-67):

- **Harm to respondents**

In social sciences, respondents can mostly be harmed in an emotional way. Respondents were treated with respect and their lives were not harmed.

- **Deception of respondents**

Deceiving respondents refers to offering incorrect information, withholding information in order to ensure participation. Accurate and complete information concerning the aim of the research was given to the respondents, including the procedure.

- **Violation of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality**

The privacy and identity of respondents were safeguarded. The completion of the schedule was done anonymously and the respondents' identities were not disclosed. The information given by respondents was dealt with in a confidential manner.

- **Informed consent**

Respondents were informed about all possible aspects of the study and were able to make voluntary decisions. They were not bribed to participate in the proposed study.

- **Actions and competence of researcher**

The researcher was competent and adequately skilled to undertake the study. A qualified supervisor guided the researcher to ensure that this aspect of the ethical guideline was adhered to. Ethical permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. The project number is 06k07.

- **Debriefing of respondents**

Respondents were offered an opportunity to work through their experience. The researcher rectified misconceptions of the information provided (Strydom, 2005b:66-67).

- **Data analyses**

Data of this study were analyzed quantitatively. Kruger *et al.* (2005:217-219) point out that a professional research can be analyzed manually or by computer. The

researcher analyzed the data in this research both manually and computer-wise and then displayed it in the form of tables under the supervision of the study leader, Dr AA Roux. It was transformed into statistically accessible forms by counting procedures (McKendrick, 1990:257).

Data were sorted to reflect the most interesting views, arranged into topics, and data belonging to each category were clustered together in one group. Buitendach's frequency distribution method was used to make the tables easier to understand. The data was then reduced and displayed and conclusions were drawn and verified (Kruger *et al.* 2005:224).

## **5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

- It was not easy to gain access to the data base of the Child Protection Unit because measures restricted access to information. As a result the outstanding statistics for July were difficult to follow up; hence accuracy is affected.
- Although social workers agreed to participate in the study, it was difficult to follow them up to complete and return the questionnaire.
- The area of research appeared to be unfamiliar to social workers and they appeared to lack its theory which led to some of the questions not being responded to and some vaguely being responded to, which made data analysis very difficult.
- The size of the sample used limited the amount and complexity of statistical analysis done and also prevented the results of the study from being generalized. Nonetheless, the study provided useful data that would inform assessment policy and planning efforts at local, provincial and national levels.

## **6. TERMINOLOGY**

### **6.1 Child**

Davel (2000:2) says the legal subjectivity of a natural person starts at birth.

According to the Child Care Act (74 of 1983), as amended, and the new Children's Act (38 of 2005), a child is defined as a person below the age of 18 years.

For purposes of this study, when the researcher refers to the child as a victim of child sexual abuse she refers to a person under 18 years of age who is seen by professionals and with whom initial interviewing takes place.

## **6.2 Child sexual abuse**

In order to understand what child sexual abuse is, it is necessary to define this phenomenon according to its existing various definitions. Collings (1995:323) is of opinion that these definitions vary across a number of dimensions which amongst others include the following: age rang used to define childhood, range of behaviour regarded as being sexual, the criteria for defining behaviour as abusive and the victim-perpetrator relationships which is regarded as being potentially abusive.

The general terms used to describe sexual abuse, according to Pienaar (2000:20), are: “child molestation”, “sexual molestation” and “child sexual abuse”. Gough, (1993:234) is of opinion that most people use the term child abuse and child sexual abuse interchangeably because there are no specific programmes in place to differentiate the two.

Sexual abuse, according to Faller (1988:12) as well as Diaz and Maningat (1999:141), involves deliberate sexual activities between adults and children which are meant for adult satisfaction, since the abuser is at a more advanced developmental stage. The mature adult manipulates the child who does not fully comprehend sexual activities and is unable to give informed consent (Berlinger & Barbieri, 1994:51; Le Roux & Engelbrecht, 2000:344). Exposure of the child to these early childhood sexual experiences has the potential of interfering with his/her healthy development (Crosson-Tower, 2002:53). At times someone can still be legally regarded as a child and yet be sexually matured, and the definition will be whether the sexual activities are unwanted, exploitative or abnormal and also on consent (Fouché 2001:17).

From these definitions the researcher is of opinion that child sexual abuse is an unwelcome experience which is taking advantage of the child for the gratification of an adult and is defined according to what the objective of that particular investigation is, as a result making the definition situation specific. The researcher is of opinion that child sexual abuse may best be defined as any exposure (non-contact) or physical contact which is of a sexual nature that takes place between a child and another person, based on the age and developmental maturity where the child does not comprehend the interaction and is not even capable of giving consent.



- **Categories of child sexual abuse**

The literature has brought to light that child sexual abuse occurs in different ways and in different areas. According to Faller (1988:12), sexual abuse takes place within the family setting and outside the family. The state has a constitutional duty to create legislative and policy protection of rights, and in this context, the rights of children (Bekink & Brand, 2000:188). Some of these legislations are The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (32 of 2007), Child Care Act (74 of 1983) and the new Children's Act (38 of 2005). As a way of recognizing child sexual abuse, the offence has been classified into different categories so as to make it more punishable, understandable and identifiable. The North West Provincial Child Abuse Protocol (1999) regards child sexual abuse to be taking place in three different categories, namely contact, non-contact and involvement of a child in other activities.

The following table illustrates the three categories of sexual abuse:

**Table 1: Identified categories of child sexual abuse**

CONTACT ABUSE	NON-CONTACT ABUSE	INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Genital /anal fondling</li> <li>- Masturbation</li> <li>- Oral sex</li> <li>- Object or finger penetration of the anus/vagina</li> <li>- Penile penetration of the anus/vagina</li> <li>- Encouraging/forcing the child/young person to perform such acts on the perpetrator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exhibition</li> <li>- Voyeurism (peeping)</li> <li>- Suggestive behaviours or making sexual comments</li> <li>- Exposure to pornographic material</li> <li>- reducing visual depictions of such contact</li> <li>- Sexual exploitation over the internet or cell phone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Activities of exploitation for purposes of prostitution</li> <li>- Activities of exploitation for purposes of pornography</li> <li>- Rape</li> <li>- Sodomy</li> <li>- Indecent assault</li> <li>- Molestation</li> <li>- Incest</li> </ul>

Child Abuse Protocol, North West Province, Department of Social Services, Arts, Culture and Sports (1999).

Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002:456) state that child sexual abuse is an unwelcome experience which does not include incidents of contact only. Fouché (2001:18) is of opinion that non-physical contact does not imply that no emotional harm was done on the child, because the child is still not emotionally or physically ready for the sexual nature of the actions.

From the different categories of sexual abuse, the researcher is of opinion that professionals assessing children should be aware of these and other forms (indirect methods) other than contact abuse that are committed to children, lest they say that sexual abuse did not take place and perpetrators take advantage of these gaps and continuously harm and damage children. The role of the professional is therefore to

understand and describe the sexual behaviour from the child's point of view to make it more understandable.

- **Effects of sexual abuse**

Most sexually abused children bear some physical and emotional scars but not all experience severe and long-term harmful consequences. The South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare Society (1992:16) further says that many abused children grow up to become normal citizens and average parents and that the age of the child at the time of abuse, the nature of abuse and the amount of aggression involved determine the extent of damage. Yet the effects of sexual abuse, irrespective of its type and duration, will always be detrimental to the child

According to Rice (1975:146), the effects vary from child to child and depend on factors such as the relationship between the abuser and the child and the relationship with caretakers during the process of sexual abuse.

### **6.3 Interview**

According to Collins and Thesaurus Dictionary (2004), an interview is a way of examining, investigating or interrogating or cross-questioning.

The researcher is of opinion that interviewing in the social work context is an art, which is objective driven, has purpose and a safety plan of action. Knowledge of the perspectives, theories and models of social work, skills, correct attitudes and techniques are used to intervene. The social work interview has different stages with each stage having its own requirements and goals which distinguishes it from that of lay counsellors. The professional interview should make the client want to return for another session and also encourage the referral system.

### **6.4 Guidelines**

According to Collins and Thesaurus Dictionary (2004), a guideline is a principle put forward to set standards, or determine a course of action.

Hawkins (1993:194) describes guidelines as statements that give general advice on something.

From the definitions the researcher is of opinion that guidelines are prescribed, expected and clearly defined ways of doing things, and adherence to these guidelines is expected.

The researcher is also of opinion that social workers require common approaches and strategies that could be their self-gauge through ensuring commonality and also give them confidence and help them to understand problems from the same perspective as other social workers.

## 6.5 Social Worker

According to The New Book of Knowledge Encyclopedia (2003:229), a social worker is a representative of a statutory or non-statutory agency, who delivers a wide range of services to individuals of different kinds. He/she uses various kinds of skills, from theory to practical knowledge, and a set of values specific to social work.

Furthermore, the researcher is of opinion that a social worker is regarded as an expert in his/her field and their role must be conspicuous because of special knowledge and skills expected from the profession.

## 7. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

Empirical data was organized in accordance with the sections of the questionnaire and are subsequently discussed.

### 7.1 Identifying particulars

#### 7.1.1 Gender

**Table 2: Gender of respondents**

Gender	f	%
Female	26	96.30
Male	1	3.70
N	27	100.00

The questionnaires reveal that 26 (96.30%) of the social workers were female and 1 (3.70%) male.

According to the researcher, the results confirm what is already known, namely that the majority of social workers are women; that is why social work is regarded as a women's profession.

### 7.1.2 Age of respondents

**Table 3: Age distribution of social workers**

<b>AGE OF RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
20-29 years	5	18.52
30-39 years	14	51.85
40-49 years	7	25.93
50-59 years	1	3.70
60 years and older	0	0
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Respondents were requested to provide their age categories and the following answers were received:

The age range of most of the social workers, 14 (51,85%), who participated in this research was between the 30-39 age group. A large proportion of social work practitioners, 19 (70%), were relatively young.

### 7.1.3 Service of social workers

**Table 4: Length of service delivery**

<b>SERVICE DELIVERY</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1-5 years	13	48.15
6-10 years	4	14.81
11-15 years	6	22.22
16-20 years	3	11.11
21 years and longer	1	3.71
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 4 reflects that most social workers, 17 (62,96%), have less than 11 years' experience. According to the researcher, the social work profession appears to be failing to keep experienced and skilled social workers, which might also affect excellent service delivery. The notion is confirmed by De Lange (2006:4), who states that the Minister of Social Development, Zola Skweyiya, once confirmed the concern that South Africa was facing a general shortage of skilled social workers.

#### 7.1.4 Number of sexually abused children interviewed per social worker

**Table 5: Number of sexually abused children interviewed**

<b>LENGTH OF SERVICE</b>	<b>NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN INTERVIEWED</b>
1-5 years	13	378
6-10 years	4	45
11-15 years	6	223
16-20 years	3	810
21 years and above	1	200
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1656</b>

According to these results, 13 (48.15%) social workers whose work experience is less than 5 years have in their years in service interviewed 378 sexually abused children. These social workers are inexperienced in terms of assessing sexually abused children. Skilled social workers are needed when assessing the sexually abused child. According to Sawitz *et al.* (2002:366), studies that have been performed, found that different techniques should be regarded to elicit accurate information from children of different age groups. Social workers who interview abused children should also make use of interviewing protocols that are sensitive to developmental differences in free recall suggestibility, community's competence and different cultural expectations. To

accomplish this, it should be specially trained social workers that interview abused children.

**Table 6: Number of sexually abused children interviewed per department/section**

The number of sexually abused children interviewed during 2007 per department/section is as follows:

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of social workers</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number of children</b>
Dept of Health	1	3,70	239
SAPS Forensic services	1	3,70	500
Department of Social Development	25	92,60	917
<b>N</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1656</b>

The Social workers from Department of Social Development together with the forensic social worker from the South African Police Services appear to be the ones who have had the experience of interviewing many child victims of sexual abuse. The numbers were compared with the reported sexual crimes committed against children in Madibeng Local Municipality for the period January 2007 to December 2007 and are indicated below:

**Table 7: Presentation of crimes against children**

<b>Crimes (children 18 years)</b>	<b>Jan 2007</b>	<b>Feb 2007</b>	<b>Mar 2007</b>	<b>Apr 2007</b>	<b>May 2007</b>	<b>Jun 2007</b>	<b>Jul 2007</b>	<b>Aug 2007</b>	<b>Sept 2007</b>	<b>Oct 2007</b>	<b>Nov 2007</b>	<b>Dec 2007</b>	<b>Year total 2007</b>
Rape	6	6	5	9	10	8	0	17	16	4	4	21	106
Sodomy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Incest	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Indecent assault	1	2	2	1	4	0	0	0	2	2	4	1	19
Act No.23 of 1957 (Sexual Offences)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Month Total	7	8	7	10	14	8	0	17	18	6	8	22	125

South African Police Services, Child Protection Unit, 2007.



The available statistics from South African Police Services (Child Protection Unit) in Madibeng Municipality indicate that from the period January to December 2007, 106 (84,80%) cases of rape, 19 (15,20%) cases of indecent assault (attempted rape) had been reported.

The research conducted by Jones and Finkelhor (2001:4) indicates that there was a decline in reported and substantiated cases of child sexual abuse and that there are different reasons attached to it. The number of child abuse cases reported to authorities and welfare organizations do not reflect the actual number of cases (Le Roux and Engelbrecht, 2000:344). Conspiracy and the silence that surrounds violence against children also contribute to inaccurate information on child abuse in South Africa. Hence the number of victims might be higher than reported.

Wazir and Van Oudenhoven (1996:30) and Fouché (2007:55) also say that most social workers have developed the skills of ignoring some cases referred to them and accept only those perceived to be important and deserving; hence less statistics captured. Bungane (2007:19) points out that, due to high caseloads dealt with by social workers, they were not able to give all cases the amount of attention they wished to and what the cases deserved. On the other hand, clients needed to be handled very skillfully because they also continuously assess and evaluate the type of service rendered to them, which determines whether they will leave counselling or will return for further intervention.

It is the experience of the researcher that there was confusion on handling sexually abused children on the side of social workers and that lack of knowledge and skills contributed to the confusion, which might prevent sexually abused children from coming to the fore for social workers' attention. The researcher is of opinion that there are no evaluation methods in place to know whether social workers made an impact on victims that might also be contributing to few clients coming for social work services. Follow up on clients was also not done.

#### **7.1.5 Data capturing methods used**

A question was put to social workers to indicate the method of data collection they apply and the following answers were received:

**Table 8: Method of data capturing currently used by social workers**

<b>METHOD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Manual	25	67.57
Computer	10	27.03
Other	2	5.40%
<b>N</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above indicates that the majority of social workers 25 (67%) still do data capturing manually. Ten (27,03%) used the computer and 2 (5.40%) used other methods and 25 (67.57%) doing it manually.

The researcher is of opinion that, in the social work profession, the method of data capturing is predominantly done manually. According to Wazir and Van Oudenhoven (1996:30), social workers lack resources, yet they are pressurized to render a service, but are also expected to interpret and analyze cases and maintain good record keeping. They might make incorrect diagnoses and interpretations, which results in doing no justice to the helpless and innocent victims.

## **7.2 Initial interviewing**

### **7.2.1 Knowledge of self-introduction at the first interview**

A question was put to the social workers regarding the way they introduce themselves at commencement of the first interview, and the following answers were received:

- Sixteen (59.26%) said that they give the child their name and capacity, explain what the role of the social worker is and also explain the purpose of the interview.
- Nine (33.33%) said they give the child their name and start by building rapport by discussing things in general.
- 1 (3.70%) said that his/her introduction is situation specific, depending on the age of the child and the degree of trauma suffered by the child.

- 1 (3.70%) social worker did not respond.

From the responses of participants, it is clear that the social workers already possess some of the skills necessary for working with sexually abused children and that some still adhere to professionalism. Because there were no common approaches, no common sequential steps were followed. According to Poole and Lamb (1999:34), the capacity of adults to elicit accurate accounts from children depends in “large part on the extent to which they understand children’s abilities and limitations”. They therefore need knowledge with regard to when children develop the fundamental skills for reporting autobiographical events. Not all social workers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to interview abused children.

### **7.2.2 Documentation method used by social workers**

To a question as to whether they usually explained to the children the documentation method they used, the following responses were received: 15 (55.56%) social workers stated that they did indeed explain the method and twelve (44.44%) social workers stated that they did not. According to Howitt-Harvester (1992:156), social workers working with child abuse cases were expected to video tape all their interviews, and those who have resources to do it are not doing it properly.

The researcher is of opinion that the present settings where child interviews took place are not conducive and child friendly, as they lacked required standard resources. According to the researcher’s experience, the most commonly used documentation method South African social workers apply is taking down notes, and it is not common practice for social workers to explain to the clients why they are doing it during the assessment.

### 7.2.3 Introduction of ground rules during the first interview

Table 9: How social workers introduce ground rules

	Always		Occasionally		Never		N	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Establish that the child understands what it means to be truthful	22	81.48	5	18.52	0	0	27	100
Inform the child to talk about things that really happened	14	51.85	9	33.33	4	14.82	27	100
Ask the child to define “truth” and “lie”	12	44.44	13	48.15	2	7.41	27	100
Elicit an agreement to tell the truth or to only talk about things that actually happened	8	29.63	14	51.85	5	18.52	27	100
Encourage child to admit any lack of knowledge, understanding or memory loss	11	40.74	13	48.15	3	11.11	27	100
Give permission to child to correct you	12	44.44	10	37.04	5	18.52	27	100

The researcher experienced that most social workers were aware of ground rules and the importance thereof during the assessment, and because there were no fixed procedures for daily assessment which were adhered to, intuition was also applied.

A question was put to social workers to explain other ground rules they used during the interview and the following responses were received:

- 19 (70.37%) of social workers did not respond to the question.
- 1 (3.70%) informed the child to tell if he/she wished to go to the toilet or needed water.
- 1 (3.70%) requested the child to not use suggestibility.
- 1 (3.70%) reassured the child of confidentiality.
- 1 (3.70 %) reassured not to impose but to consider the client in totality
- 1 (3.70%) said they probed the child more.
- 2 (7.42%) said they reassured the child that efforts would be made to assist him/her.
- 1 (3.70%) said they did not use leading questions but would allow the child to be in control of the situation.

Most social workers were not aware of some types of common ground rules used during their assessments. The researcher is of opinion that ground rules should be emphasized to the child prior to the initial disclosure since they form part of rapport building. It also influences children's accuracy and facilitates disclosure because it develops trust and causes them to relax.

The fact that 70,37% did not respond to this question is an indication that social workers are not aware of ground rules. According to Poole and Lamb (1999:127), "Ground rule discussions dramatically reduced the number of incorrect answers from children".

#### **7.2.4 Extent of the use of probing questions during the first interview**

To a question regarding the extent to which the social workers ask probing questions during the first interview, the following answers were received:

**Table 10: Probing questions during the first interview**

	Always		Sometimes		Never		N	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Ask open-ended questions to elicit narratives	18	66.67	9	33.33	0	0	27	100
Elicit narratives from the child about neutral events	5	18.52	19	70.37	3	11.11	27	100
Test the child's suggestibility	10	37.04	15	55.56	2	7.40	27	100

According to these results no formal approaches were followed. Gough (1993:234) is of opinion that social workers lack knowledge, which leads to quality information going lost because they end up working in confusion, which is detrimental to the professional, the profession and the client.

From the researcher's experience, it would be best for children to provide an account of the relevant event in their own words at their own pace and in whatever order they like and for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions in a non-leading manner.

A further question was put to social workers on how they introduce a topic of concern to the child. The answers received were:

- 12 (44.44%) social workers said that they first refer to the incident and then ask the child to explain further.
- 4 (14.81%) said that they introduce the topic and allow the child to decide where to start with the explanation.
- 3 (11.11%) said they start with ice breakers before moving on to a topic of concern.
- 4 (14.81%) said they introduce the topic by engaging the child in pictures and play so as to facilitate self-disclosure.

- 1 (3.70%) said that he/she introduces a few topics and asks the child to choose the one he/she wishes to discuss.
- 1 (3.70%) said his/her approach is situation specific, depending on the child's feelings.
- 2 (7.42%) did not respond.

Faller (2003:382) maintains that information not provided during free recall must be elicited by means of specific abuse-focused prompts to make the child provide more relevant information. Some of them should be about people, circumstances of the abuse and body parts.

Fouché (2007:222) is of opinion that reflective techniques should be used to identify inconsistencies in children's answers and also to make a successful transition from one topic to the other, including introducing a topic of concern.

The researcher is of opinion that the findings of this study indicate that social workers have a fairly general knowledge of facts related to the general assessment of sexually abused children, but that they lack accurate knowledge on the initial assessment. They do not seem to apply specific principles of assessing sexually abused children. This state of affairs does not augur well for assessment in Madibeng Municipality.

### **7.2.5 Separation of incidents**

A question was put to social workers on how they separate incidents during the interview and the following answers were received:

14 (51,86%) said they use time lines.

4 (14,81%) said they summarize previous discussions and then move on to the next.

3 (11,11%) said they allow the child to relate, depending on his/her readiness.

1 (3.70%) said that the child's developmental maturity would determine the approach.

1 (3.70%) said that they use the drawing technique to lead the child.

1 (3.70%) said their intervention is situation specific.

1 (3.70%) said they separate incidents through recording.

2 (7,42%) of the social workers did not respond.

### **7.2.6 Open-ended questions to obtain a narrative account from the child**

A question was put to social workers to explain how they use open-ended questions in order to make the child explain the incident and the following responses were received:

- 6 (22.22%) social workers did not respond to the question.
- 18 (66.67%) social workers said they use open-ended questions when they clarify or probe.
- 1 (3.70%) social worker said he/she uses open-ended questions during drawings.
- 2 (7.42%) said they use open-ended questions when they summarize.

From the response of most social workers who reacted with uncertainty, the researcher noticed that social work assessments were not structured, since theory is often not available in this regard. Moore (1992:98) maintains that each case of sexual abuse has its own unique basic requirements that are needed and are currently not available.

It is the opinion of the researcher that children must be allowed to recount incidents without any interruptions and in an order they choose. The interviewer should ask follow-up questions in a developmentally sensitive and non-leading manner in order to help the child to tell his/her story (Fouché, 2007:214).

The study by Lamb *et al.* (2003:930) examined the interviews of police officers trained in a structured protocol where suspected child victims were encouraged to provide detailed narratives with the guidance of open-ended questions. The study found that 83% of all allegations and disclosures were elicited through free recall questions (78% for pre-schoolers) and 66% of all children identified the suspect through open-ended questions (60% of pre-schoolers). The researcher is of opinion that, given a chance, the implementation of structured interviewing could yield positive results for victims.



## 7.2.7 Obtaining additional details

A question was put to social workers on how often they use additional techniques to derive detailed and relevant information from clients, and the following responses were obtained:

**Table 11: Extent of obtaining additional information**

	Always		Sometimes		Never		N	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Focused, specific or opinion-forming questions (Who, what, where, when)	16	59.26	10	37.04	1	3.70	27	100
Time segmentation (Time-line of events that child can recall)	19	70.37	7	25.93	1	3.70	27	100
Sensory focus questions (cognitive interview)	15	55.56	12	44.44	0	0	27	100
Narrative elaboration	8	29.63	18	66.67	1	3.70	27	100
Demonstration aids (such as dolls)	7	25.93	11	40.74	9	33.33	27	100

From the results obtained, as illustrated in Table 11, the following information was obtained:

- 65 responses received from the social workers, acknowledged always using focused questions, time segmentation, sensory focus questions and narrative elaborations and demonstration aids;
- 58 social workers acknowledged occasionally using focused questions, time segmentation, sensory focus questions and narrative elaborations and demonstration aids;
- 12 social workers acknowledged never using focused questions, time segmentation, narrative elaborations and demonstration aids;

The researcher is of opinion that most social workers showed that they are knowledgeable of general approaches used during interviews and that they are capable of applying the techniques.

Aldridge and Wood (1998:90) maintain that, after the child has given his/her free narrative and the professional has satisfactorily questioned him/her, it is necessary and effective to provide the child with another opportunity for free narrative, but the interviewer must explain that he/she does not doubt the original narrative. For example, the child can be requested to re-explain and give more information about a specific incident that had taken place in a particular setting the child mentioned, or explain whether that particular incident happened once.

### **7.2.8 Using additional techniques**

Social workers were asked to demonstrate their understanding of the narrative by explaining how they obtained these additional details during the interview, and surprisingly, most of them were not able to substantiate their understanding.

Most of those who responded gave vague and unstructured procedures.

- 7 (25,92%) social workers did not respond to the question.
- 15 (55.55%) social workers said they probe and use empathy and open-ended questions.
- 2 (7.42%) of the social workers said they use examples, demonstrations and story telling.
- 2 (7.42%) social workers said they listen to the child attentively.
- 1 (3.70%) social worker said that the situation and the extent of trauma suffered always determine his/her intervention.

From the responses to this question, the researcher deduces that the style of interaction between children and interviewers in the introductory phase affects the amount and quality of information obtained in the substantive portion of the interview and that social workers should have command of skills to decide on the approaches to be utilized.

It is important to know which specific areas of the child's testimony should be explored where a free narrative will be invited, for example, "I understood all you told

me but I don't understand what happened that day when you returned from school. Can you tell me more about it so that I can understand?

### **7.2.9 Ending of the first interview**

A question was put to social workers to explain how they end their first interview with the sexually abused child, and the following responses were received:

- 1 (3.70%) social worker did not respond to this question.
- 25 (92,59%) said that they reassure the child of confidentiality, summarize, set date and tasks for the next session, thank the child for coming, refer the child, if necessary, and check to make sure nothing has been left out.
- 1 (3.70%) said that he/she terminates with them singing songs and playing games.

Based on experience, the researcher is of opinion that all positive responses by social workers to this question were true. It remains a miracle that most social workers who participated in the study still showed signs of an improved interviewing approach as well as skills - they all indicated terminating sessions in a professional manner.

The researcher is of opinion that shifting the conversation at the end of the interview is very important, seeing that it normalizes the environment for the child so that he/she leaves the session on a high note. It still requires a skilled professional to make a positive closure based on the nature of the case. The step-wise forensic interview protocol (Practice Notes, 2002) and the Memorandum of good practice (Home Office, 1992:15) recommends that interviewers shift the conversation at the end of the interview to a neutral topic prior to closure of the interview.

## **8. DISCUSSION**

The study only touched on the aspect of the role of the social worker and the importance of the initial assessment of sexually abused children, and not on aspects of the entire child abuse assessment process.

In terms of the profile, the most significant findings from this study were that social workers in Madibeng Municipality were mostly females and employed by the Department of Social Development, who were inexperienced in terms of assessing sexually abused children because of lack of skills and knowledge. This is not a situation restricted to Madibeng Municipality – it also happens in other service points

of North West Province. Most of the victims of sexual abuse are girls. This situation has a negative influence on proper service delivery. Most victims, due to unavailability of relevant services, are suffering from emotional ailments that make it difficult for them to lead normal lives. In most service points, casework is done by junior social workers. Most of them do not have more than 5 years of service. In Madibeng Municipality, senior and principal social workers were coordinating programmes, leaving junior social workers to use their discretion and possibly cause more harm than good to victims of sexual abuse and their families.

Although the respondents in this research mentioned that they applied most of the techniques required in the initial assessment of sexually abused children, it was not certain whether their intervention benefited the victims. It appears that social workers did not know how to intervene in sexual abuse cases, specifically in the initial phase. Social workers are expected to reach out to the vulnerable victims, respond to them in the most helpful way through relevant skills and techniques, and minimize the pain and trauma caused by the ordeal. Doyle (1995:99) also cites lack of knowledge and purpose of the assessment as one of the failures when looking at the abused children's feelings, help them to unburden themselves through responding to them in the most helpful way possible through relevant intervention strategies and techniques.

The situation does not help in processes carried into effect by the government in trying to stop or minimize the prevalence of child sexual abuse. The fact that there are no centres that render services to sexually abused children makes them vulnerable. Because of poor intervention at the initial stage, some of these children may develop personality disorders.

From the results of the study it is evident that social workers portray their interaction with these children as good, but on the other hand, they acknowledge their avoidance of some of these cases.

From the results of the study, the researcher is of opinion that most experienced social workers no longer did functional work or no longer were in the department. The responses from the study also indicated that social workers themselves were not confident of their intervention strategies in the field of child sexual abuse. Despite their comments which portrayed quality work, they were not confident to work with sexual abuse cases. Social workers who apply ordinary casework methods with no

specialization beyond child care can be expected to effectively handle sexually abused children, especially during the initial assessment. Skills are needed for different aspects of their demanding profession. Their present mode of intervention, according to Wazir and Van Oudenhoven (1996:50) leaves them knowing little of everything, and rendering ineffective service to all categories of cases.

According to Bagley and Mallick (1999:30); Macleod and Saraga (1988:65) and Wazir and Van Oudenhoven (1996:51), it is necessary for frontline social workers to undergo training due to their lack of skills and knowledge within the area of child sexual abuse, especially those employed within the department.

The researcher is of opinion that the slow changing system professionals are caught up in, lack of resources and non-conducive working environments might be the reasons for the low turn-up of sexually abused children for professional help. This situation made them fail both the victims who were never identified and occasionally even those who were indeed identified (Bolen, 2001:219). Wicham and West (2002:16) maintain that a conducive environment is not only for professionals – victims also deserve it so as to enable them to feel safe and to have control over the process.

According to Doyle (1995:99), Jorgensen (1992:45), Kenney (1990:25) and Preston-Shoot (in Meadow, Mok & Roseberg, 2007:78), helping the sexually abused child deal with feelings of rejection and facilitating disclosure forms part of the role of the social worker. Social workers with their skills work on the feelings of children to reassure them, safeguard their welfare and investigate their circumstances to prevent further harm (Mather and Debye, 1994:13). The South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare (1992:16) also says that social workers have a role to help remove the physical and emotional scars that most abused children bear, which could have severe and long-term harmful effects. Children and families do not have access to resources for after care. The latter might be caused by the fact that those children who are victims as well as their families are left vulnerable.

Frequency and duration of abuse vary according to the degree of violence applied, and could have an impact on the healing process (Berlinger, 2003:13; Wicham and West, 2002:3-4). Some of the effects of sexual abuse need additional specialized professional intervention to be triggered to a higher priority.

An adequate number of committed and skilled social workers to assist these victims could make a vast difference in their lives. In this study the researcher is of opinion that most of the social workers participating in the study were not conducting the interviews correctly during the initial assessment. This does not reflect well on the role of social workers in Madibeng Municipality because it forms part of the role of the social worker to effectively assess sexually abused children. This situation is not only experienced in Madibeng Municipality, but also in other parts of South Africa, based on the researcher's experience.

From the descriptive information provided in this study it would appear, according to the researcher, that the duty of social workers in Madibeng Municipality was only to interview and refer the sexually abused children, while their emotional needs were neglected. Moore (1992:154-156) is of opinion that follow-up sessions and therapeutic counselling were not provided by the departments due to a lack of skills social workers need so as to persevere and to provide further protection to the child.

It also appears, according to the researcher, that the main concern was for the sexually abused children to be interviewed without a purpose and to be referred or abandoned without follow-up sessions. Only quantitative statistics were considered when monitoring and evaluating services.

Social workers should make efforts to understand the emotional needs on which these children try to focus attention. They are also expected to encourage children to experience a sense of belonging and self-worth. Most importantly, social workers should help these children to access services through proper assessment as soon as possible to reduce the impact of abuse so that they can enjoy normal lives and relationships. To be able to achieve this task, it is suggested that social workers learn to effectively engage the support systems made available to them.

As most services available for sexually abused children are usually rendered by professionals in private practice, most sexually abused children do not always have funds to access such services. It is thus important for the different Non-Governmental Organizations and Government Departments to evaluate and review their service delivery strategies, in particular those services meant for sexually abused children in areas such as Madibeng Municipality.

The researcher's experience leads her to realize that knowledge and professional purpose is lacking among social workers and among the managers at the different Government Departments and the Non-Governmental Organisations with regard to ways of improving the initial assessment of sexually abused children.

The study also revealed that the main focus of service delivery provided by the Department of Social Development in Madibeng Municipality exclusively was on prevention in the form of awareness campaigns.

The number of sexually abused children from South African Police Services was standing at a rate that might make it difficult for social workers to manage their work load, should it come to their attention.

To address the needs of all sexually abused children and their families, society should respond to the tragedy by developing programmes that identify, assess and treat victims.

The notion is supported by Bolen (2001:3) who is of opinion that our failure as a society is that we engage in programmes that fail to identify most victims, because there are no specific programmes that focus on sexually abused children and their problems. The present approach to service delivery is based on a developmental framework which has four levels of intervention: prevention, early intervention, statutory intervention and reconstruction and after care. The early intervention level needs to be reviewed to accommodate these specific services.

Skilled social workers are needed. According to The New Book of Knowledge Encyclopedia (2003:228), goodwill alone cannot be applied to solve problems – trained minds are also needed. This need for skilled social workers was also identified by Trigaardt and Mkhwanazi (2003) who conducted a study on the reconceptualisation of social work and concluded that, amongst other things, lobbying, advocacy, training and refresher courses were important activities to improve the status of the profession. The effort of the government to empower social workers with knowledge and skills, it seems, will take time to correct the current shortage of skilled social workers in the country.

## **9. GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS TO IMPROVE THE INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN**

Guidelines for assessing sexually abused children were developed for APSAC (American Professional Society on Abuse of Children) and are presently used in the United States as a specialized area offering services to sexually abused children. Jones (1992:20) as well as Yuille and Farr (in Poole & Lamb, 1998:95) are also aware of other different phases of the initial interviewing of the sexually abused child already developed by some authors, with the aim of minimizing any trauma experienced by the child and maximizing the amount and quality of the information obtained from the child.

Based on the researcher's experience, it was important to develop practical relevant guidelines with regard to working with sexually abused children. If adopted in South Africa, they could improve the quality of life of victims and their families. Guidelines for social workers to improve the initial assessment of sexually abused children will be discussed in accordance with the information obtained from Bull (2003), Fouché (2007), Grobler (2007), Home office (1992), Jones (1992) and Pool and Lamb (1998).

### **9.1 Introduction of self and role**

The interviewer needs to introduce him/herself to the child by his/her name and give a brief explanation of his/her role (e.g., "my job is to talk to children about things that bother them").

The interviewer must inform the child about how and why the interview will be recorded, if recorded (e.g., "I have a tape to help me remember what we talked about" and allow the child to glance around the room).

Assessment of sexually abused children should be done with discretion and the interviewer must answer any spontaneous questions coming from the child.

### **9.2 Rapport Building**

The aim of this phase is to build rapport with the child in order to ensure that he/she feels comfortable and relaxed by engaging the child's interest (Bull, 2003a:2). The aim is to know these children with their fears, strengths and expectations. The stage involves a brief discussion about neutral topics such as school and friends. It is also a way of affording the child an opportunity to practice the art of giving narrative responses (Grobler 2007:9; Poole & Lamb, 1999:95).



The child may be asked to recall a recent significant event, or describe a scripted event (what he/she does to prepare him/herself for school every morning until they arrive at school). The interviewer must display interest verbally and non-verbally to reinforce the child to talk (e.g. “Really”). The issue of confidentiality can also be discussed in this session (Jones, 1992:30).

### **9.3 Developmental screening**

The aim of this phase is to assess the level of detail the child conveys and supplement the knowledge concerning the child’s social, emotional and cognitive development as well as his/her communication skills (Home Office, 1992:15-16). During the interaction with the child, the interviewer may make notes on the child’s capacity to provide a narrative account and knowledge of relevant concepts by using language and the child’s emotional reactions to specific interview topics.

### **9.4 Competency check (The truth/Lie)**

The interviewer will explain the importance of telling the truth and also assess the child’s understanding of the difference between truth and lies and must then obtain a verbal agreement from the child to tell the truth and to not make up information.

As a demonstration of the child’s ability to provide accurate information on events known to have happened, the interviewer can ask the child to label statements as true or false (the interviewer makes these statements and requests the child to respond).

### **9.5 Establishing Ground Rules**

Ground rules include an explanation of why the interview is conducted, what would happen with the statement and the importance of telling the truth. The interviewer may inform the child that the purpose of the interview is to talk about things that really happened. The interviewer may say that he/she will be asking the child quite a number of questions and that it is okay if the child does not know or remember all the answers. The child may be told that it is important not to guess but tell the interviewer that he/she does not know or remember and it is okay for the child to correct the interviewer if he/she makes a mistake.

### **9.6 Introducing the topic of concern**

Introduction of the topic of concern should depend on case characteristics and the developmental level of the child. The child may be asked whether he/she knows why

he/she is being interviewed or he/she may be presented with a statement (e.g. I understand something may have happened to you; tell me about it from the beginning to the end (Grobler, (2007:10). This is followed by open-ended prompt. Only if the child fails to identify target events will the interviewer employ progressively more focused prompts to identify the alleged abuse (Fouché, 2007:242). The interviewer must also determine whether the incident occurred once or more than once, and proceed to secure incident-specific information.

The interviewer should then introduce the topic of concern, starting with the least suggestive prompts. Words such as bad, hurt and sad must be avoided.

### **9.7 Eliciting detailed description of concerning events**

During this phase the child is directed to recount events that are more accessible to memory. The interviewer must act as a facilitator and encourage the child to provide an account of the alleged incident in his/her own words and in his/her own time. Aspects such as clothing and emotions of the perpetrator, where other people were and availability of any witness and how the child participated should be focused on.

General open-ended questions may be used to obtain information which is spontaneous and free from the interviewer's influence (Home Office, 1992:17). The best way is for the interviewer to begin with most open and least suggestive questions and then proceed to more specific and leading questions.

Narrative prompts are (e.g. "then what;" "Tell me more about it"). Open-ended questions should be the main questioning strategy. Narrative inviting questions and approaches which are age appropriate must be applied because the child might need more help than anticipated. Also go beyond the child as there might be other victims who need to be identified and offered help (Doyle, 1995:100).

### **9.8 Closing the interview**

The interviewer must appreciate and recognize the feelings and emotional struggle the child has been experiencing during the interview. It is in the interest of the child to close the interview on a positive note by, amongst others, summarizing important aspects touched, thanking the child for cooperating and for providing information. Provide the child with a contact name and telephone number (in case he/she remembers something they forgot to mention, or if he/she needs help). Together with the child the social worker may agree on the date for the next appointment if deemed

necessary. The interviewer should use available resources effectively and efficiently and refer victims for further attention if need be. Some of the neutral topics that were raised during rapport building may be discussed such as the weather and music (Home Office, 1992:20).

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the descriptive information provided in this study, the following is recommended:

- A protocol needs to be developed which will advise interviewers on how to proceed through a series of distinct interviewing stages.
- Guidelines should be developed to address the problem of child sexual abuse, and not dependent rules, which will assist social workers to play a critical role in reshaping the lives of sexually abused children.
- Social workers should have access to a more advanced powerful child assessment model which will serve as a monitoring tool to ensure commonality.
- Resources to secure social workers' participation in child sexual abuse endeavours need to be procured, while at the same time enhancing inter-sectoral collaboration and channels for the flow of child abuse-related information among safety and security service providers.
- According to the researcher's experience, the policy makers at the Department of Social Development's National Office and top management should comprise managers who each have a social work background and an experience in working with sexually abused children. The head of the Department should have a vision of how societies or communities should be empowered to cope with the challenges created by the abnormal families resulting from sexual abuse.
- Child sexual abuse, like probation services, should be a specialization for better service delivery.
- An abundance of research addressing the causes and effects of sexual abuse exists, but there is a dearth of research addressing the impact of the initial assessment on child survivors.

- The study reinforced findings from previous research conducted by several researchers that much of the previous research already conducted has been on child sexual abuse in general, with little systematic research into the importance of the intervention in the initial assessment of child sexual abuse in South Africa. Consequently an empirical research with a larger sample that would facilitate generalizability of the study should be sourced.

## SECTION B

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## SECTION C

### ANNEXURES

#### ANNEXURE 1: Questionnaire

##### GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS REGARDING THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD

-Please answer all questions.

-All questionnaires will be dealt with anonymously. It is therefore not necessary to include your name.

-The information will assist the researcher to determine whether social workers have a role to play in their first assessment with the sexually abused children and also to determine the impact of their intervention on the child. The necessity for the need for more skills will also be determined.

##### DEFINITIONS

Narrative invitations: Broad invitation using open-ended questions to encourage the child to continue talking/telling the story.

Open ended prompts: Questions that allowed for a broad range of responses such as who, what, when, where.

Focused questions: Questions that focus on a particular person, body part, action or circumstance.

##### Section A. General Information.

1. What is your gender?

Male	
Female	

2. What is your age category?

20-29 years	
30-39 years	
40-49 years	
50-59 years	
60 years and older	

3. In what category is your work experience with children?

Below 1 year	
1-5 years	
6-10 years	
11-15 years	
16-20 years	
21 years and above	

4. How many sexually abused children did you interview or have interviewed?

--	--	--

5. What method of data capturing is in place? (You may mark **more** than one answer)

anual	
Computer	
If other please specify	

.....  
 .....

**Section B Initial Interviewing**

6. How do you introduce yourself at the first interview?

.....  
 .....

7. Do you tell the child about the documentation method you are using?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

8. To what extend do you give attention to the following ground rules during the first interview?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
8.1 Establish that the child understands what it means to be truthful.			
8.2 Inform the child only to talk about things that really happened.			
8.3 Ask children to define true/lie.			
8.4 Elicit an agreement to tell the truth or to talk about things that really happened.			
8.5 Encourage child to admit any lack of knowledge, understanding or memory.			
8.6 Give permission for child to correct you.			

9. If any other rules please specify

.....  
 .....

10. To what extend do you give attention to the following during the first interview:

	Always	Sometimes	Never
10.1 Ask open-ended questions			
10.2 Elicit narratives from child about neutral events			
10.3 Test the child's suggestibility			

11. How do you introduce the topic of concern?

.....  
 .....

12. How do you separate incidents?

.....  
.....

13. How do you use open ended invitations/questions to obtain a narrative account from the child?

.....  
.....  
.....

14. To what extent do you use the following to obtain additional details?

14.1 Focused, specific or opinion posing questions (Who, what, where, when)			
14.2 Time segmentation (time-line of events that child can recall)			
14.3 Sensory focus questions (cognitive interview)			
14.4 Narrative elaboration			
14.5 Demonstration aids (such as dolls)			

Describe how you obtain these details

.....  
.....  
.....

15. How do you end the first interview?

.....  
.....  
.....

Thank you for your participation  
Ms JM Mogole  
MA Student  
Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University