WRITINGS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED
CHILDREN: AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF
DISCLOSURE

BY

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Writings of sexually abused children: an important source of disclosure

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| CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the study | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: Literature review | 5 |
| CHAPTER THREE: Research methodology | 34 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: Results and discussion | 40 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and recommendations | 46 |
| REFERENCES | 49 |
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  -  Letter of declaration

APPENDIX B  -  Questionnaire

APPENDIX C  -  Permission to conduct research at Empangeni Crisis Centre
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this is my own work and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

PHUMELELE TSHABALALA

JANUARY 2002
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Grateful acknowledgements are extended to:

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To the parents of sexually abused children who gave consent on behalf of their children to participate as questionnaire respondents for the study.

To all the children who participated in the study.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband Nono, my parents Bafanyana and Gagonina, my late father and mother-in-law, Phahlane and Sisi, my brother-in-law Sipho, my son Andile and my two daughters Nqobile and Nomfundo.
The purpose of this study was to explore and uncover the levels of stress and emotional difficulties of victims of sexual abuse through their written narratives.

The study involved five females who had been recently sexually abused and had sought assistance at the Empangeni Crisis Centre.

In the present study, the researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the research respondents. Data was collected in a series of individual interviews during which individual assessments were also done. All interviews with the subjects were conducted in Zulu in order to avoid any misunderstanding. Qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the thematic content of the narratives to uncover the themes, attitudes, fears and hopes.

The following conclusions were drawn from the study:

• The written narratives of sexually abused children proved to be an important and a rich source of understanding the experiences of victims of sexual abuse.

• Thoughts and feelings experienced by the research respondents including amongst others, loss of trust, anger, guilt, hatred, depression, helplessness and loss of self-
esteem are not different from those expressed by individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder.

• Most participants in this research were victims of incest. This finding confirms the work of Nevid et al., (2000) that the great majority of assailants had some prior relationship with the child. The present study strongly implicates abuse by a parent figure, a factor also supported by the findings of Cahill, Llewelyn and Pearson (1991).

• In the light of the above-findings, the researcher recommends that a great deal of research is needed to enable us to understand the mechanism, processes, conditions and the many other variables in operation in the development of the kinds of problems which have been identified in children who are victims of sexual abuse.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Thousands of children many under three years of age are seriously mistreated each year and a sizable percentage of abuse cases involves sexual assaults. According to Gillis (1999), estimates in South Africa suggest that one out of every three females and one out of every six males suffer some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16 years. Statistics compiled by the Child Protection Unit (The Citizen, 1999), show that crimes against children included 14,223 of rape, 697 of sodomy, 171 of incest, 3,451 of indecent assaults and 750 unspecified sexual offences. It may be beneficial to note that by all accounts child sexual abuse is getting worse. Referring to this issue McClain (2002) explains that in 18 months from January 2000, there were almost 32,000 reports of child rape and sexual attacks on children countrywide. The number of children presenting with HIV/AIDS as a result of sexual abuse is also increasing (Recovery, 1997).

The experience of childhood sexual abuse is often a significant trauma. Supporting this notion, Kendall and Hammen (1998) state: “Children who are sexually victimized may experience severe, lifelong consequences...” (p.393). Yehu (1988) also, acknowledges that children who are victims of sexual abuse do experience psychological problems that appear to be related to the abuse and its surrounding circumstances.
1.2 MOTIVATION AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Child sexual abuse is an important clinical and social problem. Therefore, research literature of abnormal psychology should increasingly address topics related to sexual abuse of children.

At present, almost all reviews on child sexual abuse are based on publications in the professional literature. By contrast, there are few reviews on the writings of the victims (Allen, 1980; Spring, 1987). Yet such writings can be an important and a rich source of understanding the experiences of victims of sexual abuse.

Several authors (Kendall & Hammen, 1998; Nevid, Rathus & Greene, 1997) hold that potentially disturbing impulses are often hidden from consciousness by defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms very often thwart direct probing of threatening material. However, indirect methods of assessment may offer clues to unconscious processes. In the light of the foregoing discussion the main aim of this study was to determine whether writings produced by victims of child sexual abuse are an important method of disclosure. The researcher thus, explored the role played by writings (produced by victims) in the expression of one's experiences.
1.3 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The nature of this study, precludes generalizations of the results to an extended population.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The main research hypothesis under investigation was that writings or written narratives of victims of sexual abuse will detect their possible levels of stress and emotional difficulties.

1.5 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Concepts that will be frequently used in this dissertation are defined below.

1.5.1 Child sexual abuse

According to Nevid, Rathus and Greene (2000) child sexual abuse refers to the activities of adults who use children for their sexual gratification. As explained by Draucker (1992) forms of sexual activity involving genital contact for either the offender or the victim, such as genital fondling and vaginal, anal and/or oral intercourse, are usually included in definitions of sexual abuse. Also included are other forms of direct, physical sexual contact, such as fondling of the breasts, buttocks, or thighs and sexual kissing.
Literature (Finkelhor, 1979, Meiselman, 1978) indicate that in some instances definitions of child sexual abuse include non-contact sexual activities such as requests by the offender for sexual activities, deliberate exposure of the offender’s sexual organs, exposure of the victim’s sex organs for the offender’s sexual gratification, victims deliberately made to witness adult sexual activities etc.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the definition of child sexual abuse, as used in the present study, is any exploitative sexual activity, whether or not it involves physical contact, between a child and another person who by virtue of his or her power over the child due to age, strength, position, or relationship uses the child to meet his or her sexual and emotional needs (Draucker, 1992).

The foregoing descriptions of child sexual abuse tally with that of Wolfe (1990) who states that child sexual abuse generally refers to such physical contact as penetration of the child’s vagina or anus with the perpetrator’s penis, finger or other object and fondling or caressing and also included are exhibitionism and child pornography, which may involve actual sexual activity between adult and a child.

1.5.2 Writings or narratives of victims

In the present context this refers to written stories that people use to construct meaning out of the events of their lives. (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995).
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

2.1.1 Prevalence of child sexual abuse

Reports of child sexual abuse have increased astronomically in recent years. In support of this notion, Emery and Ottman (1999) agree that the sexual abuse of children is now far more prevalent than would have been believed a short time ago. According to Nevid, Rathus and Greene (2000), in the United States, the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse jumped threefold during the 1980's and early to mid - 1990's, to about 150,000 annually.

A dramatic increase in the sexual exploitation of children is observed also in South Africa (Sunday Sun, 2002). What was once a hidden form of abuse has now become more visible both in major cities and rural areas in South Africa. Statistics compiled by the child Protection Unit (The Citizen, 1999), show that crimes against children included 14,223 cases of rape, 697 of sodomy, 171 of incest, 3,451 of indecent assault and 750 unspecified sexual offences. Statistics compiled for KwaZulu-Natal (The Zululand Observer, 2000) on child sexual abuse reflected on Table 1 illustrates quite clearly that child sexual abuse is on the increase.
Table 1.: KwaZulu-Natal Statistics April 1998 – March 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASELOAD</th>
<th>1997/8</th>
<th>1998/9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sexually abused children already on caseloads</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New cases of sexually abused children reported</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The reported cases cited in the foregoing discussion are perhaps only the tip of the iceberg since only a third or a quarter of actual cases are reported to authorities (Alter-Reid, Gibbs, Lachenmeyer, Siegal & Mossoth, 1986). Nevid, Rathus and Greene (2000) agree that people may not be willing to report sexual abuse.

It has been learned (Nevid et al., 2000) that girls are more likely than boys to be sexually abused. Referring to this notion Dreyer (2002) explains that girls are vulnerable to sexual violence and this is best illustrated by the findings of a recent study of 30,000 youth conducted by the Johannesburg Metropolitan Local Council and a local NGO, the Community Information Empowerment and Transparency Foundation (CIET). One in four men interviewed claimed to have had sex with a girl under the age of 18.
Childhood sexual victimization is alarmingly frequent and many children in our culture are not safe from sexual violence outside or even inside the home (Kendall & Hamen, 1998).

Varma (1993) indicates that although sexual abuse of children has been the subject of increasing attention during the last decade or two, estimates of its prevalence vary, partly because of the use of different definitions of abuse and real differences in the prevalence rates in different populations.

2.1.2 Historical “discoveries” of the prevalence of sexual abuse in our society

According to Herman (1981) awareness of the occurrence of sexual abuse as a traumatic experience in the lives of children is traced to Freud. In the late 19th century, Sigmund Freud found that many of the adult patients he treated reported childhood sexual abuse, which Freud found to be casually related to these patients’ symptoms of psychological distress. Since female patients revealed to Freud that they had had childhood sexual experiences with adult men in their families, Freud postulated the seduction theory (Draucker, 1996). However, in protecting the patriarchal family structure, Freud identified the perpetrators of the sexual abuse as children, caretakers or distant relatives but not fathers. Thus, Freud repudiated the seduction theory and instead claimed that his patients’ reports of sexual abuse were incestuous fantasies rather than actual childhood events.

For decades following Freud’s repudiation of the seduction theory, silence was maintained on the topic of incest. It was only in the 1940s that incest was discovered for a second time.
by social scientists. The reality of the phenomenon continued to be denied by researchers and the public (Draucker, 1996).

Herman (1981) regards the “third discovery” of incest to the 1970's when the feminist movement brought the problem of child sexual abuse into public awareness. It was at this time when scientific studies of the problem and public revelations of incest survivors chose to tell their stories.

2.1.3 Patterns of child sexual abuse

It is clear from literature (Knudsen, 1991) that sexual abuse of children includes sexual acts such as fondling, kissing, exhibitionism, touching of genitals, oral sex, anal intercourse, and among girls, vaginal intercourse.

Faller (1989) reported that sexual abuse of boys or girls is more likely to be committed by family members than by strangers and that girls are more likely than boys to be abused by a family member or acquaintance.

According to Nevid et al., (2000) physical force is seldom used by the abuser. Very often the abuser uses manipulation, deception or, threat of force to obtain the child’s compliance. Children abused by family members are most likely to suffer repeated incidents of abuse.
As noted by Barker and Varma (1993) various deviant sexual practices inflicted on children have also been reported. Children, even young ones, have been made to participate in the production of pornographic movies and some have been used in satanic and other destructive rituals.

2.1.4 Characteristics of abusers

Authors (Finkelhor & Russell, 1984; Muster, 1992) in the field of child sexual abuse estimate that the great majority of abusers are men.

Most cases of child sexual abuse involve assailants who have some kind of relationship with the child or the child's family, typically a relative, a family friend or a neighbour (Waterman & Lusk, 1986). In many cases the molester is a family member, typically a father or uncle (Nevid et al., 2000).

2.1.4.1 Adults and sexual gratification with children

Literature (Sue, Sue & Sue, 1994; You 2002) refer to adults who obtain erotic gratification through fantasies or sexual contact with children as pedophiles. According to DSMIV (DSM IV, 1994) to be diagnosed with this disorder, the person must be at least sixteen years of age and at least five years older than the victim. Pedophiliacs may victimize their own children (incest) stepchildren, or those outside the family. Most pedophiles prefer girls, although a few choose prepubertal boys.
Gillis (1999) explains that the term pedophilia describes an adult’s preference for erotic play either of a heterosexual or homosexual nature with children. According to Gillis (1999) contrary to common belief pedophilia is not limited to older men, but is also spread among all age groups, including adolescents.

2.1.4.2 Sexual relations between close relatives

Sexual relations between close relatives is called incest (Sue et al., 1994; Draucker, 1996; Gillis, 1999). The most commonly reported incidents of incest to law enforcement agencies involve a father and his daughter or stepdaughter. Another most common incestuous relationship involved siblings (Hunt, 1974).

Most research has focussed on father-daughter incest. This type of incestuous relationship generally begins when the daughter is between six and eleven years old and it continues for at least two years. Unlike sex between siblings, father-daughter incest is always exploitative. The girl is especially vulnerable because she depends on her father for emotional support. As a result, the victims often feel guilty and powerless (Sue et al., 1994). According to Hunt (1974) mother-son incest seems to be rare.

Incest occurs in families at all socioeconomic levels (Kendall & Hammen, 1998). It often arises in the context of a poor marital relationship, for example, wife may be rejecting the husband’s sexual advances. The mother often knows about the sexual activity with the child but for various reasons tolerates it. The father may have alcoholism or some other
mental illness, and often the family is highly stressed by economic hardships and unemployment (Faust, Runyon & Kenny 1995 in Kendall & Hammen, 1998).

Williams & Finkelhor (1990) in Kendall and Hammen (1998) point out that although incestuous fathers may be different from each other, they often share the following common characteristics:

- they have difficulties in empathy and expression of nurturance
- they lack social skills and are frequently socially isolated
- they report frequent histories of childhood sexual or especially physical abuse or rejection by their own parents

The frequency of incest is perhaps surprising, given that nearly every culture prohibits most forms of sexual relationships between close relatives (Sue et al., 1994).
2.1.5 Sexual violence in schools

**HIGHLIGHT**

"All the touching at school, in class, in the corridors, all day every day bothers me. Boys touch your bum, your breasts. Some teachers will tell the boys to stop and they may get a warning or detention but it doesn't work. Other teachers just ignore it. You won't finish your work because they are pestering you the whole time."

MC age 14 sexually harassed at school.

"I can't understand how nobody saw anything or helped my child. The school has caretakers, where were they? I don't feel she is safe at school."

Mother of LB, a 9-year old girl gang-raped at school by older classmates.

Source: Dreyer 2002.

While the silence around gender-based violence (GBV) – and its link to HIV – is slowly being discussed in the public domain, educators are increasingly having to acknowledge
that they have no choice but to provide learners with the basic skills to cope with these dual epidemics.

A question that may arise at this point is how and when does one do this within an education system? Dreyer (2002) points out that to address this challenge the School of Public Health, University of Western Cape, developed a model to incorporate the issue of gender-based violence into the primary school curriculum.

2.1.6 Child sexual abuse in relation to rural areas

Van Niekerk (2002) notes that many incidents of sexual crimes against children, particularly in rural areas, are simply not reported to formal structures. Some of the factors considered by Van Niekerk (2002) as contributing to failure to report are listed below.

- Crimes against children may not be reported to the criminal justice system but advice might be sought from a local traditional healer, who may order the payment of compensation to the child’s family and the completion of certain cleansing rituals. In rural areas, traditional practices may be seen as an alternative to reporting to the criminal justice system instead of being used in conjunction with it. In situations like this, the child remains vulnerable to further abuse since the prescribed rituals may not be adequate to deal with the psychological trauma to the child. The extreme poverty that exists in rural areas may make the payment an attractive option for the family of the rural child victim.
- Children may not report a crime because they feel they are responsible for their victimization. Very often the crime is not detected through disclosure but through discovery, that is, with the child presenting with sexually transmitted disease.

- Children are powerless and more easily intimidated into remaining silent than are other victims of crime.

- At times the lack of facilities in rural areas inhibits the reporting of crimes against children.

- The offender may be the breadwinner of the family to which the child and/or family needs access of resources. Rural poverty thus contributes the silence around the crime. Very often reporting is discouraged by adult caretakers in the home because of the economic dependence of an entire family group.

- The offender may be in a position of authority over the child and thus able to persuade the child not to report the crime to an authority.

- Adult caretakers may be intimidated into remaining silent about a crime against a child because of direct threats to themselves and the child.

- Children may not be aware that a particular exploitative act is in fact a criminal offence. Even when aware they may not be able to reach resources that could assist them.

The nearest police station may be many kilometers away and a telephone may be many kilometers away or a telephone may not be available.
2.1.7 Child rape: a continuing horror

Mntungwa (2002) considers the week from 3rd to 9th March to have been another shocking seven days for the children of South Africa with more rapes of young children, including babies being reported. Information in this regard is presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGHLIGHT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R A P E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Baby, one month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Girl, 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stepdaughter, 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Neighbour, 9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Girl, 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Sunday Tribune News</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.8 Consequence of child sexual abuse

For those children who have been sexually violated the scars never disappear. Children are sexually abused and exploited in ways that can cause permanent physical and psychological harm. (McClain, 2002).
2.1.8.1 Immediately observable problems

Sue et al., (1994) indicate that child victims of sexual abuse show a variety of physical symptoms such as urinary tract infections, poor appetite and headaches. Physical indicators given by Gillis (1999) include: injuries to the child's genitals or anal area, chronic itching, or unexplained bleeding, problems in urinating, signs of semen on genitals or on clothes and difficulty in walking or sitting naturally.

Kendall and Hammen (1998) point out that clinical studies on sexual molestation (usually defined as sexual contact with a minor child by someone at least several years older) of children have generally found immediately observable problems such as behavioural difficulties, learning problems, depressed mood, guilt and sleep disturbances, as well as symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder shortly known as PTSD. For instance in a sample of sixty-six victims, forty-five reported experiencing flashbacks of the molestation (Sue et al., 1994). As indicated by Kendall and Hammen (1998) abused girls often exhibit heightened sexual preoccupation and evidence of having learned inappropriate sexual responding and sexually precocious behaviours.

Literature (Barker & Varma, 1993) argue that the feelings that children abused by adult family members have to deal with, are deep, complex and distressing in many ways. Anger is usually combined with guilt. The anger may be directed primarily towards the abusing adult or towards the parent who failed to protect the child or refused to believe her or him when told what was happening or it may be projected on to others. The child may herself
or himself become an abuser of other children or when the anger is turned inward, may become depressed and develop suicidal ideation or behaviour.

According to Barker and Varma (1993) these children fail in many areas of their lives. For instance, the emotional consequences of the abuse may affect their academic performance at school, their self-esteem may suffer serious damage which may only be reparable over a long period of time, and their ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, especially with the opposite sex may be compromised.

Evidence (Nevid et al., 2000) has shown that often the symptoms of sexual abuse in children are “masked” and are expressed as school problems, fears of eating or sleeping problems. However, these changes can have many causes, thus more evidence is needed to confirm sexual abuse.

Literature (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1966; Sarwer & Duñlak, 1996; Toth & Cicchetti, 1996) suggest that child survivors of sexual abuse are more likely to develop psychological problems including the following:

- anxiety
- depression
- anger and aggressive behaviour
- poor self-esteem/low self-esteem
- eating disorders
• premature sexual behaviour or promiscuity
• drug abuse
• self-destructive behaviour including suicide attempts/lack of trust
• social withdrawal
• psychosomatic problems such as stomachaches and headaches
• posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms
• sexual dysfunction’s in adulthood.

Nevid et al., (2000) express that regressive behaviour in the form of thumbsucking or recurrences of childhood fears, such as fear of the dark or of strangers, are not uncommon. Late adolescence and early adulthood is a particularly difficult time for survivors of childhood sexual abuse as unresolved feelings of anger and guilt and a deep sense of mistrust can prevent the expected development of intimate relationships (Jackson et al., 1990 in Nevid et al., 2000).

Although much research on childhood sexual abuse has focussed on female survivors, a significant proportion of male survivors also suffer adverse psychological effects into adulthood (Dhaliwal et al., 1996 in Nevid et al., 2000).

2.1.8.2 Long-term consequences

The long-term consequences of childhood sexual assault may be quite negative and enduring. As explained by Koss (1993), the effects of sexual victimization can be delayed,
they may also last for years. Studies (Briere & Zaidi, 1989; Brown & Anderson, 1991) have found sexual abuse in the early histories of many psychiatric patients with depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, suicidal and self-mutilation behaviours, and personality disorders such as borderline personality disorders.

Incest victims often have difficulty establishing trusting relationships with men (Sue et al., 1994). Relationships that were forceful, intrusive or of a long duration are more likely to result in long lasting negative effects.

According to Messman and Long (1996) women who suffered sexual abuse as children are also more likely than other women to suffer sexual and physical abuse as adults.

2.1.8.3 Hormonal and immunological problems

Effects are not limited to psychological hardships, sexually abused girls may also suffer hormonal and possible immunological problems (De Angelis, 1995(a) in Nevid et al., 2000). In support of this notion DeBellis et al., (1994) in Nevid et al., (2000) point out that in one study, sexually abused girls produced excess levels of stress hormones (epinephrine and nonepinephrine) and the neurotransmitter dopamine, which can be taken as a sign that the body is overstressed or hyperaroused.
2.1.9 Child sexual abuse and gender of perpetrator

2.1.9.1 Abuse by members of same sex

A closely related issue is that of same-sex abuse. Draucker (1996) argues that males are the most frequent offenders against boys. Finkelhor (1979) agrees that there is a relationship between sexual victimization by an older male in childhood and later same-sex behaviours. It appears that a male survivor directs anger towards himself for not protecting himself from the offender and views himself as not manly and overcompensates for this failure by sexually aggressive behaviours in some instances, sexual offending. Such survivors often present with a sense of isolation and alienation (Draucker, 1996).

2.1.9.2 Abuse by females

According to Draucker (1996) little is known about abuse of males and females by female offenders. Probably the underreporting of abuse by females may be due to society’s tendency to view males as aggressors and females as victims. One well-known form of abuse by females involves the extra-familial abuse of a younger male by an older woman, such as that between teacher and student. However, due to cultural prescriptions the male may not consider this as an abusive experience.
2.1.10 Myths associated with child sexual abuse

England and Thompson (1988) in Thompson and Rudolph (1996) describe a number of myths associated with childhood sexual abuse and these are listed below.

- Myth 1: Incest rarely occurs and if it does it occurs mainly in lower socioeconomic and poorly educated families. Review of literature (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996) shows that sexual abuse is not restricted to social class, educational level or ethnic group.

- Myth 2: Child molesters are sexually attracted to their victims. According to England and Thompson (1988) sexual abuse is an act of power and not an act of sex.

- Myth 3: Child molesters are strangers (not known) to their victims. Surprisingly most offenders are related to their victims. The majority of offenders are persons known to the child victim.

- Myth 4: Child sexual abuse is a modern phenomenon. According to Finkelhor (1979) sexual abuse of children by adults has been common throughout history.
- Myth 5: The sexual abuse of a child is usually a single violent incident. The abuse is usually not a single incident. The abuse moves through several phases unless a child reports the incidents.

- Myth 6: Children make up stories about engaging in sexual activities with adults. Children usually tell the truth in reporting sexual abuse.

Another myth that has emerged in recent times with the outbreak of HIV/AIDS is:

- Myth 7: Sexual activity with a child who is a virgin heals HIV/AIDS. As South Africans we need to work towards dispelling this dangerous myth that having sex with children/virgins will cure one of HIV/AIDS (McClain, 2002). The issue of HIV/AIDS in relation to sexual abuse of children only makes the crisis more severe.

2.1.11 Problem in identifying child sexual abuse

A major problem in identifying and dealing with child sexual abuse is the secrecy in which the whole process is cloaked. Society, unawares also plays a role in perpetuating the secrecy since people are usually reluctant to consider the possibility that a child could be the victim of a sexual assault by a person the child trust (Gillis, 1999).
2.1.12 Who is involved in cases of abuse

In most cases of sexual abuse only one adult and one child are involved, but cases involving several adults or groups of children have been recently reported (Sue et al., 1994, SABC News 2002).

2.1.13 Legal concept of child sexual abuse

Child molestation is the legal concept describing sexual activities perpetrated by an older person on a child. Molestation is always a sex crime (Sue et al., 1994). The relationship between legal concepts and psychological diagnosis is diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.1
FIGURE 2.1: Sex crimes and psychological diagnosis.

2.1.14 Risk Factors

There is considerable interest in whether some children are at greater risk for sexual abuse than are other children. According to Finkelhor and Baron (1986) currently it is not clear what factors increase children's risk for sexual abuse. But as explained by Conte (1991) it appears that girls are at greater risk, although boys are also victimized.

A study (Conte, Wolf & Smith, 1989) focussing on how sexual offenders select and recruit children for sexual abuse illustrates that offenders claim the ability to identify and use vulnerabilities in a potential victim in order to gain access to and maintain control over the child. Vulnerabilities were regarded as:

- status conditions such as living in a single parent family
- emotional characteristics such as being needy, shy, unhappy etc.
- situational factors such as child was young, alone or unprotected.

The identification of factors which increases a child's risk for sexual abuse is of considerable importance in the design and implementation of organized efforts to prevent child sexual abuse.
2.1.15 Factors accounting for traumatic impact in child victimology

According to West (1991) a pioneer researcher in this field is Finkelhor (1988) who identified the four elements listed below as accounting for the traumatic impact on children.

- **Traumatic sexualization** caused by premature and inappropriate sexual learning. Usually, children receive rewards for collaborating with adults in sexual acts. This encourages children to regard sex as a tool for manipulating people. Thus children acquire distorted ideas of sexual morality and appropriate sexual conducts, and may begin to behave in sexual ways incongruent with their level of development. In instances where sex is associated with memories of incidents that were unpleasant or anxiety provoking, either at the time or in the retrospect, later sexual adjustment may be impeded.

- **Betrayal.** This second factor given by Finkelhor, occurs when in the context of a trusting relationship, activities are introduced which the child finds subsequently to have been reprehensible and selfishly motivated.

- **Stigmatization.** This occurs through the furtive quality of the activity and the child’s fear of being blamed if it is discovered.

- **Powerlessness.** Occurs when a child is coerced by force, threat or deceit to submit to unwanted and intrusive invasions of bodily privacy.
West (1991) explains that Finkelhor states that behaviour exhibited by sexually abused children both at the time and in later years, reflect these four types of trauma. Elaborating on this aspect West (1991) argues that provocative and seductive behaviour with adults and aggressive sexual approaches to other children are signs of "traumatic sexualization." Dependent clinging or its opposites such as angry distrust and avoidance of intimacy, are signs of "betrayal." Poor self-esteem tests, social withdrawal or joining up with marginal groups such as drug abusers, delinquents and prostitutes, are signs of "stigmatization." Anxiety, phobias, sleep disorders, depression, running away, school learning problems and later on, sexual frigidity or sexual molestation of children can be attributed to the sense of "powerlessness" instilled by early sexual abuse.

2.1.16 Theories of child molestation

2.1.16.1 Psychodynamic theories

Lanyon (1991) points out that until fairly recently, the most prominent theoretical explanation for child molestation has been psychodynamic in nature. He further explains that the essence of this approach is that the offender's underlying motivation is not basically sexual in nature, but involves the expression of non-sexual needs and unresolved life issues. According to Lanyon (1991) this theory views molestation as a "pseudosexual" act-sexual behaviour in the service of non-sexual needs.
Another aspect of this model is the division of child molester into two basic types according to the nature of their level of psychosexual motivation.

- The regressed offender has developed an age-appropriate sexual and interpersonal orientation, but under particular circumstances he may regress to sexual involvement with children.
- The fixated offender is one whose primary sexual interest is toward children, and who has never developed psychosexually beyond that level.

Underlying motivations for both types may be various and complex including the need to cope with feelings of powerlessness, attempts to process their own abusive childhood, and misplaced needs for affection.

Further noted by Lanyon (1991) is that family systems theories can also be viewed as psychodynamic in nature and relevant to incestuous rather than nonincestuous child molestation. Such theories, take the view that it is the psychodynamic interplay among family members that is of prime importance in the etiology of the problem. The most typical aspects of this interplay involve a father who either has a personality disorder or who belongs to subculture that is tolerant of incest, a mother who may have withdrawn for her sexual role in the marriage and may be passive, dependent, and a daughter who is gradually maneuvered by the situation into taking on some of the roles of the mother including a sexual role.
2.1.16.2 Physiological theories

Hucker, Langevin, Wortzman, Bain, Handy, Chambers and Wright (1986) compared child molesters with non-sex offenders on two neuropsychological test batteries and CT scans. Results showed more neuropsychological impairment in child molesters than in non-sex offenders, although the results of the three assessment procedures tended to be overlapping. The overall pattern suggested more involvement with the left parieto-temporal lobe than with other lobes. Thus, the results suggested some degree of relationship between child molestation and impaired brain functioning, but not sufficient to have significant explanatory value for the disorder.

2.1.16.3 Behavioural theories

According to Lanyon (1991) there is no specific behavioural theory of child molestation that is distinct from global theories of sexual deviation. However, as with the theoretical literature on rape, behavioural concepts feature prominently in some of the empirically based approaches.

As with theories of rape, there has been a heightened interest in investigating the empirical relationship between molestation a variety of psychological variables including social-interpersonal, cognitive, childhood, family, and attitudinal factors. This approach has been fruitful in integrating a considerable array of research findings. A leading contributor here
is Finkelhor (1984, 1986), who offered a four-factor psychological/sociological model for exploring child molestation.

In this model, four preconditions need to be met in order for child sexual abuse to take place.

- First the offender should be appropriately motivated to do the act.
- Second internal inhibitions against acting on motivation need to be overcome.
- The third necessary precondition involves factors that overcome external inhibiting factors e.g. absent or ill mother.
- The fourth precondition involves factors predisposing the abuser to overcome the child's resistance e.g. coercion, a situation of unusual trust between abuser and child, an emotionally deprived child etc.

Finkelhor (1984) also suggested the importance of two basic dimensions for classifying child molesters: the **strength** of the person's motivation to have sex with children and **exclusivity**, referring to the percentage of the person's total sexuality that is involved with children. An adequate explanatory theory of child molestation should account for these two characteristics according to Finkelhor.

The sex offender's cognitive processes including fantasies, attitudes and distortions have also received attention as relevant areas of inquiry. Abel, Becker and Cunningham-Rathner (1984) emphasized the importance of molesters' cognitive activity as it relates to their
sexually deviant behaviour. These authors suggested that men who are sexually attracted to children respond by changing the inner world in which they live through developing cognitive distortion that support their behaviour. Common distortions include:

- Having sex with a child is a good way for an adult to teach the child about sex
- Children do not tell others about having sex with a parent because they enjoy sexual activity and want it to continue.

2.2 SELF-NARRATIVES: A MODEL IN PSYCHOLOGY

2.2.1 Narrative in psychological science

Two decades ago inquiry into narrative played a minor role in scholarly deliberations and the term “narrative” had scarcely entered the vocabulary of psychological science (Gergen, www.swarthmore.edu/soc sci/k gergen 1/text3.html). Today, however, the study of narrative concatenates throughout the humanities and the social sciences. (Gergen (www.swarthmore.edu/soc sci/k gergen 1/text 3.html) explains that there are now many distinct and well articulated orientations toward narrative including realist, phenomenological, psychodynamic, cognitive, textual and rhetorical among them. Each approach raises different implications for understanding moral identity in contemporary society. The aim in the present study is not to review, contrast or compare these various approaches, but to elucidate a single orientation, that is, to outline a social constructionist account of narrative and explore its implications with respect to identity.
2.2.2 Narrative and identity

In using the narrative, an individual tells a personal story in which he or she gives special significance to certain events, which illuminates personal meanings (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). In support of this notion Bruner (1986) in Mthembu (2000) agrees that people give accounts about themselves in stories they tell—typically written or spoken.

Syrjälä and Estola (1999) also, agree that narrative is a story which compounds the past experiences of human life. Referring to this issue, literature (Gadamer, 1975; Widdershoven, 1993) consider life as a hermeneutic circle, suggesting that experienced life and narrative life intertwine. Brunner (1990) as well as Syrjälä and Estola (1999) explain that the significance of life cannot be differentiated from the stories that are told of it. The narrative is an interpretation of life. In narratives people organize their experiences, thus creating meaning for their lives and themselves.

According to the constructivistic approach to narrativism, narratives do not actually “take place” but are created or constructed in the human mind. Thus, narratives are useful tools in the construction of the self (Syrjälä & Estola, 1999).

Narrative identity supports the idea that identity comes about through a dialogue between the self and the environment. In this dialogue a person tells about a life-story simultaneously reflecting on his/her self and life. His/her identity consists of what things he/she recalls and tells about and how he/she understands them. When telling a story, the
individual constructs the “story line” of his or her life with a narrative tension or plot. This means that life stories are a way of fashioning identity, in both the private and public senses of the world (Ochberg, 1994, Syrjälä & Estola 1999).

A person’s narrative identity is a reconstructed story based on his or her life experiences. By telling stories, individuals re-hear, re-find and re-generate their personal selves i.e. construct their identities. Through such stories a person’s identity becomes visible (Syrjälä & Estola, 1999).

2.2.3 Meanings of narratives/story writings

Writing one’s life-story is like a search of one’s identity. Writing helps one to find the child in oneself. Through written narratives an individual is enabled to analyze his/her own life and to write his/her own life-story. (Syrjälä & Estola, 1999).
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One of the tasks of a researcher is to select a relevant research method or design, which is
the outline of what the researcher will do, the outline or scheme of the operation of the
variables and methods used to gather and analyze data (Kerlinger, 1973; Mouton &
Marais, 1985). The present chapter, therefore, discusses the plan through which the
scientific inquiry was undertaken.

3.1 THE STUDY

3.1.1 Aim of the study

The present study aimed to uncover the levels of stress and emotional difficulties of
victims of sexual abuse through their writings, that is, their written narratives. Here, the
idea is to bring the experiences of sexually abused children into the limelight using their
written texts.

3.1.2 Research technique

A form of qualitative analysis, the constructivistic approach to narrativism (Jonassen,
1991; Syrjälä & Estola 1999; Rapmund & Moore, 2000) was employed. The aim of this
approach is to uncover through narratives the essential meanings implicit in the subjects'
descriptions of their experiences. As explained by Rasmund and Moore (2000) in a constructivist approach, each individual constructs the world which is his or her reality and valid for him or her in a special or unique manner. As mentioned by Makunga (2001) such an approach allows victims to tell their stories freely without any disturbances and it also frees the researcher from having to decide whether the participants reality is “correct” or “false.”

It is reasoned that the use of a qualitative approach would widen the scope of information gathered and will yield a more holistic view on the implication of being sexually molested.

In the present study, the qualitative methodology was incorporated to retain and respect the richness and complexity of human experience.

3.1.3 The participants

The study involved five females who had been recently assaulted sexually and had sought assistance at the Empangeni Crisis Centre. This criterion for involvement in the study was aimed at obtaining a group of research participants who had a common experience. The sample consisted of people who were willing to participate in the research. For the total sample, ages ranged from 8 to 13 years.

In the present study, sampling was purposive because the researcher picked only those subjects who best met the purpose of the study using her own judgement about which
respondents to choose (Bailey, 1987). The advantage of purposive sampling is that the researcher can use his or her research skills and prior knowledge to choose respondents (Bailey, 1987).

3.1.4 Data collection

Participants were asked to write an open essay covering the following aspects:

- how you felt about being sexually molested and how you feel about it now?
- did your problem affect your family and social life?
- did this incident affect your relationship with your family and friends in any way?

The choice of essay writing as a methodology provides a vehicle for impressive breath and depth of expression of concerns and the revealing of strong emotional responses. This format of the questionnaire is likely to capture a fairly extensive range of perceptions and experiences among the victims in the sample.

The data were collected in a series of individual interviews, during which individual assessments were also done.

All interviews with subjects were conducted in Zulu in order to avoid any misunderstanding.
3.1.5 Procedure

Permission to conduct research at the Empangeni Crisis Center was obtained from the authorities. Once permission was granted, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and what it hoped to achieve engaging the assistance of the social worker at the Centre.

3.1.6 Scoring

Data collected was scored and coded by the researcher. Information on scored data is reported on Chapter 4.

3.1.7 Data analysis

To make sense out of the data collected qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the thematic content of the narratives to uncover the themes, attitudes, fears and hopes. Stories were read through systematically and areas of concern were categorized into themes.

In this study, to obtain clarity from the participants, narratives were analyzed along the lines suggested by Giorgi (1985) who suggested the following four essential steps in this method:
read the entire description in order to get the general idea of the whole statement. In the present study all narratives were read until the researcher felt comfortable with the terminology and expressions used by participants. This enabled the researcher to grasp the main ideas of what has been written.

Once the sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher reads through the text once more with the specific aim of discriminating meaning units from within a psychological perspective and with the focus on the phenomenon being researched.

With the aim of the present study in mind, the narratives of participants were reread with a psychological perspective, and using this, certain themes began to emerge.

Once meaning units have been delineated, the researcher then goes through all the meaning units and expresses the psychological insight contained in them more directly.

Common place expressions of participants were changed into psychological discourse always bearing in mind the phenomenon being investigated. The actual content of the participants' narratives was considered appropriate and thus retained in the text, without correcting mistakes or grammatical errors made.

The researcher synthesizes all transformed meaning units into statements regarding the subject's experience.
Information on analyzed data is reported on Chapter 4.
In this chapter, data collected for this study are presented along with comments about significant findings.

The results are mostly presented in table form to allow the reader to clearly understand the findings of the study.

4.1 Demographic information

All five participants (n=5) in the present study were females with ages between 8 and 13 years. Table 1 displays the distribution of participants by gender and age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>AGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1. Distribution of participants by gender and age
Only female participants were involved in the study probably because sexual abuse of girls is reported more often than abuse of boys. A survey of literature (Thompson & Rudolph, 1996) reveals that data from the American Humane Association indicates that 94% of the offenses were against girls.

According to Table 2 the following results emerged. Most participants 80% were victims of incest and it is also clear that abusers were known to abused girls.

**TABLE 2. Distribution of abusers by relations to the victims**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FATHER/STEPFATHER</th>
<th>UNCLE</th>
<th>PERSON KNOWN TO VICTIM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the finding that most participants were victims of incest, literature (Emery & Oltmanns, 1999) proposes that girls are more likely to be victims of incest.

Data in Table 2 further indicate that 4 (90%) of the respondents were molested by people living with them in the same household and only 1 (10%) respondent was abused by a person not staying with her in the same household.
4.2 Reactions of participants

Reactions considered as emotional symptoms or psychological problems that made themselves visible in the content of the respondents' protocols are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Children's reactions to sexual abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMATIC CATEGORIES OF EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONSES</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger towards abuser</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt feelings for not disclosing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatred</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of trust and negative feelings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed and feeling like committing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide, unable to appreciate life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared, afraid, insecure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of self-esteem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As portrayed in Table 3 most respondents expressed feelings of anger, hatred and insecurity towards perpetrators. They were scared, afraid and no longer trusted their abusers and they expressed negative feelings towards all males. Respondents also
expressed guilt feelings for not reporting the incident of abuse which was embarrassing and frustrating to them. Barker (1993) explains that the child in this predicament may hesitate for a long time before disclosing the abuse to anyone and some never do disclose.

It is interesting to observe that there are participants who expressed that being victims of sexual abuse resulted in their loss of self-esteem. This result is expected. According to Barker (1993), sexual abuse in children almost inevitably damages their self-esteem which may only be reparable over a long period of time.

In addition, results show that participants expressed feeling depressed, feeling like committing suicide and unable to appreciate life. These results are consistent with the literature in that the literature points that among the symptoms reported among sexually abused adolescents have been depression, suicidal ideation and something missing behaviour.

Table 4 presents behavioural problems that resulted from unresolved issues surrounding child sexual abuse.
TABLE 4. Behavioural problem resulting from sexual abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMATIC CATEGORIES OF INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONSES</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal from others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of sleep</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed wetting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted memories coming back to mind</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to do school work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this study show a high percentage of participants reporting nightmares and anxiety associated with fear of sleep. Other symptoms reported by participants in the present study were withdrawal from others, flashbacks or unwanted memories coming back to mind and bed wetting.

Of the four participants in the present study, only one respondent indicated that the sexual abuse experience affected her school performance which declined after the abuse.
4.3 Benefits of results

The results of the study lends support to the growing body of evidence attesting to the long-term adverse effects of child sexual abuse as including amongst others: disturbed social adjustment, lack of self-esteem, helplessness, depression, anxiety disorders, shame and guilt, multiple personality disorder and borderline personality disorder (Wolfe, 1990). The present results are in keeping with the observation by Wolfe (1990) who noted that like adult victims of rape – and in a very real sense molested children are often rape victims – posttraumatic stress disorder can be a consequence.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter outlines the conclusions that have been drawn from the findings of the study. It also recommends areas which need further investigation in order to help sexually abused children in the community.

5.1 Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the study.

5.1.1 Written narratives: a method of disclosure

Written narratives of sexually abused children uncovered their levels of stress and emotional difficulties. The experiences of sexually abused children were brought into the limelight using their written texts. Indeed these writings proved to be an important and a rich source of understanding the experiences of victims of sexual abuse.

The findings of this study are confirmed by studies by Allen (1980) and Spring (1987) who found that writings of the victims of sexual abuse were an important method of disclosure.
5.1.2 The experience of being sexually molested

The respondents gave their experiences of being sexually abused in terms of thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings experienced by them including amongst others loss of trust, anger, guilt, hatred, depression, helplessness, loss of self-esteem, unable to appreciate life, insecure, afraid, scared and isolated are not different from those highlighted by authors such as Draucker (1996), Kendall and Hammen (1998) and Nevid et al., (2000).

Many survivors of sexual abuse experienced trauma symptoms such as flashbacks and nightmares. The findings of the present study are confirmed by observations in literature (Draucker, 1996) indicating that survivors present with such trauma symptomatology.

5.1.3 Participants victims of incest

Most participants were victims of incest, thus abusers were known to the abused. The results of the study confirm findings that the great majority of assailants had some prior relationship with the child (Nevid et al., 2000). The present study strongly implicates abuse by a parental figure a factor also supported by findings made by Cahill, Llewelyn and Pearson (1991).

5.1.4 Effects of child sexual abuse include a range of emotional and behavioural problems.
5.2 Limitations

The nature of this study, precludes generalizing of the results to an extended population since the study is concerned with investigating and explicating experiences of individuals.

The bulk of published material regarding effects of child sexual abuse refers to female victims only, and this "bias" is also reflected in this study.

Although the theoretical formulations referred to in the literature review are of value to researchers and therapists alike providing a comprehensive conceptual framework of child sexual abuse, obviously a great deal more empirical research is needed to enable us to understand the mechanisms, processes, necessary and sufficient conditions, and the many variables in operation in the development of the kinds of problems which have been identified in children who have been the victims of sexual abuse.
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APPENDIX A

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I give consent on behalf of my child for the investigation as described below.

The study aims to:

- Uncover the levels of stress and emotional difficulties of victims of sexual abuse through their writings, that is, their written narratives.

My permission is granted of my own will. Such permission can be revoked at any time and will not result in any negative bias to my child.

Singed: Parent/Social Worker.......................... Date..........................

Witnesses...................................................... Date..........................

............................................................ Date..........................
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

WRITINGS OF SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN: AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF DISCLOSURE

Dear Respondent

The purpose of this research is to uncover the levels of stress and emotional difficulties of victims of sexual abuse through their written narratives. Please feel free to express your experiences as a victim of sexual abuse. All information supplied will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Question 1

How did you feel about being sexually molested/ Wazizwa uphatheka kanjani ngokuthi uhlukunyezwe ngokocansi?

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Question 2

Did your problem affect your family and social life? Ingabe inkinga yakho yahlukumeza impilo yakho kanye nabomndeni wakho?
Question 3

Did this incident affect your relationship with your friends/ Ingabe lokukuhlukunyezwa ngokocansi kona yini ubudlelwano phakathi kwakho kanye nabangani bakho na?

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Thank you for your co-operation.