Educators' Experience of Managing Sexually Abused Learners: Implications for Educational Support Structures

by **Tshepo Tlali and Samantha Moldan**

The purpose of this study was to establish the personal impact that managing sexually abused learners had on primary school educators working in an East London (South Africa) community. In addition, the researchers sought to establish what support these educators felt they needed in order to help alleviate the personal impact that managing sexually abused learners might have on them.

A phenomenological approach was employed to address the research questions. Using availability-sampling methods, four educators from a local primary school were interviewed and the data systematically analysed in accordance with Morrisette's (1999) seven–step procedural model.

The present study confirmed the finding of Skinner (1999) and Mzamo (2003) that managing cases of sexually abused learners had a profound personal effect on the participants. What was most commonly felt was a sense of frustration with the justice system, as well as a sense of personal responsibility. In addition, the participants felt that they needed support structures to assist them in managing sexual abuse cases in the school. In particular, they felt that they needed a forum where they could share their own experiences and feelings, as well as receive guidance on how to deal with problems in their class. A need for more support from professional psychologists was also expressed, as well as a need for counselling skills training and general training in the area of child sexual abuse. It is hoped that these findings will prove useful in providing guidelines for the development of appropriate support structures for educators managing cases of child sexual abuse in South African schools. More research on the subject needs to be conducted within South Africa, however, in order to ensure that the support structures implemented address context-specific needs.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a social problem that is extremely prevalent in contemporary society, and particularly so in South Africa. The increase in the number of reported child sexual abuse cases can be attributed to social changes conducive both to the perpetration of abuse and the disclosure thereof, as well as to the greater public awareness now existing around sexual abuse (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1999). In 2001, more than 20 000 rapes of children were reported in South Africa (Human Sciences Research Council, 2003). These cases, however, are believed to represent only a fraction of the actual rate of occurrence, given that children may fear that reporting sexual abuse will cause them to be blamed, disbelieved, intimidated or stigmatized. Children may also be either too young or too uninformed to know where and how to report incidents of child sexual abuse (Bezuidenhout, 1999; Human Sciences Research Council, 2003).

School is seen as a second home to most school-going children and consequently educators are among the earliest professionals to encounter children who experience sexual abuse. Learners often share very personal information with their educators, and it follows naturally that educators are, therefore, the likely candidates to hear the disclosure of sexual abuse of their learners (Minard, 1993; Roscoe, 2001). There is thus a growing awareness that school systems and educators, by virtue of their accessibility to children and expertise in child development, are in a unique position to identify possible cases of sexual abuse and intervene on behalf of the children (Randolph & Gold, 1984).

In many instances, however, it has been found that educators feel untrained and ill-equipped to manage sexually abused learners in their class (Abrahams, Casey & Doro, 1992; Davidson, 1999). In addition to feeling untrained, educators are often not prepared for the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners has on them and they often feel unsupported (Jones, 1998; Maher, 1988; Skinner, 1999). While there would appear to be an increasing number of programmes being put in place to train educators to deal with sexual abuse issues, there would simultaneously appear to be inadequate support structures in place to help them deal with the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners has on them (Carlson & Furby, 1997).

Defining Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is a time and culture bound concept and has only recently been defined and recognized as a social problem in spite of the fact that sexual interactions between children and adults have occurred throughout history, beginning in ancient times (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1999). Despite the fact that child sexual abuse has now been identified as one of the pervasive problems within our society, some controversy exists around the definition of what

behaviours are to be deemed abusive. In particular, there is often controversy around the specification of what behaviours characterize child sexual abuse and under what circumstances these sexual interactions become abusive (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; 1990; Robertson, 1989). Thus, child sexual abuse has been defined differently by various researchers (Bezuidenhout, 2002; Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1999; Randolph & Gold, 1984). For the purpose of this study, the definition of child sexual abuse provided by Knight (1997) is preferred. Knight defines child sexual abuse as "sexual contact between a child and individual in a position of power or authority. This term does not restrict the abuse to the family, as does 'incest', but it encompasses the full range of sexual activities that survivors may have been forced to participate in, including, but not limited to, vaginal and anal intercourse, oral sex, fondling, masturbation, and exposure to or participating in pornography" (Knight, 1997, p.19).

Research Aims

The research aims of this study were twofold:

- to explore educators' experiences of managing sexually abused learners;

- to establish what sort of support educators feel they need to manage these cases effectively.

Participants

The study was conducted at a primary school situated in an urban community of East London (a small port city on the Eastern seaboard of South Africa) in 2004. The participants were four educators who were assigned to manage cases of sexually abused learners at this school. Availability sampling methods were employed in selecting the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). After explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining

permission from the school principal, two letters were written to prospective participants: the first to introduce and explain details of the study, and the second to request the participation of volunteers who had been extensively involved in managing cases of sexually abused learners in their teaching capacity at school. For inclusion in the study, educators ought to have been involved in managing sexually abused learners for the past three to five years. Informed consent was obtained from those selected for participation in the study for the use of the data elicited.

Method

Audio-taped, unstructured interviews were conducted by the researchers with the selected participants. Morrisette (1999) defines the interview as not simply a matter of chunks of information being transmitted between people, but a conversational process that is participatory, collaborative and aesthetically rich. The words used do not convey information, but reflect the speaker's world.

During the unstructured interviews, researchers suggested the general theme of discussion and posed further questions as necessary in the spontaneous development of the interaction between themselves and the participants (Huysamen, 1994; Kvale, 1996). Deviating from an interview schedule allowed the participants time and space to reveal their feelings and beliefs, as well as facilitating further probing of participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question. The unstructured interview further enabled the researchers to focus on the first hand experience of the life world of each individual rather than on their interpretation or speculative explanations of it (Huysamen, 1994).

The researchers started each interview by asking the educators to describe how they managed the case of a sexually abused learner, which then led to questions around how the case had affected them personally. The question about what form of support they felt they needed in order to help alleviate the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners had on them, was then asked. Further open-ended questions were asked about the educators' experiences, feelings and beliefs concerning the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners had on them. Open-ended questioning was employed in order to avoid the imposition of predetermined categories of interpretation (Thomas, Smucker & Droppelman, 1998). What was sought were not specific answers, but the gaining of a deeper insight into the participants' personal experiences.

The interview sessions were open-ended and were conducted in an informal non-directive manner as suggested by Kruger (1988). They were conducted in an office where there was privacy and no interruptions. A relaxed atmosphere was created and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then subjected to phenomenological analysis. The aim of the process of phenomenological analysis of descriptions of lived experiences is to uncover the structures of experience constituted in consciousness. In that lived experiences and meanings are not always explicitly expressed, they must be discovered and thematized (Giorgio, Fischer & Murray, 1975) in order to reveal the essential structures of the phenomenon in question. To this end, a systematic interpretive procedure was employed, following the steps outlined by Morrisette (1999):

Step 1: *The interview as a whole* Following each interview, the audio-taped conversations were carefully listened to and reviewed. The rationale behind this process of familiarization with the flow of the interview as a whole is for researchers to gain a global sense of

the data and hence to contextualize their awareness of the experiences described by the informants.

Step 2: *The interview as a text*
The interviews were then transcribed and written protocols produced. Personal involvement by the researchers in the transcription of the data provided an opportunity to be fully immersed in it. Each protocol was then read several times, highlighting those words and statements relevant to the topic under investigation.

Step 3: *First Order Thematic Extractions*
The protocols were reviewed, with significant statements extracted, paraphrased and assigned a theme, and the resultant First Order Thematic Abstractions systematically tabulated.

Step 4: *Second Order Thematic Clusters*
Second Order Thematic Clusters were then created. This step entailed clustering the themes identified in the preceding step, with the emergent thematic clusters tabulated and descriptively elaborated. The descriptions form a basis for the synthesis of individual participant experiences.

Step 5: *Individual Participant Protocol*
Each participant's protocol was then synthesized, with the process of protocol synthesis involving reflecting and summarizing each participant's experiences.

Step 6: *Overall Syntheses of Participants' Protocols*

An overall synthesis of the participants' protocols then followed. This involved reflecting upon the various themes emerging from each individual protocol, with the process providing the opportunity to gain a deepened understanding of both the individual and the shared experiences among the participants.

Step 7: *Between Participants Analysis*
Once the analysis had been completed, the outcomes were re-grounded against the context. This entailed a rich description of the experience of the participants of the research and comparison with other educators' experiences of managing cases of sexually abused learners, as outlined in the literature review.

Findings

The Second Order Thematic Clusters which emerged from the analysis of the individual protocols are tabulated below for each of the four participants, with 'X' representing the presence of a theme and '–' indicating the absence of a theme in a particular protocol:

	1	2	3	4
Part 1: Educators' Experience of Managing Sexually Abused Learners				
Astonishment	X	-	-	-
Helplessness and powerlessness		X	-	-	-
Empathy	X	X	-	-
Increased awareness of ills of society		X	-	X	-
Impact on them as educators		X	-	X	X
Personal feelings of vulnerability		X	-	X	-
Impact on being a parent		-	-	X	-
Frustration with the justice/welfare system		X	-	X	X
Fear and anxiety	X	X	-	-

Relief	X	X	-	-
Sense of personal responsibility	X	-	X	X
Need to be empowered	X	-	-	-
Sadness and compassion	-	X	X	-
Feelings of identification	-	X	-	-
Anger	-	X	X	-
Frustration	-	-	X	X
Self doubt	-	-	X	-
Feelings of incompetence	-	-	X	-
Need for sense of closure	-	-	X	-
Emptiness/fatigue	-	-	-	X

Part 2: Kind of Support Needed to Manage Cases of Child Sexual Abuse Effectively

Support from talking to others	X	X	-	-
Support of school management	X	-	X	-
Lack of potential support of Care Team	X	-	X	X
Need for support from psychologists	X	-	X	X

Empowering herself	-	-	-	X
Support from health department nurse	-	X	-	X
Need for support structures for educators	-	-	-	X
Support group for educators	-	-	-	X
Support from church/belief in God	-	X	-	X
Belief in learner's own ability to solve problems	-	-	-	X
Support from Fort Hare Psychological Services	-	-	X	-
Support from relevant training course	-	-	X	-
Lack of support from colleagues	-	-	X	-

From the comparative tabulation of the thematic clusters, with the above tabulation representative of a Between Participants Analysis of the protocols, emerges the description synthesised below of the essential structure of the experience and needs of the participant primary school teachers in respect of the management of child sexual abuse in the South African context.

Overall Synthesis of Protocols

Most of the participants experienced frustration with the justice and welfare systems due to lack of support and efficacy. Lack of feedback from these systems also left the participants feeling frustrated and in need of a sense of closure. As a result, they felt disillusioned with the South African justice system, with some feeling that it is pointless to report cases of sexually abused

learners. Due to the perceived lack of efficacy of the justice system, participants experienced a sense of helplessness and powerlessness and wondered whether their actions had made any difference at all.

Furthermore, most of the participants experienced feelings of personal responsibility. They felt obligated to provide support to these learners. This sense of personal responsibility on the part of the educators catapulted them into reacting in different ways. While one educator felt frustrated, others took proactive measures in educating learners about sexual abuse and generally amplifying awareness of the problem and its implications.

Through managing such cases, some of the participants also reported an increase in their awareness of the vulnerability of children in society, as well as of the prevalence of abuse perpetrated against children. It led them to believe that they live in a sick and immoral society, which created feelings of demoralization and personal vulnerability. Fear and anxiety, arising from a variety of sources, was also experienced by some of the participants. It was feared in some instances that the learners could test HIV positive as a result of being raped and/or sexually abused by HIV positive men. This fear was, however, countered by relief when learners tested negative for HIV. In contrast, continuing fear was experienced by one participant as a result of her concern that the learner's abuser had broken out of jail and could come back to the school.

Some of the participants felt sadness and compassion when managing such cases. One of the participants believed that her compassion was due to her having undergone many forms of abuse herself. She deeply identified with the sexually abused learner and, as a result, often felt overwhelmed emotionally when managing such cases. Some of the participants experienced a sense of frustration. For instance, one participant felt frustrated and helpless because in most cases she was unable to take abused learners for therapy because of a lack of finances.

Two of the participants felt ill-equipped to manage cases of child sexual abuse. They felt that they did not have the necessary skills and counselling qualifications. Consequently, they felt that they needed to be equipped with counselling skills, as well as provided with general training in dealing with child sexual abuse. These feelings of incompetence led to a sense of helplessness and powerlessness on the part of the participants.

Most of the participants experienced a differing and wide range of emotions. One educator experienced feelings of empathy as the experience made her reflect on her own life and consider how she would have coped with such a trauma. Other emotions experienced by participants were anger, helplessness, shock and frustration. Emptiness and fatigue were felt by one participant as a result of providing extensive and ongoing support to sexually abused learners, without receiving any outside support. A participant, who was made to feel that she was overreacting, experienced self-doubt and this lead to her questioning both herself and the situation.

As a result of the personal impact that managing such cases has on educators, the participants felt that they needed a support structure. The majority of participants expressed awareness of the potential usefulness of the Care Team forum,[1] but felt that it was not being implemented effectively. They nevertheless felt that constant questioning of its efficacy could prove counterproductive by being merely demoralising, provoking feelings of being criticized and intimidated. For the forum

---

[1] The Care Team forum is a voluntary weekly meeting comprising educators and psychology students (from the University of Fort Hare) who work collaboratively to solve problems and to generate alternative solutions for learners with scholastic, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

to be more useful, it was felt that it should provide more support and encouragement to the educators, not just to the learners. It was felt that there should be more discussions where educators could share their own experiences and feelings, as well as space for suggestions on how to deal with the problem in the classroom.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants felt that they needed support from professional psychologists who could provide therapy to the sexually abused learners as well as to the educators, and provide guidelines on how to manage the sexually abused learner within the classroom. It was also felt that access to the school's internet facilities would serve as a potential support for educators and learners, as it would provide access to support systems such as Lifeline. This would be useful to learners who might find confiding in educators difficult.

Despite feeling that they needed additional support in managing cases of sexually abused learners, some educators drew on support from talking to others. These included people outside of the school context as well as the more experienced teachers within the school. Half of the participants felt that they received support from the school management in so far as they were given the freedom to follow the necessary procedures. Support was also received from the University of Fort Hare Psychological Services Centre, which provided counselling to sexually abused learners. Some of the participants derived support from the church and their belief in God. One participant had received training in dealing with sexual abuse, which helped her to manage cases of sexually abused learners, and another participant equipped herself with the necessary counselling skills and self care skills, which helped support her in managing these cases. It was felt that, in the past, valuable support had been provided by Health Department nurses who visited the schools and were thus available for educators to voice their suspicions about the possible abuse of certain learners.

Discussion

The present study found that some of the educators felt ill-equipped when confronted with sexual abuse issues, which left them feeling helpless, powerless and incompetent. This is in line with the finding reported in the literature that often educators feel that they have inadequate resources to manage such cases, which leads to feelings of incompetence (Abrahams, Casey & Doro, 1989; Maher, 1988). Similar findings were reported in studies conducted within South Africa by Davidson (1999) and Mzamo (2003), who both found that educators experienced a lack of training in sexual abuse issues, consequently leading to feelings of inadequacy. In contrast to the other studies, however, the present study found that the participants felt particularly ill-equipped to provide counselling to the learners and felt that, in addition to being provided with general training in dealing with child sexual abuse, they needed to be equipped specifically with counselling skills.

Previous research in the field has indicated that educators often experience a sense of fear, especially with regard to the decision to report abuse (Robertson, 1989). This was also found in the present study. In addition, fear arose out of concern that the learners could be HIV positive as a result of being raped by HIV positive men. This has not been documented in previous research but would seem to be particularly relevant in the South African context where there is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Half of the participants reported an increase in awareness of the ills of society. They began to believe that society in general was sick and immoral, which created feelings of demoralization and personal vulnerability.

Managing cases of sexually abused learners also left participants in the present study feeling perplexed concerning the benevolence of the learner's parents and as to why abuse should be perpetrated against an innocent child. Similar

findings were reported by Jones (1998), who found that professionals managing sexual abuse cases could become so overwhelmed by the reality of human cruelty to children that it could challenge their worldview and shatter their preconceptions concerning the benevolence of parents and the innocence of childhood.

In addition, it has been reported that intervention workers could become cynical when victims are not made safe and offenders are not prosecuted. Maher (1988) also reported that educators could feel frustrated and angry because of their lack of control over subsequent events, as well as when the decisions of others seem inappropriate. Cynicism, anger and frustration were expressed in the present study in respect of the perceived lack of efficacy and support from the justice and welfare system in South Africa. This frustration with the justice system left the educators feeling that it was pointless to report cases of sexually abused learners, and this subsequently led to feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and futility. The lack of feedback from the justice system also left some participants with a need for a sense of closure. It would seem that this could be of major concern for many educators managing sexual abuse cases in the South African context, and particularly in the Eastern Cape, given the marked lack of resources within the justice system.

In the South African situation, as a result of the high child sexual abuse statistics, there is a particularly high probability that educators will themselves have undergone some form of sexual abuse. In these cases, the distress of the child can sometimes be internalized and they may struggle with the painful memories of a traumatic experience (Jones, 1998). This was found to be the case in the present study, where one of the participants had been sexually abused herself as a child. She experienced similar feelings of being emotionally overwhelmed when managing cases of sexually abused learners, as the memories and the feelings of abuse would be relived. However,

as a result of being a child sexual abuse survivor, she was able to identify more instinctively and extensively with the sexually abused learners.

The present study also indicated that managing cases of sexually abused learners had an impact on some of the participants as parents. They became aware that abuse could be perpetrated against their own children and so they became more protective of their children and more vigilant in increasing their awareness of abuse. This accords with the finding reported by Maher (1988) that managing cases of sexual abuse can influence parenting.

The literature suggests that professionals managing sexual abuse cases can experience a desire to avoid the situation and escape from it as a result of feelings of anxiety and dread (Jones, 1998). The participants in the present study, however, did not experience this. In contrast, the majority of the participants experienced a sense of personal responsibility for reasons such as that the learners in question were in their classes, that there was a lack of support from the learners' parents, and that the learners had placed their trust in their educators by disclosing their abuse to them. This concurs with earlier reports that, when faced with a distressed and traumatized child, educators often have no option but to respond, despite their feelings of inadequacy (McCallum, 2002).

The present study found that managing cases of sexually abused learners had an impact on nearly all of the participants as educators, which does not seem to have been documented in other studies. This motivated educators to become more proactive in educating learners about sexual abuse and encouraged one participant to consider whether she could play an active role in improving society's morals. It was also seen as a good learning experience for herself, in that it made her aware of the need to take the learner's context into consideration before making assumptions.

Feelings of anger and frustration, arising from a variety of sources, are often experienced by professionals managing cases of sexually abused children (Jones, 1998; Maher, 1988; Mzamo, 2003). This would seem to correlate with the experience of the participants in the present study. Self-doubt was also experienced by a participant in the present study as a result of her colleagues disbelieving that the learner had actually been abused. This experience accords with the finding reported by McCallum that educators often experience feelings of self-doubt when managing cases of sexually abused learners (McCallum, 2002). One participant in the present study experienced feelings of empathy in that dealing with the sexual abuse of learners made her reflect on how she would have dealt with such a trauma in her own life. This does not seem to have been reported in previous studies. Similarly, the feelings of emptiness and fatigue reported in the present study would not appear to have been documented earlier.

Previous research has found that, given the importance of the role they play in the management of sexually abused learners and the profound impact that their intervention may have on them, educators felt that they required both administrative and procedural, as well as personal, support (Jones, 1998; McCallum, 2002; Skinner, 1999). This is exactly what the participants in the present study indicated was needed. Procedurally, some of the participants felt that they should be provided with training in counselling skills as well as a general training in sexual abuse issues.

In addition to procedural support, the participants indicated a need for personal support. They therefore believed that there should be a forum available to them, consisting of educators as well as psychologists working at the school, and which would meet on a regular basis to provide support and encouragement to those educators involved in managing sexual abuse cases in the school. Within this forum, it was envisaged that the educators could share their own experiences and feelings with each other and have them acknowledged, as well as being provided with guidance on how to deal with specific problems in their classes.

Child sexual abuse is not something to be dealt with alone, and educators need colleagues and people with whom to share their feelings, to work with them and to provide support, understanding and advice so as to prevent a sense of isolation and overwhelming responsibility (Jones, 1998; Maher, 1988). The support structure suggested by the participants would appear to fulfil these criteria in so far as it would provide a forum in which educators could gain support from colleagues and share their feelings. This would tend to counter the sense of isolation and overwhelming responsibility reported. Some of the participants in the present study mentioned that talking to others within and outside of the school also helped them to deal with the way in which managing these cases had an impact on them personally. This endorses the importance of the need for educators to have the support of people with whom they can share their feelings. The acknowledgement by some of the participants that they had received support from school management in so far as they had been allowed to take the necessary steps in managing sexual abuse cases further points to the importance of support from colleagues.

Ideas for support emanated from the present study that had not previously been documented. In that some of the participants had previously felt supported by nurses from the health department, who paid regular visits to the school and were thus available to examine the learners and enable educators to voice their suspicions about possible cases of abuse, it was felt that it would be very helpful for the practice to be reintroduced. It was also mentioned that allowing learners access to the internet could be useful in providing them with access to support systems such as Lifeline, which might be helpful

to learners who find confiding in educators difficult. Other participants sought assistance from a psychologist based at the University of Fort Hare Psychological Services Centre.

Conclusion

This research project set out to seek answers to two questions. Firstly, the researchers wanted to know how managing cases of sexually abused learners had a personal impact on primary school educators working in an East London community. In this regard it was found that managing cases of sexually abused learners had a profound personal impact on the participants. It was also found that, although there were a few experiences collectively shared amongst the participants, in general they experienced a differing and wide range of emotions.

What was most common amongst the participants was the frustration they experienced with the South African justice and welfare system. This would seem to be particularly relevant in the Eastern Cape where resources within these departments are exceptionally limited. Associated with this frustration were feelings of futility, helplessness and powerlessness, as well as a need for a sense of closure. Feelings of personal responsibility were common amongst the participants. Managing cases of sexually abused learners also had an impact on most of the participants as educators. In addition, feelings of incompetence were experienced, which created a need to be empowered. Managing cases of sexually abused learners also increased some of the participants' awareness of the ills of society, which resulted in feelings of personal vulnerability and perplexity, as well as having an effect on the some of the participants as parents. Other emotions experienced were concern, anger, empathy, sadness, compassion, emptiness, fatigue, relief, fear, anxiety and astonishment, as well as role conflict and feelings of identification.

These findings appear to compare with those of previous studies reported in the literature concerning the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners has on educators. It would therefore seem that, despite very little research in the area having been conducted in South Africa, the findings from studies conducted in other countries might be relevant to the South African context. Through documenting the personal impact that managing cases of sexually abused learners can have on educators, it is hoped that their experiences will be acknowledged and the importance of the need for relevant support structures realized.

Secondly, the researchers wanted to investigate what forms of support educators felt they needed in order to ohelp alleviate the personal impact of managing cases of sexually abused learners. It was found that the educators felt that they needed both procedural as well as personal support. They felt that:

They should be provided with counselling skills training as well as general training in dealing with child sexual abuse issues.

There should be a forum available for educators that would meet on a regular basis to provide support and encouragement. The type of forum envisaged would provide a safe space for educators to share their experiences and feelings with each other and to have these acknowledged, as well as providing a resource base for guidelines on how to deal with sexually abused learners in their classes.

Professional psychologists are needed to provide the sexually abused learners with therapy, as well as to provide educators with guidance in dealing with such learners in the class.

The above suggestions link with those offered in the literature on the needs of professionals who are managing cases of sexual abuse. What has been emphasized in this regard is the need to

work in a multidisciplinary team, and the need for educators to have colleagues and people with whom to share their feelings, to co-work with and to provide support, understanding and advice (Jones, 1998; Maher, 1988).

Suggested forms of support not previously documented that arise from the present study are:

1. The need for a health department nurse to visit schools on a regular basis.

2. The potential usefulness of internet facilities and subsequent online support for learners who may find it difficult to disclose their trauma to educators.

3. The need for more collaboration and support from the South African justice and welfare system.

In so far as they reflect the needs of educators working within the South African context, it is hoped that the suggestions in respect of support structures generated by this study will contribute to the development of an appropriate and relevant system of support for educators tasked with managing cases of child sexual abuse in South African schools.

The present study also raises the need for more adequate resources within the South African justice and welfare system. An increase in the efficacy of these crucial systems would result in more reports of child sexual abuse being made and would address the frustration educators appear to be experiencing in this regard.

About the Authors

Tshepo Tlali holds a Masters degree in Counselling Psychology and has, over the years, accumulated a wealth of experience through working in diverse fields in psychology. He is currently employed as a Lecturer at the University of Fort Hare (East London campus) in the Department of Psychology. He teaches at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as supervising postgraduate students in the clinical and research fields. He can be reached at: TTlali@ufh.ac.za.

Samantha Moldan is currently working as a Counselling Psychologist at a primary school situated in Cape Town, South Africa. She has previously worked in special needs schools both in England and Australia. She completed her internship as a Counselling Pychologist in a primary school situated in a low income community. Through her experience in this context, she became aware of the need for support for primary school educators who found themselves tasked with managing cases of sexually abused learners.

References

Abrahams, N., Casey, K., & Daro, D. (1992). Teachers' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about child abuse and its prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 16*, 229-238.

Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bezuidenhout, F. J. (Ed) (1999). *A reader on selected social issues*. Pretoria: Van Schaik

Publishers.

Bless, C. & Higson-Smith, C. (1995). *Social research method: An African perspective*. (2nd ed.). Cape Town: Juta.

Carlson, E. B. & Furby, L. (1997). A conceptual framework of the long-term psychological effect of traumatic child sexual abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, *2*, 272-296.

Davidson, A. F. (1999). *School teachers' perception of child sexual abuse in the Belhar area, Cape Town*. Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.

Finkelhor, D., Browne, A. (1985). Traumatic impact of child sexual abuse: a conceptualization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *55*, 530-541.

Giorgio, A., Fischer, C. T., & Murray, E. (Eds.) (1975). *Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology, Vol 2*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Human Sciences Research Council (2003). Protecting children against violence in schools. *HSRC Review*, 1 (1) (Online). [http://hsrc.ac.za/about/HSRCReview/Vol1No1/index.html?/violence_in_schools.html`Context]

Huysamen, G. K. (1994). *Methodology for the social and behavioural sciences*. Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing.

Jones, K. D. (1998). Coping with reactions to clients traumatized by child sexual abuse. *Journal of Mental Health Counselling, 20,* 332-342.

Knight, C. (1997). Therapists' affective reactions to working with adult survivors of child sexual abuse: An exploratory study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, *6*, 17-41.

Kruger, D. (1988). *An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. (2nd ed.). Cape Town: Juta and Company Limited.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research.* California: Sage.

Maher, P. (Ed.) (1988). *Child abuse: The educational perspective*. London: Basil Blackwell Limited.

McCallum, F. (2002). *Law, Policy, Practice: Is it working for teachers in child protection?* (Online). Available: http://aare.edu.au/02pap/mcc02344.html. April 14 2004.

Miller-Perrin, C. L., & Perrin, R. D. (1999). *Child maltreatment: An introduction*. London: Sage.

Minard, S. M. (1993). The school counselor's role in confronting child abuse. *School Counsellor*, *41*, 9-16.

Morrissette, P. (1999). Phenomenological data analysis: A proposed model for counselors. *Guidance and Counselling*, *15*, 2-7.

Mzamo, N. (2003). *An exploratory study on the experiences of junior primary school educators in dealing with sexually abused learners*. Unpublished Honours thesis, Fort Hare University, East London.

Randolph, M. K. & Gold, C. A. (1984). Child Sexual Abuse Prevention. *School Psychology Review*, *23*, 485-496.

Robertson, G. (1989). Children and child abuse: Teachers and the law. *Transvaal Education News*, *85*, 21-25.

Roscoe, B. (2001). Sexual abuse: The educators' identification and interaction with abuse victims. *Education, 105*, 1-7.

Skinner, J. (1999). Teachers coping with sexual abuse issues. *Educational Research*, *41*, 329-340.

Thomas, S., Smucker, C., & Droppelman, P. (1998). It hurts most: A phenomenological exploration of women's anger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 28*, 1-14.