

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERTED FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS  
REGARDING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THEIR  
OFFENDING**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

A comprehensive literature review indicated that there is a dearth of research focusing on female youth sex offenders and even less is known about the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. This study explores the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding their reasons for offending. The female youth sex offenders in this study indicated that various factors as discussed below contributed to their offending.

The empirical findings of this study confirmed that female youth sex offenders are of the opinion that certain problems within their families possibly contributed to their offending behaviour. Some of these characteristics include factors such as divorce, poor parenting skills, domestic violence, substance abuse and lack of basic care and safety, just to mention a few. Female youth sex offenders' lack of assertiveness, low self-esteem and identity issues were other factors that most probably contributed to their sexual offending. When taking into account that the majority of the participants' parents were unemployed, poverty was another factor that most likely played a contributory role. Due to poverty in the household some of these youth were forced to relocate to Girls' Homes, change schools or drop out of school. In order to curb female youth sex offending one would need to address these factors in a multidisciplinary and holistic manner. This study reports an in-depth qualitative understanding of the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding factors that contributed to their offending. In addition the last objective of this study will be the formulation of recommendations to address female youth sex offending more effectively.

The following key concepts will be used in this study:

- Child
- Adolescence and adolescent
- Puberty
- Child sexual abuse
- Youth offender
- Female youth sex offender
- Sexual offence
- Sexual activities
- Diversion
- Ecological Systems Approach

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## DECLARATION

I, Gloria Elizabeth Da Costa, declare that the dissertation, *The perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending*, submitted for fulfilment of degree Magister Artium in Criminology at the University of Pretoria is my own work and has not previously been submitted for a degree at another university. In addition, I declare that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete and proper references.

\_\_\_\_\_  
GLORIA ELIZABETH DA COSTA

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my father and mother, Norman and Veronica Yvonne Bhairrow. Thank you for believing that I could be better than my past and for teaching me the value of perseverance and hard work.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION, DEFINITION OF RELEVANT CONCEPTS AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Youth sex offending in South Africa is a fairly new field of study, especially the sub-field of female youth who sexually offend. Furthermore, the extent of female youth offending is difficult to ascertain (Moore, Franey & Geffner, 2005:3). Hunter, Becker and Lexier (2006:148) elaborate that due to the low incidence or the under-reporting of female sex offending, the prevalence of this offending is difficult to assess. Subsequently, sex offending committed by females is a phenomenon that has been under-recognised, as there is a dearth in research regarding females that sexually offend (Denov, 2004:9). In addition, Denov (2004:10) explains that although early work on sex offending suggested that female sex offending was rare, more recent research in this field found that female perpetration is occurring more frequently.

Sex offences committed by youth have been occurring since the beginning of time; however effective ways of dealing with these youth are still a grave concern for societies. An international study conducted by Finkelhor, Ormrod and Chaffin (2009:1) confirmed that more than one third of sex abusers of children are other children. Mashaba (2009:2) reported in the *Sowetan* that an alarming 12 000 children were raped in Gauteng during 2008 and that this figure is incomplete as 88% of child rapes were never reported. Statistics pertaining to the sexual abuse of children are difficult to ascertain as many of the sexual crimes against children are seldom reported and some of those that are reported to the SAPS are not recorded (Van Niekerk, 2003:1). Crime statistics obtained from the South African Police Service (SAPS) showed a 2.6% increase in sexual offences against children (The South African Police Service [SAPS] 2010/2011). A recent report (The South African Police Service [SAPS] 2012/2013) indicated that from April 2004/2005 to March 2012/2013 the total amount of sexual offences decreased from 69 117 to 66 387 respectively.

International research findings showed that although most sexual assaults are committed by adults, approximately 20% of sexual assaults are committed by youth offenders (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006:3). Du Plessis (2006) reported that youth misbehaviour is on the increase and that practitioners in the field admit that they are

ill equipped to appropriately deal with youth offenders. Furthermore, professionals dealing with youth who misbehave would need to understand why the youth have misbehaved and what motivated them to offend. The researcher is of the opinion that once professionals are equipped with the necessary information they will be in a better position to assist these youth more effectively.

Sex abuse and sex offending have detrimental long-term effects on the victims and offenders alike (Cernkovich, Lanctôt & Giordano, 2008:3; Omar, Steenkamp & Errington, 2012:8-17). Finkelhor and Ormrod (2000:1), Siegel (2003:320), as well as Hesselink-Louw and Schoeman (2003:165) argue that the influence of crimes on young victims can be devastating and this violent or sexual victimisation of youth can often lead to an intergenerational cycle of violence and abuse. Many lives are destroyed when a sexual offence takes place and society's first reaction is to demand the worst possible punishment for the offender. However, this is not always the best way forward for these offenders, as some of them are victims of sexual abuse and some are victims of their circumstances. Instead of punishment, some of these offenders need intervention. Earlier and more effective intervention could curb future offending (Berger, McBreen & Rifkin, 1996:28-32; Grant, 2000:1; Righthand & Welch, 2005:1). Practitioners in the field need to do everything in their power to help the youth who sexually offend and at the same time ensure that the best interest of the child stays paramount (Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005; Maree & Prinsloo, 2001:6).

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY**

Young offenders constitute 41% of the prison population, while they only form 26% of the general South African population (Peacock, 2008:63). According to research conducted at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (2012:1), "[c]hildren make up thirty percent of the world's population but are a silent constituency in the world of social policies and research". An appropriate response to this might be to explore the thought processes of female youth sex offenders, and to listen to their motivation for offending. The importance of listening to what the youth have to say about why they offend and then to report this information to the broader community of experts in this field of study is vital. Section 10 of the Children's Act states that "every child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participate in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration" (Children's Act, No.

38 of 2005). This section of the Act forms the basis for Lombard's response below. Mulder (2013:1) reports that the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria participated in the Child Protection Week, where Prof Lombard articulated:

However, children should not be asked what their views are on matters that concern them just so that we can claim that they have been consulted but when it comes to implementation or action, their views are ignored. This too, is exploitation and disregard of their right to opportunities for participation and having a voice. We should not pride ourselves as a society listening to children but then silence their voice by not acting on their views. We should never forget the role that children played in changing the unjust history of South Africa. Their role in a democratic society should be respected – including vulnerable and orphaned children and their choices and wishes for their protection, survival and having a future.

A study by Ward (2000:3) indicates that various distorted thought patterns play an important role in motivating sexual offending. Studying the cognitive thought processes of youth who sexually offend could contribute to the field of literature for other professions. If professionals working with youth actually understood how and why youth who sexually offend struggle with maladaptive beliefs and distorted thinking, this breakthrough would assist professionals to use more effective methods of dealing with troubled youth and thereby curb youth sex offending (Moore et al., 2005:7). As most research is regarding male youth who sexually offend, collecting data of the maladaptive beliefs and distorted thinking of female youth who sexually offended will be invaluable to future research and interventions in this regard. A study such as this will shed light on this neglected field in research. After 30 years of international research in male youth sex offending, not much progress has been made in female youth sex offending (Moore et al., 2005:12; Schlesinger, 2010:147-148). There is still much to learn and especially in the South African context this is even more so as diverse cultures, heterogeneous groups, family environments, social skills and cognitive functioning all play a role in youth who sexually offend. The stigma that these youth are faced with, coupled with the strong feelings of shame, guilt and mistrust add to the complexity of this phenomenon (Moore et al., 2005:8-9). These are the type of factors that would need to be explored during this study. While interviewing the female youth who sexually offended one needs to verify if these aspects motivated their offending.

With reference to the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), non-custodial sentences are important in fighting crime in a meaningful way. It is futile to simply punish children without addressing the root causes of their criminal behaviour and thinking patterns. NICRO accurately states that prison is often not the best option for many offenders and that often times, imprisonment of some offenders actually worsens their behaviour problems (The Non – Custodial Sentencing Project. *Chance to Change: Facing the problem of crime.* [Sa].). Bezuidenhout (2007:34) stresses that if society ignores pre-sexualised children (who do not have the psychological and emotional ability to contextualise their behaviour) and do not address youth who commit sexual offences, society will be guilty of encouraging future adult sexual offenders.

### **1.3 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

#### **1.3.1 Child**

According to the South African Constitution of 1996, section 28(3), as well as the Criminal Law (Sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007, a child is a person younger than 18 years.

#### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study a ‘child’ will refer to a person younger than 18 years.

#### **1.3.2 Adolescence and adolescent**

The term adolescence is referred to as a developmental phase in the human life cycle, namely the trajectory between childhood and adulthood, and is also equated to both the terms “teenage years” and “puberty” (Bartollas, 1993:70; Berndt, 1997:525; Gouws & Kruger, 1994:3; OAPP[sa]). As children grow older, their self-concept and their ideas in relation to their physical skills, mental abilities, personality traits and characteristics become more complex (Berndt, 1997:525). It is during this period that adolescents form their own identity which allows them to work through the complex aspects of adolescence and this identity then forms a sense of continuity that provides a link to their past and a direction for their future (Berndt, 1997:534). Bezuidenhout (2013:3) rightfully states that adolescence is a difficult life trajectory with various problems that could impact considerably on a youth’s life. Furthermore, he explains that during the adolescent stage, the adolescent’s personality is being formed and their bodies are also changing remarkably. Bartollas (1993:70) considers

adolescence to encompass children between the ages of 12 and 18 years and Berk (2009:18) refers to Erikson's psychosocial stages which indicate that the adolescence stage commences from 12 years. In addition it was confirmed in a Constitutional court case that South African children reach physiological sexual maturity during adolescence and it was confirmed that this developmental period refers to youth between the ages of 12 and 16 years (Khampepe, 2013:21).

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study the researcher combines the views of the above-mentioned researchers and confirms that an adolescent is defined as an individual who is in the developmental trajectory that occurs from puberty to maturity and includes individuals between the ages of 12 and younger than 18 years.

### **1.3.3 Puberty**

Puberty is defined as "the condition of being or the period of becoming first capable of reproducing sexually, marked by maturing of the sexual organs, development of secondary sex characteristics, and menstruation in the female... the age at which puberty occurs being typically between 13 and 16 years in boys and 11 and 14 in girls" (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006:3; *Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary*, 2002:367-368). Puberty is a potentially complex stage during which the adolescent exhibits rapid changes in behaviour (Najman, Hayatbakhsh, McGee, Bor, O'Callaghan & Williams, 2009:369). Gouws and Kruger (1994:17) postulate that the growth acceleration that occurs during adolescence is distinctive of the pubescent period and the onset of puberty. Additionally, during this stage various changes take place in the child and these changes lead to reproductive maturity and consequently puberty is reached.

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study puberty is defined as the period of becoming capable of reproducing sexually, the development of menstruation for females and the demonstration of rapid changes in behaviour.

### 1.3.4 Child sexual abuse

According to Omar et al., (2012:6):

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that the child does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.

Child sexual abuse is when sexual interactions are forced against a non-consenting child. The person who forces sex is referred to as the sex offender and the non-consenting child is recognised as the victim of sexual abuse (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006:9).

#### Operational definition

For the purpose of this study child sexual abuse is defined as all sexual interactions between children and adults or between children and other children, where coercion and/or where a power imbalance is present.

### 1.3.5 Juvenile/youth offender

Romig, Cleland and Romig (1989:1-2) declare that the concept 'juvenile' stemmed from the Latin word *juvenilis*, which means young and 'delinquent' from the Latin word which means 'to fail'. They argued that a 'youthful failure' would be the relevant modern definition. However, they were concerned that this could mean that the youth is a failure or that the youth's behaviour is a failure. They assumed that juvenile delinquency is a legal rather than a psychological term. As envisaged by these researchers, juvenile delinquency has become a controversial term and more and more a child in conflict with the law is being referred to as a youth offender. According to Ovens (2013:17) until 1963 young offenders in South Africa were classified as juvenile offenders. However, more recently juvenile offenders have been classified as youthful offenders. Juvenile delinquent is a term that is no longer used in South African Law. Furthermore Bezuidenhout (2013:10) explains that instead of referring to juvenile delinquency the concept of 'youth misbehaviour' should rather be used which includes the youth's wrongdoing in regard to criminal and status offences.

### **Operational definition**

With reference to the discussion above, the term youth offender will be used for the purpose of this study.

#### **1.3.6 Youth sex offender**

A youth sex offender is “a person below the age of 18 years who commits a sexual act with a person of any age against the victim’s will without consent or in a threatening, aggressive and exploitive way” (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:28). Barbaree and Marshall (2006:3) state that a juvenile sex offender is “a young person who has been convicted of a sexual offence and who is considered to be held criminally responsible for the crime.”

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study a youth sex offender will refer to a female younger than 18 years who has been convicted of a sexual offence.

As there are different definitions for ‘youth’, for the purpose of this study a ‘youth’ will be referred to as someone younger than 18 years. For the purpose of this study the concepts child, youth, juvenile and adolescent will be used interchangeably.

#### **1.3.7 Sexual offence**

According to the Criminal Law (Sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007, sexual offences can be divided into two categories, namely rape and sexual assault:

Rape: Any person (A) who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant (B), without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of rape.

Sexual Assault: (1) A person (A) who unlawfully and intentionally sexually violates a complainant (B), without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of sexual assault. (2) A person (A) who unlawfully and intentionally inspires the belief in a complainant (B) that B will be sexually violated is guilty of the offence of sexual assault.

‘Sexual act’ means an act of sexual penetration or an act of sexual violation.

‘Sexual penetration’ includes any act which causes penetration to any extent whatsoever by –

- a) The genital organs of one person into or beyond the genital organs, anus or mouth of another person;
- b) Any other part of the body of one person or, any object, including any part of the body of an animal into or beyond the genital organs or anus of another person; or
- c) The genital organs of an animal into or beyond the mouth of another person.

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study a sexual offence will be any sexual act without consent perpetrated by an individual younger than 18 years.

### **1.3.8 Sexual activities**

Sexual activities are seen as activities that include both contact and non-contact activities. Contact activities include the following: “sexualised kissing, fondling, masturbation, digital and/or object penetration of the vagina and/or anus, as well as oral-genital, genital-genital and anal-genital contact”. On the other hand, non-contact activities comprise of exhibitionism, inappropriate observation of a child and the production or viewing of pornography (Campher, 2006:25). Furthermore, Omar et al. (2012:6) divides sexual activities into the following categories: penetration, fondling, violation of privacy, exposing of children to adult sexuality and exploitation.

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this research, sexual activities will refer to any sexually related activity whether contact or non-contact activities.

### **1.3.9 Diversion**

As defined in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, diversion entails the removing of a child away from the formal court processes in a criminal matter. According to Muntingh and Ballard (2012:8) diversion can occur at the following phases in criminal proceedings against the child: “firstly, a prosecutor may decide to divert a child who has been charged with an offence; secondly, at the preliminary enquiry which is an informal enquiry where the assessment report of a probation officer is considered; or thirdly, by the child justice court prior to the finalization of the case.” Steyn (2013:179) categorises the diversion options in two levels that are linked to the schedules which consist of lists of offences in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008. Level 1 refers to offences in Schedule 1 of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 and level 2 refers to all other offences included in Schedules 2 and 3 of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008. In

addition the level and the age of the offender will be taken into account when determining the length of diversion.

### **Operational definition**

For the purpose of this study diversion will refer to all female youth sex offenders who have been diverted away from the formal court procedures to the Teddy Bear Clinic for therapeutical intervention.

## **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The fact that research over the years has only concentrated on male youth sex offenders leaves a huge gap in research and therefore a costly shortage in relevant information with regard to assisting female youth sex offenders. The problems pertaining to research focusing on female youth sex offending will be discussed in more detail.

### **1.4.1 Problems pertaining to research focusing on female youth sex offending**

Although international research has been conducted for the past 30 years (Moore et al., 2005:12) regarding youth who sexually offend, not much research has been done with regard to female youth who sexually offend, especially in South Africa. More recent research has found that although most perpetrators are males, females are also likely to engage in sex offending. It was found that girls have forced sex with other girls or that a group of girls forced themselves on a boy (Booyens, Beukman & Bezuidenhout, 2013:42). Some early researchers proposed that female offenders committed crimes that mostly had a sexual connotation and mentioned that the causes for these crimes were due to emotional or family problems. Furthermore, there is a scarcity in research and theories to explain female offending as researchers merely borrow concepts that explain male offending in order to try to make sense of and explain female offending (Klopper, 2013:145). Male and female offenders are different. Their biological and emotional differences must be appreciated in order to understand them better. Early theorists emphasised that biological factors and the girls' anatomy and sexuality played a role in causing female offending. More recent theories have however shown that there are various factors that contribute to female offending and more research in this area is critical (Klopper, 2013:157). The researcher is aware of two recent South African studies conducted

by Harris (2010) and Omar (2010) regarding male youth sex offenders and the risk factors contributing to their offending. Thus, a study focusing specifically on female youth who sexually offend will add to the body of knowledge in this field.

#### **1.4.2 Risk factors contributing to female youth sex offending**

In their research regarding adolescent rapists and other adolescent delinquents, Hagan, Gust-Brey, Cho and Dow (2001:322) and Wood, Welman and Netto (2000:47) conclude that delinquency is a general risk factor for sexually abusive behaviour and that being a delinquent sex offender serves as an additional risk factor for future sexual assaults. Bischof, Stith and Whitney (1995:1-3) and Hesselink-Louw and Schoeman (2003:165) state that professionals specialising in sex offending assert that adolescent sex offenders are unique and should be distinguished from other delinquent and non-delinquent adolescents. Because of the complexity of human behaviour the researcher needs to take a few important points into consideration. For the purpose of this research a human being, and more specifically a youth, is part of a much bigger system. “Juveniles do not appear one day as fully developed offenders; rather they grow up in family systems and social ecologies that shape their personalities and course of development over time” (Baker, Tabacoff, Tornusciolo & Eisenstadt, 2003:105). These authors insist that families of sex offenders were more deceitful and were more likely to be involved in deviant behaviour. In addition they assert that the majority of family members of sexual offenders were victims of sexual or physical abuse themselves (Baker et al., 2003:106; Hesselink-Louw & Schoeman, 2003:165-166; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1). Family secrecy was also found to be a common characteristic of sexual offenders and the consequences are threefold, namely lack of intimacy, distorted reality and feelings of powerlessness. Therefore youth sex offenders felt that they could enhance their feelings of power and control by means of offending (Baker et al., 2003:107; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). Youth who displayed sexual offending behaviour were also involved in prior delinquent behaviour, were older than other youth offenders and were more likely to be subjected to childhood maltreatment. These adolescents had caregivers with more extensive criminal histories as well as substance abuse problems (Way & Urbaniak, 2008:1197). These findings have a number of practical implications, especially when working with females who present with sexually abusive behaviour. Some researchers (Hunter et al., 2006:148-151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-25) emphasise the developmental perspectives and characteristics of the female youth sex offender. They mentioned that females who had histories of sexual or physical maltreatment showed a greater risk of identity

confusion and emotional maladjustment (Hunter et al., 2006:148-151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-25). The researcher will investigate and explore these issues when interviewing the female youth who have sexually offended. In addition the researcher is of the opinion that in order for criminologists to understand female youth sex offending and to facilitate the rehabilitation of youth sex offenders, they would need to first understand the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. Even though some contributing factors may be suppressed, the facilitation of the semi-structured interview might bring these factors to the surface. Furthermore, the issue of female youth who sexually offend needs to be addressed holistically and with a multidisciplinary approach.

## **1.5 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW**

Researchers across disciplines agree that a thorough research approach, design and data collection serve as a blueprint or map of the study.

### **1.5.1 Research approach**

Creswell (2007:41) suggests that all researchers seem to start their research with an issue or problem, examine the literature, pose questions, gather data and then analyse the data and write up their reports. The researcher is utilising this structure for the study. Qualitative research is explained by Francis (2011:23) as an inquiry to describe, explore, and investigate people's attitudes, motives and behaviours. This best describes the approach of this study. The researcher will explore, describe and investigate the female youth sex offender's attitudes, motives and behaviours. When exploratory research questions are utilised in a study with the commitment to inductive reasoning assists the researcher to discover what people think, and how and why they act in certain social settings. Fouché and Schurink (2011:312) state that the qualitative researcher purposefully selects respondents who will best answer the research question and selects the research approach best suited to the study being undertaken. In this research project, qualitative research will be conducted to explore the intricate problem of female youth who sexually offend and to understand their perceptions regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. The researcher has chosen to embark on a qualitative research approach since the study of youth who sexually offend is a complex issue that would need a holistic understanding. The researcher will be guided by the ecological systems perspective to aid in researching this problem. Furthermore, the researcher will ensure that the

purpose, question and methods of research will all be interconnected so that the study appears as a cohesive whole, rather than isolated parts (Creswell, 2007:41).

### **1.5.2 Research design**

Dastile (2004:132) states that a research design acts as a guideline which determines what data collection method will be utilised. The product of the collective case study design is the in-depth description of cases (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:312). The researcher has chosen the collective case study, as this design refers to the fact that the researcher will be instrumental in collecting data from a number of cases. The purpose of the collective case study is to increase the researcher's understanding regarding a social issue or the population that is being researched. The core product of this research will consist of in-depth descriptions of approximately 12 case studies of female youth sex offenders who are willing to participate in this study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320-322). The population of the study will be all the female youth sex offenders who were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic. The following criteria will be applied:

- The participants will be between the ages of 12 and 18 years.
- The participants must be female.
- The participants should have committed a sexual offence.
- The participants should have been diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic for therapeutical intervention.

### **1.5.3 Data collection method**

The researcher found that the best measuring instrument for this study will be a semi-structured interview schedule (Greeff, 2011:350). A semi-structured interview schedule was designed and will be utilised when conducting the interviews (Greeff, 2011:352). The population of the study is all the female youth sex offenders who were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic. Sampling procedures can be divided into two groups, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Strydom, 2011b:226). Probability sampling is based on randomisation, therefore each person in the population will have the same chance of being chosen. Non-probability sampling on the other hand refers to sampling done without randomisation (Strydom & Delport, 2011:391). In this study the researcher used non-probability sampling. The researcher applied the purposive sampling method by finding eight participants that fit the sampling criteria (Neuman, 2006:219). Furthermore, the sample consisted of

individuals that fulfilled the sampling criteria and were representative of the population that was being studied (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:392). According to Strydom (2011b:232) purposive sampling is also known as judgemental sampling, and is therefore based on the judgement of the researcher. According to Neuman (2006:222) the purposive sampling method refers to the researcher finding participants that fit the sampling criteria. The interviews will be transcribed from the digital voice recorder. The transcribed interviews will be analysed and emerging themes and sub-themes will be identified. The researcher will then analyse these themes in order to interpret the empirical evidence. After conducting the interviews, the researcher will analyse the data by following the steps discussed below (Bachman & Schutt, 2011:254):

- Organising and detailed reading: after organising and preparing the data, the researcher will read through the data several times in order to gain a sense of the information and to reflect on the general themes that will emerge.
- Themes and descriptive information: the researcher will organise this material into relevant sections and will then generate a description of the themes. The themes will then be used to draw up descriptive information about each participant.
- Interpreting of information: the researcher will make an interpretation of the data by presenting a scientific report and thereby contributing to the body of knowledge in this field (Creswell, 2003:190-195).
- Presenting and concluding: the last process of data analysis will be the conclusion and recommendations for further research.

## **1.6 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

With reference to the goal of the study, namely to explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending, the researcher was able to formulate the objectives of the study as follows:

- i) To theoretically conceptualise the context of female youth sex offending.
- ii) To explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.
- iii) To formulate recommendations to address female youth sex offending more effectively.

## **1.7 DEMARCATION OF CHAPTERS**

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims, the following demarcation is used: in chapter 2 the overview of existing literature pertaining to female youth sex offending, an overview of adolescent developmental stages, the extent and nature of female youth sex offending and the high risk factors leading to the female youth sex offender's offence will be discussed. In chapter 3 an exposition of the theoretical framework will be given and in chapter 4 an exposition of the research methodology applied in the study as well as the ethical aspects pertaining to the study will be provided. Chapter 5 will consist of an exposition of the transcribed data and a discussion of the empirical findings of the study and chapter 6 will consist of conclusions and recommendations with regard to the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding factors that contributed to their offences.

## **1.8 CONCLUSION**

In chapter 1 the researcher provided an introduction to give insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Subsequently the rationale for the study was explained in detail. In addition the key concepts were defined operationally in order to clarify the key concepts that will be used in the study. Furthermore, the problem statement was given. The chapter was concluded with an overview of the methodology that will be applied in the study, the goals and objectives of the study were highlighted and a demarcation of the chapters was provided.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Although there is a dearth in literature relating to female youth sex offending, this chapter aims to provide the reader with a comprehensive and current literature study including a holistic view on youth sex offending, as well as the diversion of these offenders. The objective of this chapter is to firstly provide an overview of existing literature related to youth sex offending as a whole and then to focus on the population of female youth sex offenders in particular. A literature search revealed that there is a scarcity of information in South Africa and internationally regarding female youth sex offenders. However, the research collected on male and female adult sex offenders could be used to draw comparative conclusions. The aspects that the researcher will focus on in this chapter are the extent and nature of female youth sex offending, characteristics that are common with regard to female youth sex offenders and the risk factors that the female youth sex offender is faced with.

#### **2.2 SYNOPSIS OF YOUTH SEX OFFENDING STATISTICS**

Sexual offending against children remains a complex and challenging psychosocial problem (Londt, 2008:93). Statistics indicate that the arrests of children for sexual crimes are increasing (Redpath, 2003:9). UNICEF (2008:3) reports that “child protection in South Africa is lacking and that there are high levels of violence against children despite a world-renowned constitution and a legislative overhaul that safeguard children’s rights. Approximately 50 000 children were victims of violent crimes in 2008/2009 and crimes of a sexual nature were the most frequent.” The eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) announced that 40% of sexual offences against children were perpetrated by children (eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) News bulletin 30/5/2013). Dr Omar articulated that when the prosecutors at Soweto Court noticed an increase in child sex offending, the Support Programme for Abuse Reactive Children (SPARC) was initiated at the Teddy Bear Clinic and to date approximately 2000 children participated in this programme (eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) News bulletin 30/5/2013). A report that was drafted for the UK government, entitled ‘Letting

children be children’, contains proposals for preventing the sexualisation of children by the media. A study linked to this report was conducted and it was found that 90% of parents felt that many children are under pressure to grow up too quickly (Mclea, 2011:8). According to Mclea (2011:8), the sexualisation of music videos is a huge problem as many children are acting out what they see on these videos. She mentioned that a growing amount of children who were found guilty of raping other children were exposed to sexualised content. There has been a slight drop in sexual offence cases reported in South Africa recently (South African Police Service [SAPS] 2012/2013). However, these statistics are unreliable due to the following reasons: not all sex offences are reported (the so-called dark figure of crime), no distinction is made between adult or youth sex offenders, and no distinction is made between the gender of offenders. Thus the total amount of female youth sex offenders remains unknown:

**Table 1**  
**Total sexual offences in RSA - April to March 2004/2005 to 2012/2013**

RSA	2004/2005	2012/2013
TOTAL	69 117	66 387

(Adapted from South African Police Service – Crime Statistics Overview, Crime Report, 2012/2013)

According to a newspaper article entitled sexual abuse stats untrue (2010:8), Lisa Vetten argues that the biggest problem with the sexual offences statistics is that it was far too general. In addition, she stated that due to a lack of detail in the figures, incorrect inferences are drawn. According to her, sex offences are not decreasing as shown in the police statistics; in fact it is increasing. It must be noted that Childline South Africa keeps a record of cases reported to them and some of these cases have not been reported to the police. This provides an indication of the extent of under-reporting (Redpath, 2003:8). The researcher contacted several organisations to enquire as to the recent statistics of female youth sex offenders and unfortunately only received the statistics from the Teddy Bear Clinic. The Teddy Bear Clinic confirmed that according to their records they received the first female youth sex offender referral in 2008 and the total of female youth sex offenders for 2011-2013 was 20 (Mdlalo, 2013).

According to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development the Intersectoral Implementation of the Child Justice Act (Annual Report 2011-2012),

table 21 contains the total number of children that have been charged by the SAPS for committing sexual offences during the period of April 2011 to March 2012:

**Table 2: Total number of children that have been charged by SAPS for committing sexual offences during the period April 2011 and March 2012**

2010/2011	2011/2012
4 671	4 772

(Source: Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Intersectoral implementation of the Child Justice Act, Annual Report 2011-2012)

The explanation of the report suggests that there was a slight (2%) difference between the 2010/2011 and the 2011/2012 statistics, which indicates a similar trend over the two years following the implementation of the Child Justice Act. Once again these figures are insufficient as no distinction is made between male and female offenders. The researcher reiterates that not all sex offences committed by children, especially in relation to female youth sex offenders, are in fact reported to the SAPS. Malamuth (1988:123) confirms that even though a small percentage of rapes are reported, there are various sexually aggressive acts that do not meet the legal definition of rape or sexual assault. He therefore indicates that acts that are reported to the police might only be the “tip of the iceberg” of sexual aggression. Malamuth’s comment regarding the legal definition of rape and sexual assault is however not applicable in the South African context as the definitions provided in the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007, encompass all the different types of sexual acts and are very comprehensive. Youth misbehaviour seems to be on the increase, as is the degree of violence that accompanies these offences (Booyens et al., 2013:32; Peterson, Esbensen, Taylor & Freng, 2007:385, 387). Besides the increase of youth sex offence cases in South Africa, the decrease in the age of both the victim and offender and the increase in violence are issues of concern (Van Niekerk, 2003:11). An international study revealed that youth sex offenders target children rather than peers and confirm that 33% of sex offences were perpetrated by youth sex offenders against children and adolescents (Rich, 2009:78). The existing data seems to imply that most youth sex offenders are going through the criminal justice system without proper intervention and this will have a detrimental effect on their future behaviour (Redpath, 2003:9). Furthermore, Redpath (2003:9) emphasised the need to determine what is happening to children suspected of and arrested for sexual offences.

Internationally the statistics of sexual assault against children was five times higher than that of adults (A focus on child sexual abuse, 2008:1). Moore et al. (2005:3) and Rasmussen (2005:58) reported that youth sex offenders are responsible for a substantial amount of sexual offences. Adolescent males accounted for one in every five sexual assaults, while female adolescents accounted for one in every 16 arrests for sexual assaults.

## **2.3 LEGISLATION RELEVANT TO YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS**

The laws that are relevant to youth in South Africa are as follows:

- Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005
- Domestic Violence Act, No. 75 of 1998
- Sexual Offences Act, No. 23 of 1957
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- Child Justice Act, No. 75 of 2008
- Films and Publications Act, No. 65 of 1996
- Criminal Law (Sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007.

### **2.3.1 Different laws applicable to female youth sex offending**

It is of extreme importance that professionals working with children are aware of the current legislation relevant to child sex offenders. Some of the legislation that would assist in this regard is the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No 32 of 2007, the Child Justice Act, No. 38 of 2005, and the Films and Publications Act, No. 65 of 1996. Aucamp, Steyn and van Rensburg (2012:8-9) indicate that legislation pertaining to youth sex offending has been upgraded and reworked to improve existing laws. The two recent documents that have been legislated are the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007 and the Child Justice Act, No. 38 of 2005. With reference to the new specialised juvenile justice system in South Africa (Muntingh & Ballard, 2012:6), the Child Justice Act, No. 75 of 2008, became operational on 1 April 2010. This Act established specific procedures for children in conflict with the law. This Act provides safeguards in order to reduce the exposure of children to the possibility of prosecution and detention and to ensure that this form of punishment is only seen as a last resort. If the child has to be detained this should be for the shortest appropriate time possible and the child must be kept separately from those older than 18 years.

These children should be treated and be kept in conditions that take into account the age of the child [The South African Constitution, 1996, Section 28(1)(g); Child Justice Act, No. 75 of 2008, Section 69(1)(d)]. The Correctional Services Act, No. 111 of 1998, views children as a distinct category of inmates and provides certain minimum standards for these children. In addition, one of the aims of the report on children in correctional facilities in South Africa (Muntingh & Ballard, 2012:9, 12) is to provide information in respect of the imprisonment of children and to observe the implementation of the Child Justice Act. In doing this, researchers found that there has been a gradual decrease in the total number of children in South African youth facilities from January 1995 – February 2011 (Muntingh & Ballard, 2012:12). This leads the researcher to explore the area of diversion.

### **2.3.2 Diversion and the law**

A workshop entitled ‘Managing and treating young sex offenders: what action for government and civil society?’ was held in November 2003. During this workshop the following came to light. A national audit of diversion services was undertaken and it was found that diversion and alternative sentencing were almost non-existent in South Africa (Open Society Foundation of South Africa, 2003:5). Two of the programmes available from the Teddy Bear Clinic and Childline South Africa respectively were evaluated and the following results were found. The Teddy Bear Clinic’s Support Programme for Abuse Reactive Children (SPARC) was implemented in 2002. All children referred to the sex offending programme were male. However, female youth sex offenders have recently also been referred to this programme. Characteristics of these offenders showed a lack of interpersonal skills, empathy deficits and sexual pathology. Based on the Childline Programme, a study was conducted with 54 children that were victims of sexual offences committed by 25 youth offenders. It seems like all 25 of the offenders were male and the most common category of offenders were brothers as 9 brothers committed sexual offences. Most of the sexual offenders, 12 of them, committed these offences at the age of 13 years or younger. The most common offence was vaginal and anal penetration. It was found that these offenders have themselves been exposed to various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse and were also exposed to difficult family dynamics (Open Society Foundation of South Africa, 2003:70). The sexual offenders were exposed to inappropriate sexual messages and pornographic material from peers and family members. The sexual offenders’ experiences negatively impacted on them and affected them on a social, cognitive and emotional level, leading to poor self-images. They experienced difficulty to

express their feelings and could not relate emphatically toward their victims. They displayed feelings of anger and aggression, and sought support from gangs. The helplessness they felt led to feelings of powerlessness and this in turn contributed to the offending behaviour. The sexual offending was used for the following reasons:

- As a mechanism to reduce tension
- To fulfil the need of nurturance
- To redeem feelings of personal power
- To obtain pleasure and comfort.

According to the then Senior Public Prosecutor Mark Dyson, the National Prosecuting Authority's Strategy for 2020 refers to restorative justice and alternative dispute resolution (Goodenough, 2007:1). Youth that are charged for minor transgressions and are prepared to accept responsibility for their actions would be given the chance to right their wrongs and work in the very communities they harmed. The Child Justice Bill (now the Child Justice Act), according to Blumer (2008:1), will aim to ensure a comprehensive implementation of child justice, providing a chance to rebuild and restore the child to be a law-abiding citizen contributing to creating a safer country. According to Muntingh and Ballard (2012:11) an updated report from the 1997 Community Law Centre's report was necessary to provide an efficient analysis of the children in correctional facilities to date. The percentage of children diverted or entering a pre-sentenced diversion scheme in 2010-2011 was 16 462.

## **2.4 FACTORS THAT AFFECT UNDER-RECOGNITION OF FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDING**

One of the reasons provided for the under-recognition of female youth sex offenders is that girls represent the minority of sex offenders. However, the question that remains is whether this data is a true reflection of an under-occurrence of female sex offending, or if female sex offending is simply under-reported (Denov, 2004:16). Sex offending is often viewed as a male-only crime. This could be related to the universal gender role stereotypes which view females as nurturing individuals. Furthermore, sexist beliefs portray males as being in control of sexual encounters while females are seen as passive and submissive. Misconceptions pertaining to the "ability" of females to sexually victimise or abuse males could contribute to the under-

recognition of female sex offenders (Denov, 2004:19; Righthand & Welch, 2005:25). In addition, another factor that contributes to society's under-awareness of female youth sex offenders is the total number of cases and the imbalance of cases that are reported to the criminal justice officials. Beliefs can influence the perspectives and responses as there is evidence that broader cultural bias affect female sex offending (Denov, 2004:22; Righthand & Welch, 2005:16). During training sessions held for law enforcement officers it was found that the focus was placed on men as sex offenders and women as victims. These biases give rise to the under-reporting of sexual offences committed by female youth offenders, and if these cases are reported they may not receive the necessary attention within the criminal justice system (Denov, 2004:21; Hunter et al., 2006:148; Righthand & Welch, 2005:25). Furthermore, the lack of professional and public awareness pertaining to female sex offending and its damaging effects deprives both the victims and the females who offend against them of essential familial support services (Denov, 2004:20, Hunter et al., 2006:148; Righthand & Welch, 2005:25). Moore et al. (2005:3) confirm that whereas literature and statistics focusing on adolescent males who sexually offend indicate the seriousness of their crimes, there is a dearth of research focusing on females who sexually offend. Most studies on youth sex offenders simply mention the percentage of females that offended but then go on to discuss the male sex offender (Moore et al., 2005:4). This study intends to break this trend and will deliberately provide a view of youth sex offenders holistically and then zoom into the essence of the female youth sex offender; her characteristics, the risk factors that motivated her offending and the type of offence that she committed.

## **2.5 ADOLESCENCE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE OF CHILDHOOD**

Adolescent development refers to growth, adjustment and changes which children experience during the developmental stages in childhood (Omar et al., 2012:8). The typical developmental stages of childhood for the purpose of this study are early adolescence and middle adolescence as these are the two developmental stages which are applicable to this study. The table below indicates the physical and cognitive aspects separately and encompasses the emotional, sexual and moral aspects under the heading of 'social-emotional'. The growth acceleration that occurs during adolescence is typical of the onset of puberty (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:17). The various changes that occur in the adolescent's body contribute to reproductive maturity. As this study will focus on females, it is important to note that girls reach

their mature body length more or less two years before boys. The primary sexual characteristics for girls are evinced in the sex glands and the sexual and reproductive organs, namely the vulva, vagina, uterus and ovaries (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:18; Omar et al., 2012:12-14). The secondary sexual characteristics include breasts, pubic hair and changes in skin texture and voice. The other physical, cognitive and social-emotional changes that occur in the female body are described in more detail in the table that follows.

**Table 3**  
**Stages of Adolescent Development**

Stages of Adolescence	Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Social-Emotional Development
<b>Early Adolescence</b> <b>Approximately</b> <b>11 – 13</b> <b>years of age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puberty results in the increase of growth of body hair and perspiration. Enhancing of oil production in hair and skin.</li> <li>• Females – breast and hip development, onset of menstruation.</li> <li>• Males – growth in testicles and penis, ‘wet dreams’, deepening of voice.</li> <li>• Incredible physical growth in relation to gaining of height and weight.</li> <li>• Increase in sexual interest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased capacity for abstract thought.</li> <li>• Mainly interested in the present with restricted thought of the future.</li> <li>• Intellectual interests develop</li> <li>• Enhancement in moral thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battle with sense of identity.</li> <li>• An awkward feeling about one’s self and one’s body; a constant worry about being normal.</li> <li>• Realisation that parents are not perfect; conflict with parents is increased.</li> <li>• Greater influence of peer group.</li> <li>• A desire for independence.</li> <li>• A propensity to return to “childish” behaviour, particularly when stressed.</li> <li>• Moodiness.</li> <li>• Testing of rules and limits.</li> <li>• Enhanced interest in privacy.</li> </ul>

<b>Middle Adolescence</b> <b>Approximately 14 – 18 years of age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puberty is completed.</li> <li>• Physical growth slows for females, continues for males.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in capacity for abstract thought.</li> <li>• Superior capacity for goal setting.</li> <li>• Interest in moral reasoning.</li> <li>• Thinking about the meaning of life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme self-involvement varying between high expectations and poor self-concept.</li> <li>• Constant modification to a changing body and concern about being normal.</li> <li>• Propensity to distance oneself from parents, constant drive for independence.</li> <li>• An increased reliance on friends, popularity could be seen as important.</li> <li>• Increase of feelings such as love and passion.</li> </ul>
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(Adapted from: American Academy of Child and Adolescent's Facts for Families)

Puberty is a complex stage of development during which the adolescent experiences turmoil and rapid changes in behaviour which could lead to aggressive tendencies or delinquent behaviour (Najman et al., 2009:369). Zilney and Zilney (2009:63) assert that puberty is not only a biological event, but also occurs within a social context and its reality is experienced differently depending on the youth's culture, religion, ethnicity, class and family origin. The table above illustrates that puberty begins from ages 11 - 13 years. One can observe the various physical, cognitive and social-emotional developmental stages that take place during the early adolescence period in a child's life. During middle adolescence which includes young people between the ages of 14 and 18 years, physical and cognitive development starts to slow down, but the social-emotional development is more intense. As youth approach puberty, they develop their own understanding of sexual behaviour (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:38). This understanding is based on the youth's past and present sexual experiences. Harris and Bezuidenhout (2010:38) list these experiences as school sex education, family attitudes towards sex, viewing sex and violence as normalised behaviours, past physical and sexual abuse, exposure to pornography and how they are introduced to sex by their peer group. According to Erikson (in Peacock, 2008:64) identity development is not exclusively a product of adolescence, but it becomes more profound during this phase due to the necessity of dealing with considerable physical and cognitive changes, genital maturity and the acquiring of productive skills.

Erikson (1968:132) explains it as follows:

The body changes its proportions radically, when genital puberty floods body and imagination with all manner of impulses, when intimacy with the other sex approaches and is, on occasion, forced on the young person, and when the immediate future confronts one with too many conflicting possibilities and choices.

Bancroft (2006:19) states that society's emphasis on adolescent sexuality has been on restricting their sexuality instead of understanding the key aspects of sexual development that occur during this period and that ultimately prepare the adolescent for 'legitimate' sexuality during adulthood. To distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate sexual development in adolescence is a challenge (Bancroft, 2006:39). The above-mentioned table of stages of development gives an indication of the stages that children go through, but even this is not sufficient when dealing with appropriate and inappropriate sexual development in adolescence. The changes that occur in association with puberty represent probably the most discontinuous phase in human development (Bancroft, 2006:41). Major changes in the body shape and function become visible particularly for females who then also have to deal with menstruation during this phase. Studies related to the impact of puberty on aggression found that females' early puberty might be associated with negative experiences pertaining to factors such as social networks, parental conflict and contact with older males (Najman et al., 2009:371). Studies in this area have shown that adolescents with a positive outlook towards life are more likely to delay sexual intercourse (Bancroft, 2006:44). According to Bancroft (2006:46) three strands, namely sexual responsiveness, gender identity and dyadic relationships start to integrate in the trajectory from childhood to adolescence. From this integration a sexual identity emerges. These biological factors associated with puberty also interact with the cognitive processes of acquired meanings that the adolescent has to deal with (Bancroft, 2006:49). Females between 12 and 18 years experience tremendous maturation in physical growth and cognitive development. Sexual maturity and sexual relationships envelop these females during this period in their life cycle. These females are faced with a variety of psychophysiological changes, for example menstruation, development of secondary sexual characteristics and reproductive changes. Studies have shown that early puberty in females is associated with a high risk of emotional, social and behavioural maladjustment (Hunter et al., 2006:149). Gouws and Kruger (1994:21) deduce that early development in girls is generally disadvantageous for them as the early maturer may not be emotionally ready for the social demands of heterosexual relationships.

Comparatively, late development for girls can have a negative effect on them as some girls are unsatisfied with their appearance and have a greater need for acknowledgement than the early maturers. Adolescents who have a negative body image usually also have a negative self-concept as body image is closely related to self-concept (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:22).

## **2.6 THE NATURE OF FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDING**

The extent and nature of the phenomenon of female youth sex offending remain unknown for now due to most of the research available referring to male youth sex offending. Female youth sex offending is a complex and sensitive issue. Very little is known about female youth sex offenders (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011:1; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:31; Kubik, Hecker & Righthand, 2003:64; Vess, 2011:77; Wijkman, Bijleveld & Hendriks, 2011:34; Zilney & Zilney, 2009:103). Because of this, researchers and practitioners run the risk of generalising characteristics from male or adult female sex offenders (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011:1; Wijkman et al., 2011:35). Recent research shows that although male and female sex offenders share some common characteristics, differences do exist. The myth that factors that lead to criminal behaviour is universal is slowly being dispelled by emerging empirical evidence (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011:1).

Literature relating to female youth sex offenders indicate that samples used in studies are small (for example 11 adolescents). After conducting a detailed study of some of the more recent literature with regard to youth sex offenders and comparing female youth sex offenders with their male counterparts, the researcher came to the following conclusions.

Characteristics of female youth sex offenders compared to the females with non sex offending behaviours research found that the female youth sex offenders (Kubik et al., 2003:64):

- displayed less antisocial behaviour such as alcohol, drug abuse, fighting or problems at school; and
- began offending from a younger age.

When compared to the age matched adolescent males:

- The two sex offending groups were found to be similar.
- There were less differences in relation to criminal and psychosocial histories and antisocial behaviour.
- Similar with respect to specific sex offence behaviour.
- The females experienced more severe abuse compared to their male counterparts.

Although the majority of research focuses on men as sexual offenders, an increased cognisance of females as sex offenders has surfaced recently (Wijkman et al., 2011:34). Roe-Sepowitz and Krysik (2008:405) studied 118 female youth sex offenders and the following findings were recorded. It was confirmed that research on female sex offenders is restricted by minute clinical samples. Furthermore, the existing literature is merely descriptive of adolescent females in clinical environments that make it unfeasible to draw dependable deductions about any significant characteristics and risk factors associated with female sex offenders. Furthermore these researchers concluded that similar to research findings based on male sex offenders research on female youth sex offenders seems to suggest that they are a heterogeneous population (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:1; Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:29; Hunter et al., 2006:148-149; Rasmussen, 2005:57).

In a South African study of 20 youth sex offenders conducted by Wood et al. (2000:45), the researchers found the following characteristics of young male sex offenders between the ages of 7 and 15 years:

- High exposure to deviant peers
- History of prior sexual or non-sexual offences
- History of consensual sexual interactions
- Deviant patterns of sexual interests
- History of poor academic achievement
- Behaviour problems
- History of physical or sexual victimisation
- Histories of social isolation and limited social skills.

The above-mentioned characteristics displayed by youth sex offenders emerge from factors such as dysfunctional families, sexual and physical abuse of children, alcohol

and drug abuse and/or criminal activity. These researchers confirmed that their study focusing on youth sex offenders in South Africa revealed data regarding the kind of young person that is most likely to commit a sex offence in the South African context (Wood et al., 2000:48). Furthermore, Harris and Bezuidenhout (2010:33,37-38) propose that the motivations for youth sex offenders committing their offences are related to the risk factors that these offenders are exposed to. In the current study the researcher aims to see if the above mentioned characteristics and high risk factors are applicable in the context of female youth sex offenders.

## **2.7 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

Childhood experiences of sexual abuse has been related with youth sex offending (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3; Barbaree & Langton, 2006:58; Finkelhor et al., 2009:3; Kubik & Hecker, 2005:45; Omar et al., 2012:8; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19; Siegel & Williams, 2003:71; Widom, 1995:2; Zilney & Zilney, 2009:102). Many researchers have concluded that most youth sex offenders might possibly be victims of sexual abuse themselves. Childhood experiences of physical abuse, neglect and witnessing family violence has been related with sexual violence in youth offenders (Hunter, 1999:18, 27; Lamont, 2010:1-4; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1; Siegel & Williams, 2003:71; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19; Widom, 1995:1;). The impact of these crimes has devastating effects on both the victim and offender (Finkelhor et al., 2009:1). The role of child maltreatment in the etiology of sex offending appears to be multifaceted (Hunter, 1999:18; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20). For example, studies conducted over the years found the following: compared to other youths, the ones who sexually offended were younger during the time of their victimisation, they experienced higher rates of abusive episodes, suffered longer periods between abuse and disclosure, and experienced a lower level of apparent family support after the disclosure of the abuse. Righthand and Welch (2005:20) found that compared to youth offenders who committed other offences, those that sexually offended most likely had a male perpetrator who abused them, these offenders most probably had closer relationships with their perpetrators, endured longer durations of victimisation, and most likely endured more force and penetration. In addition, Righthand and Welch (2005:20) report that other studies focusing on youth sex offending found that childhood experiences of sexual abuse were linked to constant sexual offending from childhood into adolescence and findings confirmed that the abused youth offenders began their sex offending 1.6 years earlier than the other youth and had twice the

amount of victims. The findings concluded that youth offenders with histories of abuse repeatedly began their offending at earlier ages than the offenders who did not suffer abuse (Barbaree & Langton, 2006:58-59; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19; Wyatt, 1988:111). Wyatt (1988:111) proposes that the most common problems in relation to child victimisation are sexual dysfunction, dissatisfaction and promiscuity. Research confirmed that abused women generally embark on intercourse at earlier ages, engage in various types of sexual behaviours and have higher numbers of partners (Barbaree & Langton, 2006:58-60; Wyatt, 1988:111). Barbaree and Marshall (2006:10) confirm that children are neither knowledgeable nor autonomous beings and therefore they are unable to make their own decisions regarding sexual relations. The recent Constitutional court case matter between the applicants, Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children and Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN) and the respondents, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development and National Director of Public Prosecutions found that Section 15 and 16 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 was declared “inconsistent with the Constitution and invalid to the extent that they impose criminal liability on children under the age of 16 years” (Khampepe, 2013:55). This finding confirms that children between the ages of 12 and 16 can no longer be held criminally liable for consensual sexual interaction and in addition their names will also not be entered into the National Register for Sex Offenders. It must however be noted that although a child might be willing to engage in sexual interactions the child might not have the psychological maturity or capacity to give consent (Skelton & Courtenay, 2013:220).

## **2.8 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDER**

Research findings confirm that youth sex offenders are a heterogeneous population, differing according to a wide range of variables (Dicataldo, 2009:19; Londt, 2008:94; Moore et al., 2005:7; Rich, 2009:77; Righthand & Welch, 2005:17). Londt (2008:93) confirms that research conducted in South Africa in relation to characteristics of sex offenders remains limited. Taking the limited literature into consideration, the researcher will provide an outline of the characteristics of youth sex offenders. It must be noted that a considerable number of youth sex offenders do not differ extensively from other juvenile offenders, although it was found that subgroups may differ.

Research findings have approximated the incidence of youth sex offending by female youth to be between 2% and 11% (Finkelhor et al., 2009:2; Righthand & Welch, 2005:25). These reports on youth sex offenders might underestimate the degree of the problem for female youth even more so than for males. For example, research confirmed that sex offending in childcare situations might be less likely to detect, due to the fact that young victims might not have the abilities, language skills or knowledge-base to disclose sexual abuse (Righthand & Welch, 2005:25).

Our understanding of the characteristics of female youth sex offenders is still evolving as research in this field is increasing very slowly. The studies that the researcher was able to access showed that the use of aggression was common and occurred in the form of threats of violence, intimidation and acute physical violence. About 40% of the female and male youth offenders from a sample of 91 demonstrated aggression in their sex offence(s) against younger children and in addition victimisation towards peers or adults resulted in the use of more force (Righthand & Welch, 2005:19). A number of “triggers” that have been associated with sex offending comprise of family problems, boredom, attention seeking behaviours and anger (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2-3).

Finkelhor et al. (2009:6) established that compared to males, females are inclined to choose younger victims, they make use of less force, are less often caught up in the legal system and are involved in incidents with multiple victims. Furthermore, females typically evidence elevated rates of child maltreatment and the maltreatment that they were exposed to was harsher than male sex offenders. In addition, female offenders were considered by investigators to be victims at the same time they were offenders (Finkelhor et al., 2009:6). In addition to research findings confirming the evidence of high rates of trauma and abuse, Righthand and Welch (2005:25) reported that these females came from families who had elevated levels of family dysfunction and poor parental support. Their family settings were often explained as damaging to the development of positive self-images and healthy attachments. Like male sex offenders, female sex offenders frequently engage in other forms of deviant behaviours consisting of a variety of behaviour and sexual behaviour problems (Righthand & Welch, 2005:25). However, studies that were conducted so far have revealed the following universal characteristics (Hunter et al., 2006:148-149):

- High prevalence of sexual victimisation;
- instability and dysfunction within the family and home;

- co-occurring psychiatric disorders, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder victimising young children within the family or with whom they are familiar;
- targeting victims of either gender; and
- acting alone, often offending within the context of care-giving activities.

When noting the available research, it seems like most of the characteristics of the female youth sex offender closely resemble those of the female adult sex offender. Thus, additional research that explores the distinctive developmental circumstances of the female youth sex offender is needed.

## **2.9 OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR OF FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS**

The offending behaviours of the female youth sex offenders are intricate and will be elaborated on in order to understand these behaviours in more detail.

### **2.9.1 Sexual criminal behaviour**

The types of sexually abusive behaviour these youths engage in array from penetrative acts to non-contact offences. Research findings confirm that for the most part abusive acts might involve attempted or actual vaginal or anal penetration or oral-genital contact (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006:45; Righthand & Welch, 2005:18). When considering sexual abuse in South Africa, it is important to understand that sexual abuse is not limited to contact sexual behaviour as most sexual abusive behaviour may be described as non-contact sexual abuse (Aucamp et al., 2012:2).

### **2.9.2 Criminal behaviour**

Youth sex offenders often engage in criminal and antisocial behaviour. However, in contrast to similarities between youth sex offenders and those who commit other deviant behaviour, some distinct characteristics have been noted. Righthand and Welch (2005:18) also found that those who sexually offended were inclined to have better academic performance, less substance abuse and less prior offences and convictions compared to youths who committed other offences. Research findings in relation to the three year follow-up period point out that none of the sex offenders reoffended and their recidivism rate was lower than that of offenders who committed other types of offences. Furthermore, when the youth sex offenders reoffend, their crimes were inclined to be non-violent and non-sexual. Righthand and Welch

(2005:18) and Finkelhor et al. (2009:3) concluded that “[t]hese findings suggest that when a longitudinal perspective is used, sex offending among juveniles appears to be but one piece of a pattern of generalized delinquency.” Zimring, Piquero and Jennings (2007:509) found that when assessing the course of a longer criminal career, sex offenders were less likely to repeat their offence. However, an eight year long comparative study found that youth sex offenders were considerably more likely to commit a sex offence again in the eight year time period following their release from a correctional facility than a control group of non-sex offenders from the identical institution (Hagan, Gust-Brey, Cho & Dow, 2001:314).

## **2.10 COMMON TYPES OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT COMMITTED BY CHILDREN**

Coetzee (2012:27) is of the opinion that sexual misconduct by learners in schools in South Africa has become alarming. Sexual experimentation and becoming sexually active at young ages are new trends in schools. Learner-on-learner sexual misconduct is prevalent in South African schools and these types of offences are as follows:

- Inappropriate, obscene and vulgar sexual innuendos, jokes and stories
- Sexual bribery such as coercing girls into performing oral sex
- Groping
- Fondling girls’ breasts
- Touching or pinching another learner’s buttocks
- Kissing girls without their consent
- Raising girls’ skirts
- Putting hands under girls’ skirts
- Pressing up against another learner’s body
- Leering at or eyeing up another learner’s body
- Showing pornography
- Flashing
- Circulating rumours of sexual conduct by another learner
- Fingering
- Spying on other learners who are undressing
- Standing under stairs and looking up under girls’ skirts

- Rape and gang rape; also referred to as ‘jackrolling’ – the practice where boys have to show their ‘male power’ or earn their gang membership by forcefully abducting and gang-raping girls.

## 2.11 FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDERS TYPOLOGY

In terms of the type of offences committed by female youth sex offenders, the following three preliminary subtypes of female youth sex offenders were found (Hunter et al., 2006:154-156):

- Female youth sex offenders who engaged in a restricted number of incidents against a non-related youth within a babysitting context. These type of offenders were inexperienced, naïve, and fearful with regard to sexual matters. Their offending appeared to be enthused by curiosity or experimentation. Histories of family dysfunction, maltreatment and psychological problems were restricted within this subtype.
- Female youth sex offenders who appeared to be sexually reactive were found to abuse young children in a way that reminded them of their own abuse. Research found that a few in this subtype showed psychological, emotional and other types of problems, however these problems were not severe and many of these youth had sufficient personality strengths and social skills.
- Female youth sex offenders who engaged in extensive and recurring sex offending and who experienced increased levels of emotional and psychosexual disturbance were found to have experienced significant developmental suffering. In addition this suffering consisted of sexual abuse that often began at a young age and which most likely contributed to their problems with stability and adjustment.

The female youth sex offender tends to choose the following type of victim to offend against (Finkelhor et al., 2009:6):

- Young children, frequently younger than 5 years
- Most likely male victims but both genders can be targeted
- Often known by the offender
- Often times a sibling, relative, step- or foster sibling, or a cousin.

Victim characteristics according to Righthand and Welch (2005:25) are as follows:

- Often much younger than the offender
- Use less force and are typically less commonly involved in the Criminal Justice System
- Hardly ever are they strangers, typically relatives or acquaintances
- Babysitting regularly present the opportunity to offend.

## **2.12 HIGH RISK FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDING**

In order to explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their sexual offending, the researcher will investigate the following high risk factors that could have led to their offending. A South African report (Roester, 2008:25-28) indicated that the contributing factors related to criminal behaviour of children could be identified at three levels – micro, mezzo and macro levels as outlined below:

- Some of the micro-level contributing factors are behaviour problems, mental health and substance abuse.
- On the mezzo level, contributing factors consist of family related problems, peer group pressure, and other social relation problems.
- Factors on the macro level consist of the different environments that the youth is exposed to, such as their community and their country.

Any negative influences in a youth's community or country can contribute to them making unwise decisions that may lead to crime. In a country as diverse as South Africa, with many cultural and socio-economic differences, poverty and political issues unique to South Africa could be some of the contributory factors related to youth who sexually offend.

As confirmed by Rich (2009:19) more often than not it is a mixture of risk factors and environmental circumstances that ultimately allow antisocial behaviour to surface. This research will investigate the model mentioned in Rich (2009:17) when conducting the interviews with the respondents. Risk factors that are considered to be both endogenous and exogenous in relation to female youth sex offenders and how these factors contribute to their offending will be investigated. This model further

explains that “risk resides within the individual and the environment, resulting in an emergent level of risk. The endogenous factors reside within the individual and include attitudes, sexual drive, capacity for empathy, sexual interests and elements such as biology and social-development experiences”. Furthermore, exogenous factors reside in the surroundings and might consist of factors such as family functioning, peer group, domestic violence and social messages amongst others. Overcrowding in South Africa put children at risk of sexual abuse, particularly when males and females have to share beds or youth are forced to sleep in the same room as adults (Hall, 2008:1). “South Africa’s entrenched structural problems inherited from the apartheid era continue to undermine children’s survival, development and protection” (UNICEF, 2008:1). If there are no absolutes in identifying predictive risk factors it is important to consider all available information (Londt, 2008:98).

Although the following risk factors were identified as youth sex offending in general empirical findings of this study in correlation with the literature research shows similar risk factors associated with female youth sex offending

Risk factors identified in the most recent South African study (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:33) reveal the following themes:

- Incomplete family structure
- Substance abuse
- The culture of violence
- Pornography
- Rape myths
- Previous sexual conduct
- Previous sexual victimisation
- Peer influence.

The following are key examples of risk factors for female youth sex offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:9)

- Sexual and physical victimisation
- Dysfunctional family
- Parent/child relationship difficulties
- Antisocial peers

- Academic failure
- Pregnancy
- Early onset of puberty
- Mental health difficulties
- Substance abuse.

Moore et al. (2005:7) mention risk factors such as family setting, history of abuse, social skills, mental health, cognitive functioning and sexual experiences. For the purpose of this study the researcher will focus on the following risk factors as these factors are most applicable to this study and require a detailed explanation.

### **2.12.1 Family factors**

Studies vary with regard to the number of youths whose families experience considerable problems such as family dysfunction, separations or significant stress. Some research samples confirmed the prevalence of the following factors: family instability, substance abuse, psychopathology, criminality and violence (Booyens et al., 2013:41; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Lamont, 2010:1; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). Studies varied as some offenders came from intact families. However, even when families seem to be intact, some parents were portrayed as being disengaged, unapproachable and distant. Kimball and Guarino-Ghezzi (in Righthand & Welch, 2005:21) found elevated rates of ongoing family conflict among youth sex offenders. In addition, these studies suggest that youth sex offenders have been exposed to considerable forms of family dysfunction and psychopathology that might have contributed to them suffering from a lack of emotional support. Furthermore, it was found that these youths may experience continuous stress and might be unable to establish positive relationships and attachments. “Aggressive and violent behaviour in girls is linked to family and social factors such as social and financial deprivation; harsh and inconsistent parenting; parents having marital problems; poor parental mental health; physical and sexual abuse; alcoholism; drug dependency; and poor attachment to their mothers” (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2). Becroft (2009:2) propose that antisocial youth are not islands in time or in space, these youth were parented by unique people in specific ways, and in societies where several attitudes were discouraged while other attitudes were promoted (Becroft, 2009:6). Researchers concluded that antisocial parents tend to raise antisocial children.

### **2.12.2 Social skills and relationships**

Research findings document that youth with sexual behaviour problems have considerable deficits in social capabilities such as, shyness, insufficient social skills, social isolation and poor peer relations (Kubik et al., 2003:67; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1; Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). Miner and Crimmins' (in Righthand & Welch, 2005:21) research findings confirm that youth sex offenders experienced less positive attachments to their schools compared to other youth offenders and non-offending youth and they had less peer attachments. Most of the research points to the prominence of poor social adjustment and isolation as distinctive characteristics of youth sex offenders.

### **2.12.3 Sexual knowledge and experiences**

Research proposes that youth who commit sex offences usually have had earlier consenting sexual relationships (Wood et al., 2000:45; Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). Ryan (in Righthand & Welch, 2005:21) reported that a research “study of 1,600 youth sex offenders described by 90 independent contributors from 30 states found that only approximately one-third of the youth perceived sex as a way to demonstrate love or caring for another person; others perceived sex as a way to feel power and control (23.5%), to dissipate anger (9.4%), or to hurt, degrade, or punish (8.4%)”. Some sex offenders have a tendency not to think clearly about their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. The lack of sexual knowledge or experience and poor social skills are some of the functional deficits (Hesselink-Louw & Schoeman, 2003:165).

### **2.12.4 Academic performance**

Research classically reports that youth sex offenders experienced academic and school problems (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3-4; Booyens et al., 2013:41-42; Righthand & Welch, 2005:23). Reported problems consisted of academic problems, disruptive behaviour, learning disabilities, truancy and placement in special classes. However, academic performance should not only be determined by intellectual or neurological functioning, other factors such as parental support and their level of education should also be investigated. Some youth sex offenders, however, do well in school. For example, O'Brien (in Righthand & Welch, 2005:23) “found that 32% of the offenders in his sample were described as above average in their academic performance.” School problems experienced by females such as social rejection, low connectedness to school and learning disabilities lead to being absent from school and eventually dropping out of school (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3).

### **2.12.5 Cognitive distortions**

Research reported that certain factors observed in children who were abused might have significance for youth sex offenders who have been abused (Righthand & Welch, 2005:23). For example, it was found that “abused children exhibit less empathy than non-abused children, have trouble recognising appropriate emotions in others, and have difficulty taking another person’s perspective.” Furthermore, this observation is consistent with research signifying that cognitive distortions, such as blaming the victim, were associated with elevated rates of sexual offending among youth sex offenders (Righthand & Welch, 2005:23). Aggressive and violent females might also have poor self-representation or self-concepts. Research found that females who experience problems in regard to cognitive moral or social development are more likely at risk of resorting to aggressive and violent behaviour, to experience problems in school and face social rejection (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:4). Thinking errors that are found in most sex offenders, according to Hesselink-Louw and Schoeman (2003:166), are lying, blaming others for their offences, indicating that the victim wanted the sexual act to happen and making excuses for the offence. Furthermore Kubik and Hecker (2005:44, 62) are of the opinion that female youth sex offenders demonstrated more distorted beliefs about their victim.

### **2.12.6 Pornography and sexting**

The themes of risk factors relating to youth sex offenders are consistent right across the different studies, whether related to male or female youth offending. There is conflicting research with regard to the influence of pornography on sexual offending. It was found that pornography is harmful to youth but not all youth exposed to pornography develop sexually deviant thoughts and behaviour patterns (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:35). The researcher would argue that young children unable to grasp the exposure to violent acts of pornography would most probably deal with this information in a destructive manner. Campher (2006:35) stated that when children are exposed to sexual material that they cannot cognitively or emotionally process, their moral and mental development can be adversely affected.

According to Righthand and Welch (2005:22), exploration into the role of pornography in youth sex offending are inadequate but the following research findings give an indication of the effect. In addition, findings confirm elevated rates of exposure to hard core, sexual magazines among youth sex offenders compared to

youth who perpetrated other offences. The youth sex offenders were exposed at a young age, from five to eight years. More specifically, elevated rates of exposure to pornographic material have been found in female sex offenders (Righthand & Welch, 2005:22).

According to Chetty (2009:3) the creation, production, distribution, use and possession of child pornography are offences in both the Films and Publications Act (Act, No. 65 of 1996) and Criminal Law (Sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007. Child pornography is referred to as “any image, however created, or any description or representation of a person, real or simulated, who is depicted, made to appear, look like, represented or described or presented as being under the age of 18 years of an explicit or sexual nature, whether such image or description or presentation is intended to stimulate erotic or aesthetic feelings or not, including any such image or description of such” person-

- a) engaged in sexual conduct
- b) engaged in an act that constitutes a sexual offence
- c) participating in or assisting another person to participate in sexual conduct
- d) engaged in an act of sexual penetration
- e) engaged in an act of sexual violation
- f) engaged in act of self-masturbation
- g) displaying the genital organs of such person in a state of arousal or stimulation
- h) unduly displaying the genital organs or anus of such person
- i) displaying any form of stimulation of a sexual nature of such person’s breasts
- j) engaged in sexually suggestive or lewd acts
- k) engaged in or as the subject of sadistic or masochistic acts of a sexual nature
- l) engaged in conduct or activity characteristically associated with sexual intercourse
- m) showing or describing such person-
  - (i) participating in, or facilitating or assisting another person to participate in; or
  - (ii) being in the presence of another person who commits or in any other manner being involved in any act of a sexual nature; or

- n) showing the body, or parts of the body, of such person in a manner or in circumstances which, within context, amounts to sexual exploitation or violate or offend the sexual integrity or dignity of that person or any category of persons under 18 or in such a manner that it is capable of being used for the purpose of sexual exploitation or is capable of being used for the purpose of violating or offending the sexual integrity of that person, any person or group or categories of persons.

In terms of both the Film Publications Act (Act, No. 65 of 1996) and the Criminal Law (Sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007, it is an offence to create, produce, to be in possession of or distribute child pornography (Chetty, 2009:3).

Sexting, a combination of “sex” and “texting”, is the practice of sending sexually-suggestive text messages or photos mainly through cell phones and social networking sites (Chetty, 2009:2). According to the Pew internet survey conducted by Lenhart (2009:7) on teens and sexting the data confirmed that 4% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 reported the sending of sexually suggestive nude or semi-nude photography or videos of themselves to someone else. Furthermore the data suggests that females and males are equally likely to practice sexting. Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones and Wolak (2012:13) state that it is important to conduct research regarding sexting due to the concerns of the production and possession of illegal child pornography. In addition, the youth should be made aware of the legal consequences with regard to sexting.

### **2.12.7 Substance abuse**

Research studies differ extensively on the significance of the role that substance abuse plays in sex offending. Righthand and Welch (2005:24) reported that the proportion of youth sex offenders that abused drugs or alcohol during their offences ranged from 3.4% to 72%. Even though substance abuse has been recognised as a problem for youth sex offenders, the role that substance abuse has in sex offending still is unclear and for a number of youth, substance abuse might not be associated with sex offending. Booyens et al. (2013:35) states that substance abuse could cause youth to practise criminal behaviour due to distorting perceptions and an increased sense of bravado. Furthermore, substance abuse could have a

disinhibiting effect and could therefore contribute to difficulties such as poor social skills, poor impulse control and problem-solving difficulties. In addition these problems might be aggravated by substance abuse, and might elevate the risk of sex offending (Righthand & Welch, 2005:24). “Chronic use of drugs was reported to be especially related to girls’ ongoing participation in violence” (Artz & Nicolson, 2009:3).

## **2.13 CONCLUSION**

This chapter includes an exposition of existing literature pertaining to female youth sex offending. Due to the scarcity of information with regard to female youth sex offending the researcher consulted various types of studies, for example studies where male youth sex offenders were compared to female youth sex offenders, female adolescents were compared to adult female sex offenders, and the like. A synopsis of youth sex offending statistics was given. Furthermore, the legislation relevant to child sex offenders was deliberated and the circumstances that led to diversion instead of imprisonment for youth offenders were described. In addition, the factors that affect the under-recognition of female youth sex offending were considered. The researcher then included an overview of the adolescent developmental stage. The early and middle adolescent years were briefly discussed and puberty was explained. The developmental stages of adolescence were clearly defined. The researcher investigated the extent and nature of female youth sex offending and provided an exposition of the profile of female youth sex offenders. Various typologies of the youth sex offender were carefully considered and the profile of the victim was listed. Furthermore, the high risk factors that contributed to female youth sex offending were examined. Subsequently the following chapter will focus on the ecological systems theory which is the theoretical framework used for this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **AN EXPOSITION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK RELATING TO FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDING**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

An exposition of the theoretical framework will be provided in this chapter. Subsequently an overview of relevant theories relating to child and youth development will be discussed and these theories will be applied to female youth sex offending.

Although theories are often evaluated, critiqued and scrutinised, they continue to stand tall and offer insight and strategies for the helping professions (Parrott, 2003:73). How one thinks about issues will determine how one will approach the situation at hand. Theories help answer questions and help researchers and professionals formulate beliefs and values to tackle issues (Parrott, 2003:74). According to Prochaska and Norcross (2003:5) a theory is generally defined as a set of statements used to explain the data in a given field. Schmallegger (1996:92) refers to theory as “a series of interrelated propositions that attempt to describe, explain, predict and ultimately control some class of events. A theory gains explanatory power from inherent logical consistency and is tested by how well it describes and predicts reality.” A good theory ultimately gives meaning to observations and provides a relative complete understanding while being supported by observation (Schmallegger, 1996:92). The researcher will motivate why the ecological approach is the most suitable theory for this study and how it gives meaning to the observations and a relative understanding of the female youth sex offender. Furthermore, the researcher will utilise this theory to provide patterns for the interpretation of the data and to supply frameworks with which concepts and variables attain special meaning and allow the researcher to interpret the larger meaning of the findings (Schmallegger, 1996:93).

## **3.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THEORIES RELATED TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Over time new ways of understanding children has emerged. Theorists have questioned, built on and enhanced earlier theories to broaden the understanding of the development of children.

### **3.2.1 Historical background**

According to Maguire (2002:4), the history of the helping professions is characterised by sensitivity to the interactions between the youth and their environments. This same sensitivity needs to be upheld when dealing with the female youth sex offender who interacts with different significant systems which include the family, peers, school and community, while at the same time dealing with issues affecting themselves emotionally, cognitively, physically and the like (Hunter et al., 2006:149-150).

According to Maguire (2002:5-6), during the 1950s two radical modes of intervention came to the fore to challenge the psychodynamic approach. There was an urgent need for interventionist alternatives within the helping professions and thus the behaviour modification and client-centred approach was developed. The client-centred approach was developed and emphasised the individual's innate strength for self-actualisation. During the 1960s and 1970s the helping professions became more socially and environmentally oriented in their techniques, as they recognised the need to deal with the everyday reality of problems in their clients' lives and environments (Maguire, 2002:35). During the 1980s, researchers began to focus on the field of cognitive psychology in order to gain an understanding of children's thought processes (Berk, 2009:23). More recently, developmental cognitive neuroscience united researchers from psychology, biology, neuroscience and medicine to conduct research pertaining to the relationship between the developing child's cognitive behaviour patterns and changes in the brain (Berk, 2009:24). Later on the field of child development saw an escalation in studies relating to the cultural context of children. Over the past two decades, Urie Bronfenbrenner (Berk, 2009:26) offered a combined and more complete theory that viewed the contextual influence on children's development. The ecological systems theory refers to the child as a developing individual within a complex system of relationships while at the same time being affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment (Berk, 2009:26).

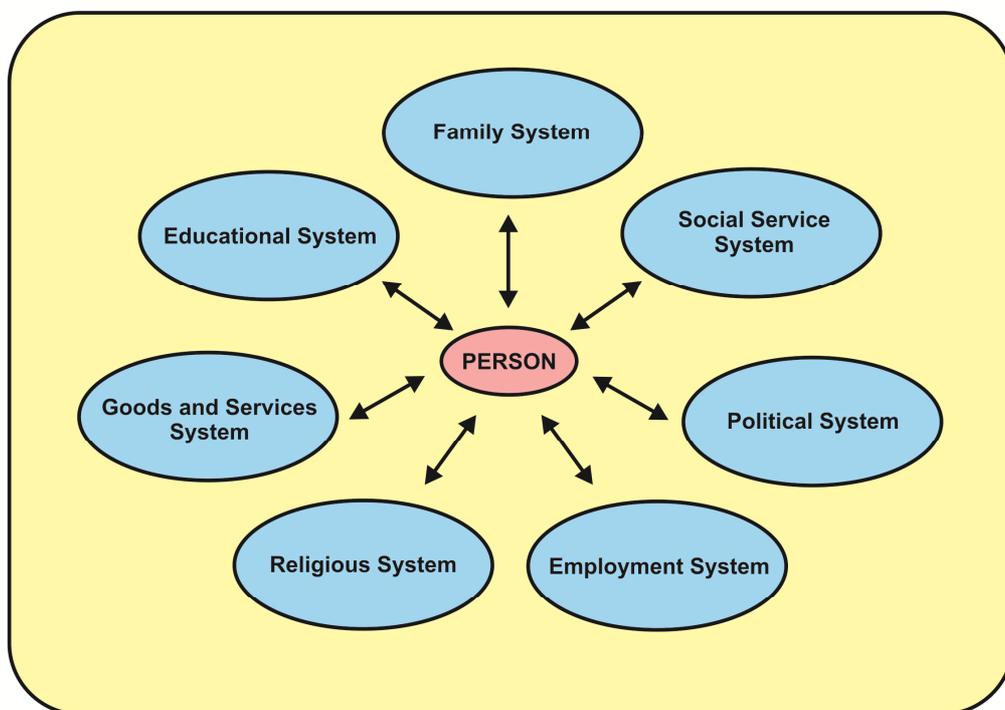
Family violence is also explained by the ecological systems theory by analysing relationships between individuals and larger systems (Benokraitis, 2011:405).

### 3.2.2 The systems-based approach

In the systems-based approach, the interaction of the social environment and the need to increase social support and decrease the stresses and negative forces that influence the individual's system are recognised (Maguire, 2002:36). Germain (in Maguire 2002:40) explains that there is no single theory that adequately explains human behaviour except those that rely upon a broad systems orientation. The researcher therefore advocates the systems perspective which operates from a person-in-environment model, also known as the ecological model (Maguire, 2002:69; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012:62-63; Zide & Gray, 2001:9).

Figure 1 demonstrates how the person interacts with many different systems. The person-in-environment conceptualisation is one emphasis of the ecological model and it illustrates the interactions between the person and their environment and vice versa.

**Figure 1: Person-in-environment conceptualisation**



(Adapted from: *Clinical Social Work: Beyond generalist practice with individuals, groups and families* in Maguire, 2002:18)

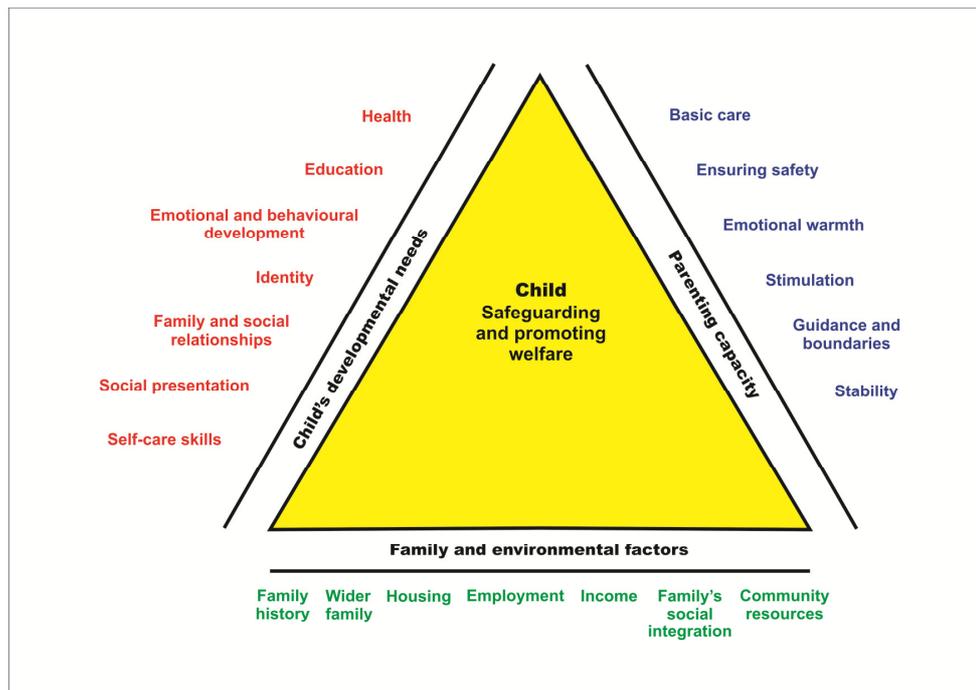
In order to understand this model one needs to have an understanding of the terms used in this theory. For example, when the researcher refers to the system it is any unit that has definable boundaries and interacting parts (Maguire, 2002:69; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012:62-63; Zide & Gray, 2001:9). These definable boundaries and interacting parts can be seen as follows: the physical (housing, money); social (family, peers); and economic (finance, budgeting) factors. In addition, the transitional problems and needs that individuals face as they move from one life stage to another are as follows: growing older, adjusting to puberty, entering high school and the like. Carel Germain and Alex Gitterman's ecological approach is a holistic approach that views people in the context of their environments (Maguire, 2002:90). The fact that individuals are in a constant state of continuous exchange, interaction and reciprocal influence with their environments is clearly emphasised. The biological, psychological, cultural, emotional and social forces in the environment must be understood and utilised in order to help individuals to adapt or "fit" into their own systems (Hepworth, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried & Larsen, 2006:18; Maguire, 2002:90; Newman & Newman, 1997:131). The interdependence of the organism and the environment is accentuated. In addition the model focuses on (a) difficult life transitions and traumatic events; (b) poverty, oppression and the harshness of social and physical environments; and (c) dysfunctional interpersonal processes in families. During the empirical section of this study, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with female youth sex offenders to explore factors such as difficult life transitions, traumatic events, poverty, oppression and dysfunctional interpersonal development. Furthermore, these factors should highlight any motivations that could have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour.

### **3.3 THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH**

For the purpose of this study, the ecological systems perspective will guide the researcher when conducting the research. The ecological systems perspective is a holistic approach that views people in the context of their environments and emphasises the continuous interactions and reciprocal influence with their environments (Maguire, 2002:90). Kruger and Spies (2006:160) highlight the fact that ecological thinking appears to be on the verge of gripping the imagination of those who are involved with youth. They also acknowledge that one of the benefits for professionals is that such a model enables them to see their research participants

(adolescents) in the widest possible social contexts. The interaction between these adolescents and their environment is a synergistic cycle of influence between the changing individual and the changing environment. The interrelatedness of these components is illustrated in figure 2:

**Figure 2: The Framework of the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families**



(Adapted from: *The Framework of the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*, Department of Health in Wilson, Ruch, Lymbery & Cooper, 2008:480)

The above-mentioned framework indicates the interplay between the different aspects that form part of a person's environment, which will influence their behaviour in a reciprocal way. This implies that the research will also focus on the situational factors which are constantly in interaction with each other and may contribute to female youth sex offending. Some of these factors will be explored during the semi-structured interviews, which will be guided by the interview schedule.

According to Sheafor and Horejsi (2012:62-63), the helping professions borrow concepts from a science such as ecology and in doing this one will have to realise that the fit will not always be perfect. The unit of study in ecology is the ecosystem and this ecosystem consists of many interacting species and their exchanges with their physical and chemical environment. In contrast to the unit of study in ecology, the helping professions place a high value on the individual and consider

environmental factors as they encroach on the individual. Ecosystems are never static and the species within the ecosystem are constantly adapting to different conditions. Similarly the female youth sex offender and her circumstances in the environment are never static and they are constantly adapting to an ever-changing environment. Thus the researcher advocates the principles of the ecological approach.

### **3.3.1 The basic principles of the ecological approach**

There are seven characteristics according to Germain and Gitterman (in Maguire, 2002:91-93) that epitomises the ecological approach as discussed below.

#### **3.3.1.1 *Person: environment exchange***

This refers to the fluid and multidirectional interactions between the individual, their personality, behaviour and the demands of their environment. A good fit will result in positive growth in the individual and meaningful relationships in the community. However, a poor fit will result in impaired functioning and an environment that stifles growth. In relation to this study, the female youth sex offender's interactions between herself and her environment will only be able to result in a good fit if she experiences positive growth and sufficient resources from the community. However, the literature study shows that a misfit usually develops during the different interactions between the female youth sex offender, her personality, behaviour and the demands of her environment (Hunter et al., 2006:149-152; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-25). The poor fit that results in the female youth sex offender will be further explored in this study. The impaired functioning and how the environment stifled female youth sex offenders' growth are factors that the researcher will investigate in order to explain the motivational factors contributing to their behaviour.

#### **3.3.1.2 *Varied levels of fit***

The view of the ecological approach is to ensure that individuals find the most appropriate fit in their environments. *Adaptedness* will occur when the environment offers the necessary resources needed to promote the individual's optimum functioning and *adaptation* will transpire once the individual has transitioned successfully and has improved the level of fit in their environment (Maguire, 2002:91-93). The researcher will consider the different levels of fit when describing the *adaptedness* and the *adaptation* of the female youth sex offender. The semi-structured schedule consists of questions relating to the necessary resources that the environment provided and once the data from the interviews has been transcribed,

the researcher will explain how the female youth sex offender transitioned into the varied levels in her environment.

### **3.3.1.3 *Life stressors that threaten fit and coping***

This concept refers to the external life stressors that fabricate negative exchanges in the level of fit. How the individual views and the meaning that they assign to the life stressor will affect the person. According to the literature study, life stressors such as separations, significant stress, abuse, neglect, and cognitive distortions are evident in the youth sex offender's life course (Benokraitis, 2011:393-393; Hunter et al., 2006:151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-22). Life stressors such as death in the female youth sex offender's family, abuse, and/or family violence are possible stressors that will be explored in order to confirm which life stressor threatened the fit and coping strategies of female youth sex offenders.

### **3.3.1.4 *Human relatedness, competence, self-esteem, and self-direction***

These aspects refer to the outcome of past and present experiences in relation to the environment. Relatedness, also known as attachment, is necessary for the survival of the individual. In relation to this study, the literature research demonstrates that the female youth sex offender often struggles with productive attachment to significant others and this hampers her competence and self-esteem (Benokraitis, 2011:397; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). When analysing the interviews in this study, the researcher will explain the female youth sex offender's relationships and attachment to significant others.

### **3.3.1.5 *Vulnerability to oppression, abuse and social/technological pollution***

This concept refers to the oppression of individuals that have led to people being victims of oppression and feeling abused. With these basic principles of the ecological approach, the helping professions can assist by empowering individuals to overcome these feelings of oppression and abuse. With relevance to the study, female youth sex offenders' behaviours will be explored in order to view their vulnerability to oppression, abuse and social/technological pollution. Once the researcher has confirmed which factors have contributed to their offending, this will aid the helping professions to empower the female youth sex offender. There are three ways in which they could be empowered: (a) the first area of focus might be on the youth, while seeking to develop their problem-solving, coping and developmental capacities; (b) the second area of focus might be on the relationship between the

youth and the system that they interact with and that link the youth to the needed resources, services and opportunities; and (c) the third area of focus might be on the systems themselves, while seeking to reform these systems to meet the needs of the youth sex offender more effectively (Maguire, 2002:18).

### **3.3.1.6 *Healthy and unhealthy habitats and niches***

This concept refers to the habitat and niche. The habitat is the physical environment that the individual lives in and the niche refers to the status a person has in that specific environment. The types of habitats and niches that involve the female youth sex offender will have to be established during this study. From the literature survey one clearly sees that unhealthy habitats and niches might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour, such as a history of child abuse, physical and emotional neglect, poverty, academic difficulties, adjusting to puberty, identity confusion, harbouring feelings of shame, guilt and mistrust, and the like (Hunter et al., 2006:149-153; Moore et al., 2005:7-9; Righthand & Welch, 2005:18-25). The researcher will investigate the habitats and niches of each participant in order to establish which aspects contributed to their offending.

### **3.3.1.7 *Life course***

The life course concept refers to the unique developmental pathways of individuals. Many varied human experiences, cultures, histories and the like lead to differing understandings of the environment. In using the ecological model the researcher will view the youth sex offender as having transitional problems and needs as they move from one life stage to another, such as adjusting to puberty, entering high school or graduating from school (Maguire, 2002:18). When the interviews are transcribed the researcher will ensure that each participant's life story will be accurately retold and this will assist in deriving the female youth sex offender's unique developmental pathway. In addition, this life course will most probably also show the trauma and other experiences that contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour.

## **3.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

Benokraitis (2011:35) explains that the ecological perspective has four interlocking systems that mould developmental growth. Interlocking systems are referred to as systems that range from the most immediate, such as family or peers, to other

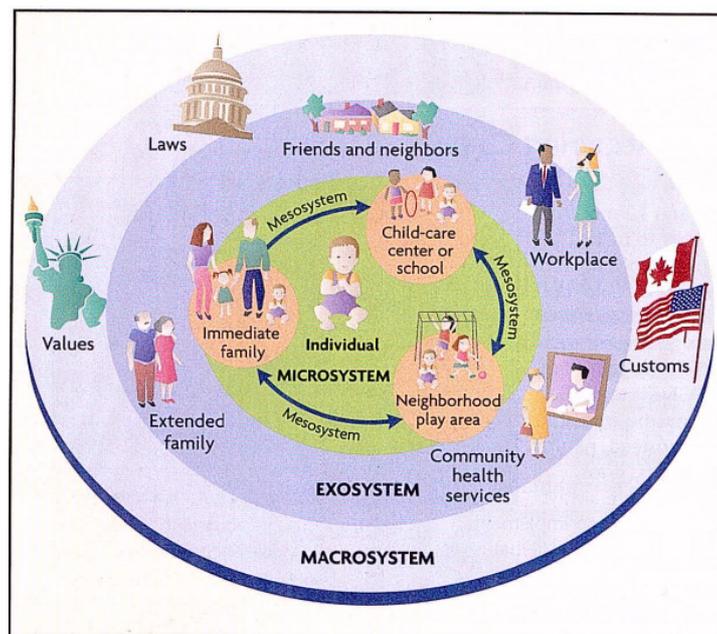
contexts in which the youth are not directly involved in, such as technological changes or ideological beliefs. The systems are described as follows:

- The microsystem consists of the interconnected behaviours, roles and relationships that influence the youth’s daily life (for example their parents and peers).
- The mesosystem comprise the relationships existing in different settings (for example the home and school).
- The exosystem is made up of settings or events that the youth does not experience directly, but that can affect their development (for example a parent’s employment).
- The macrosystem consists of the broader society and culture that embraces all other systems.

These interlocking systems are important and require further deliberation in relation to the female youth sex offender and subsequently it will be discussed in more detail.

The youth’s characteristics link with the environmental factors at multiple levels to mould development in different and unique ways (Berk, 2009:31). The diagram below clearly conveys the structure of the individual’s environment and the interactions between the different systems that influence the individual.

**Figure 3: Structure of the environment in ecological systems theory**



(Adapted from: *Child Development* in Berk, 2009:28)

With reference to the above-mentioned diagram, the structure of the environment in ecological systems theory is as described below.

### 3.4.1 Microsystem

The **microsystem** is the innermost level of the environment comprising of interaction and activity patterns in the youth's immediate surroundings. At this level all relationships are reciprocal, for example the adults affect the youth's behaviour and at the same time the youth's characteristics, physical attributes and personality also affect the adult's behaviour towards the youth. Simultaneously third parties which include other individuals in the microsystem also influence the quality of the two-person relationship (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36; Berk, 2009:27). When these relationships are supportive, the interaction is enhanced and when the relationships are strained, the interaction is worsened or even severed.

### 3.4.2 Mesosystem

The **mesosystem** is made up of connections between the microsystems such as the home, schools and neighbourhoods (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36; Berk, 2009:27). For example, the youth's academic performance is not just affected by the classroom but also by the involvement of the parent in the youth's studies and the resources the youth has access to after school. Research found that family-neighbourhood connections are especially important for economically disadvantaged youth (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36; Berk, 2009:28). Disadvantaged youth are most dependent on their immediate surroundings, unlike affluent families who can afford to transport their children to the necessary support and resources they need.

### 3.4.3 Exosystem

The **exosystem** consists of the social settings that involve the parents, such as formal organisations like their places of employment, health and welfare services, and/or religious institutions. These organisations indirectly affect the youth. For instance when a parent experiences problems at work, is retrenched or his/her services are terminated, these aspects have an influence on their child or children (Berk, 2009:27).

### 3.4.4 Macrosystem

The **macrosystem** includes the cultural values, laws, customs and resources that the youth has access to in the country. The environment is not a static force, but an

ever-changing system which affects children (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36; Berk, 2009:29). A South African example would be the new Child Justice Act (No. 75 of 2008). The correct implementation of this Act is a relevant resource for youth in trouble with the law, as it advocates the best practices for treating children in conflict with the law.

### **3.5 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS: WAYS IN WHICH THE FEMALE YOUTH SEX OFFENDER INTERACTS WITH HER ENVIRONMENT**

Two concepts that are relevant in the social context are *habitat* and *niche* (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 2002:18; Maguire, 2002:92).

As already discussed in paragraph 3.3.1.6, a *Habitat* refers to the physical and social settings within cultural contexts. Rich *habitats* provide resources in which individuals can grow and develop. However, poor *habitats* lack resources and growth and development is stifled. For example, the current literature study shows that in the female youth sex offender's life course there may be a lack of support and encouragement from significant others and due to this there may be a deficiency in vital resources and this may result in dysfunctional behaviour (Hunter et al., 2006:149-151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19-21). The term *niche* refers to the status one occupies in the community. In relation to the study, a female youth sex offender will find her *niche* in society by achieving self-respect and a stable sense of identity. Nevertheless, this could only occur when positive opportunities for human needs exist in the community. The helping professions dealing with female youth sex offenders must do everything possible to promote social justice which may lead to expanding opportunities and the creation of appropriate *niches* for female youth sex offenders (Hepworth et al., 2002:18, 255). During the analysis of the interviews, the researcher will indicate the habitats and niches that were available to each female youth sex offender and once these habitats and niches are identified one would be able to make the relevant recommendations.

### **3.6 ASSESSMENT FROM AN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS APPROACH**

Hepworth et al. (2006:18) stress that assessment from an ecological systems approach requires a focus on the youth and their total context. The table below

represents the diverse systems involved in interaction between youth and their environments.

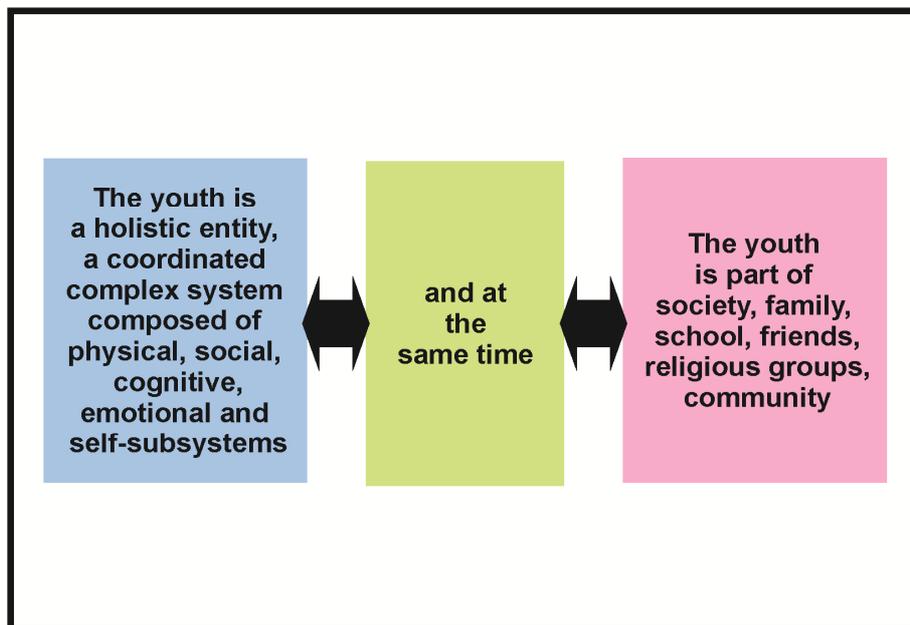
**Table 4:**  
**Assessment from an ecological systems approach**

<b>Subsystems</b>	<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Physical environment</b>
Biophysical	Parent-child	Institutions	Housing
Cognitive	Marital	Schools	Neighbourhoods
Emotional	Family	Communities	Buildings
Behavioural	Friends		Water
Motivational	Neighbours		Weather
			Climate

(Adapted from: Direct Social Work Practice: Theory and Skills, Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2006:18)

According to Newman and Newman (1997:131) the youth is viewed as a holistic entity, made up of a complex system including physical, cognitive, emotional, social and self-subsystems. In addition, the youth is also a part of a family, school, sport team and the like. Furthermore Newman and Newman (1997:131-132) argued that development is affected directly by the interactions that take place within a single microsystem, for example in a family, and by similarities and differences in patterns of interaction that manifests across the systems, like mesosystems amongst others. The researcher concludes that although the youth is a complete individual system, at the same time the youth is a component of a larger system. For this reason, researchers need to approach the study of youth development from different perspectives, highlighting the critical resources which support an adaptive process of reorganisation and growth (Newman & Newman, 1997:132). The researcher drew the following diagram in order to explain this complexity:

**Figure 4: The youth as a holistic entity**



(Adapted from: *Childhood and Adolescence* in Newman & Newman, 1997:131)

The ecological approach integrates both reform and treatment by conceptualising and highlighting the dysfunctional relationships between female youth sex offenders and their physical social environments (Zastrow, 2003:18). The ecological model views youth as having transitional problems and needs as they transgress from one stage to another, such as emotional difficulties with significant others during the adolescent phase.

### **3.6.1 How the ecological systems approach relates to the assessment of the female youth sex offender**

Righthand and Welch (2005:19-21) maintains that the female youth sex offender's family is usually characterised by problems such as divorce, poor parenting skills, domestic violence, poor quality of relationships, substance abuse and lack of basic care and safety, just to mention a few. The researcher explains the framework further by dissecting three aspects and relating these aspects to the existing literature regarding female youth sex offenders.

#### **3.6.1.1 *The female youth sex offender's developmental factors***

Literature regarding female youth sex offending alludes to the developmental needs and emotional status of the female youth sex offender. The female youth sex

offender is often viewed as a person with a lack of health and self-care skills which obviously hamper the developmental needs and emotional status of the youth (Benokraitis, 2011:393; Hunter et al., 2006:153-155). Emotional and behavioural problems are also viewed as high risk factors for female youth sex offenders. Youth maltreatment entails a broad range of behaviours that place youth at risk or result in serious harm, which may include abuse and neglect (Benokraitis, 2011:392; Hunter 1999:27; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19-20). The acts or failure to act responsibly by parents, caregivers or teachers are seen as maltreatment. In addition, maltreatment can also be viewed as the lack of relevant school structure and community resources that contribute to poor school performance which may lead to poor or no education. Lack of extramural activities breeds time for idleness and therefore enables issues to arise from this. Righthand and Welch (2005:23) mention that youth who sexually offend tend to experience school and academic difficulties. The difficulties include disruptive behaviour, truancy, academic problems, learning disabilities and placement in special classes. Academic functioning is not only determined by intellectual or neurological functioning, but the parental level of education and support, truancy and other variables are also taken into consideration. However some youth who sexually offended were found to do well in school, for example 32% of the offenders in one sample were described as above average in their academic performance (Righthand & Welch, 2005:13). Cognitive distortions and attributions were some factors observed in abused youth and this may have relevance for youth sex offenders who have been maltreated. For example, it was noted that abused youth exhibit less empathy than non-abused youth, have trouble recognising appropriate emotions in others, and have difficulty taking or understanding another person's perspective. This observation is consistent with research indicating that cognitive distortions, such as blaming the victim, were associated with increased rates of sexual offending among youth sex offenders (Hunter et al., 2006:149-151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:23).

Research shows that youth offenders with sexual behaviour problems have significant deficits in social competence. In addition, inadequate social skills, shyness, poor peer relationships and social isolation are some of the difficulties identified in these youth offenders (Benokraitis, 2011:397; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1). Youth who have sexually offended have fewer peer attachments and feel less positive attachments to their schools compared with other youth offenders. Righthand and Welch (2005:20) stated that this and other research point to the

prominence of isolation and poor social adjustment as distinctive characteristics of youth sex offenders.

Research portrays that youth who commit sex offences generally have had previous consenting sexual experiences (Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). It was also found that sometimes their experiences have exceeded the experiences of a control group of youths who have not committed sex offences. For example, in a study of 1,600 youth sex offenders described by 90 independent contributors from 30 states, it was found that only one-third of the youth professed sex as a manner to demonstrate love or caring for another person. The other youth sex offenders professed sex as a way to dissolve anger (9.4%), experience power and control (23.5%) and others professed that it was a way in which to hurt, degrade, or punish others (8.4%)". When investigating the role of pornography in youth sex offending, one study found higher rates of exposure to hardcore, sexually explicit magazines among youths who sexually offended, compared to youths who committed other offences. Another study found that exposure to pornographic material at a young age was common among youths who sexually offended. Additionally, high rates of exposure to pornography have been found in girls who have committed sex offences. Although male sex offenders often have high rates of child maltreatment histories, female youth usually evidenced higher and more severe maltreatment histories (Righthand and Welch, 2005:25).

### **3.6.1.2 Family and environmental factors**

Family and environmental factors include family history, housing, employment, income and community resources. Poor relationships with family members, and/or peers and strong relationships with deviant peers such as gangs are seen throughout the youth sex offender's life trajectory. Sexual abuse, exposure to pornography and endless time spent on the internet, violent and seductive music videos and television are prevalent issues associated with family and environmental factors relating to female youth sex offenders (Hunter et al., 2006:149-150). According to Benokraitis (2011:395-397) poverty is one of the best predictors of youth abuse and neglect. Youth from poor families are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected. Disadvantaged and poverty stricken families and neighbourhoods are breeding grounds for exposure to all forms of sexual abuse and wrong or inadequate sex education. An ecological model helps focus on maladaptive interpersonal problems, needs in families, communication processes and dysfunctional relationship patterns (Zastrow, 2003:19). With regard to family and environmental factors, one should view

the interaction between the subsystem, interpersonal and physical environments that ultimately will affect the youth. The use of family secrets as a coping mechanism can in turn contribute to sexual offending behaviour. “Sex offending has at a minimum both a sexual component and a deception component” (Baker et al, 2003:105). One evidently sees the interaction between the youth sex offender and the family, also known as the microsystem.

### **3.6.1.3 Capacity of the parent or caregiver**

The capacity of the parent or caregiver entails the basic care, ensuring safety, emotional warmth, stimulation and guidance for the youth. Neglect can be defined as the failure by parents or caregivers to provide the youth with basic necessities (Benokraitis, 2011:393). Righthand and Welch (2005:20-21) found that family factors such as separations, significant stress, family instability, substance abuse, psychopathology, criminality and violence were prevalent in some of the youth who sexually offended. This study will explore these factors in female youth sex offenders’ lives and examine how these factors affected their lives. In some families it was found that some parents were described as disengaged and physically and/or emotionally inaccessible and distant. Stimulation neglect is when parents or caregivers do not hug, play or engage in activities that encourage the youth’s development (Benokraitis, 2011:393). High rates of ongoing family conflict are common among youth offenders who sexually abused younger children. Due to these difficulties, these youths may experience ongoing stress and may be less able to form positive attachments and relationships (Maguire, 2002:91). Furthermore, a history of personal substance abuse and family substance abuse was also identified in youth sex offenders. Youth whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are three times more likely to be abused and five times more likely to be neglected (Benokraitis, 2011:395, 405). The researcher will explore this theme when interviewing the female youth sex offenders and subsequently provide the relevant recommendations.

## **3.7 CONCLUSION**

The ecosystem approach as a theoretical framework was discussed in detail and focuses on the following: mention was made of the overview of a few of the theories relating to child development. Furthermore, the researcher motivated the reasons for choosing the ecological systems approach. Additionally the structure of the environment in the ecological systems theory was discussed and the assessment

from an ecological approach was dissected in order to understand how this relates to existing literature with regard to female youth sex offending. The female youth sex offender's developmental factors, the family and environmental factors and the capacity of the parent or caregiver was further analysed. Subsequently chapter 4 will focus on the methodology and ethical aspects of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE ETHICAL ASPECTS

#### 4.1 Goal and objectives of the study

In this study the researcher explored the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. The following objectives were formulated in order to reach the goal:

- a) To theoretically conceptualise the context of female youth sex offending.
- b) To explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.
- c) To formulate recommendations to address female youth sex offending more effectively.

Consequently the research question was constructed as follows:

What are the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the reasons for their offending?

#### 4.2 Research approach

In this research project, qualitative research was conducted to explore the intricate problem of female youth who sexually offend and to understand their perceptions regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. The researcher chose to embark on a qualitative research approach since the study of youth who sexually offend is a complex issue that would need a holistic understanding. The researcher will be guided by the ecological systems perspective to aid in researching this problem. Furthermore, the researcher will ensure that the purpose, question and methods of research will all be interconnected so that the study appears as a cohesive whole, rather than isolated parts (Creswell, 2007:41).

#### 4.3 Type of research

The need for an explorative study arises out of a lack of basic information on a new topic of interest (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). Although research pertaining to male youth sex offenders has been conducted, there is a lack of information relating to female youth who sexually offend. This underlines the importance of an explorative study that investigates the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the driving force behind their criminal behaviour.

Furthermore, by exploring the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending, practitioners could be better equipped to deal with these offenders in practice. Therefore the type of research most suited for this study is applied research, as it is aimed at solving problems and helping practitioners to effectively accomplish tasks (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95).

#### **4.4 Research design and methods**

The product of the collective case study design is the in-depth description of cases (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:312). The researcher collected the data from the participants by conducting semi-structured interviews with the female youth sex offenders who were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic.

##### **4.4.1 Research design**

The researcher chose the collective case study design, as this design refers to the fact that the researcher was instrumental in collecting data from a number of cases. The purpose of the collective case study is to increase the researcher's understanding regarding a social issue or the population that is being researched. The researcher's primary interest is the group of cases with the individual case being the secondary interest. Furthermore, the collective case study design enables the researcher to make comparisons between cases. The cases that were examined will be compared and the relevant themes that emerge from these case studies will assist the researcher in exploring the motivations of female youth sex offenders. The core product of this research consists of in-depth descriptions of the perceptions of eight female youth sex offenders who were willing to participate in this study (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320-322).

##### **4.4.2 Research population, sample and sampling method**

The population of the study is all the female youth sex offenders who were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic. The research managers, social workers and secretaries at the Teddy Bear Clinic in Parktown and Soweto assisted the researcher in identifying and contacting the research participants and 12 participants that comply with the following sampling criteria confirmed appointments for the interviews:

- The participants were between the ages of 12 and 18 years at the time of the offence.
- The participants were female.

- The participants committed a sexual offence.
- The participants were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic for therapeutical intervention.

However, on the scheduled dates of the interviews at the Parktown offices, two of the participants rescheduled to meet the researcher at the Teddy Bear Clinic in Soweto instead of Parktown due to transport problems. At the interviews in Soweto, four of the participants that initially confirmed appointments for the interviews did not attend. Thus interviews were conducted with eight research participants.

Sampling procedures can be divided into two groups, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Strydom, 2011b:226). Probability sampling is based on randomisation, therefore each person in the population had the same chance of being chosen. Non-probability sampling on the other hand refers to sampling done without randomisation (Strydom & Delport, 2011:391). In this study the researcher used non-probability sampling. The researcher applied the purposive sampling method by finding eight participants that fit the sampling criteria (Neuman, 2006:219). Furthermore, the sample consisted of individuals that fulfilled the sampling criteria that was being studied (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). According to Strydom (2011b:232) purposive sampling is also known as judgemental sampling, and is therefore based on the judgement of the researcher. This requires that each research participant is chosen based on the unique position of that individual. Bachman and Schutt (2011:108) state that purposive sampling is applicable in studies where the entire population of a limited group or subset of a population is included. In this study all the participants that were included in the sample were female youth sex offenders between the ages of 12 and 18 years. Due to the small number of female youth sex offenders in this category, all the research participants that were identified at the Teddy Bear Clinic (Parktown and Soweto), who were willing to participate in the study and fit the sampling criteria were included in this study.

#### **4.4.3 Data collection**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews which were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix C) (Greeff, 2011:351-353). The researcher used exploratory questions to discover what the perceptions of female youth sex offenders were regarding the factors that contributed to their offending, in order to obtain an insider's perspective and rich data pertaining to female youth sex offending. Greeff (2011:352) confirms that when one utilises the semi-structured

interview schedule as a guide, participants share more closely in the direction that the interview takes and they could introduce an issue that the researcher had not thought of. Open-ended questions that were unambiguous, non-judgemental and unbiased were used in this study (Greeff, 2011:352). In addition, the researcher requested permission (Appendix A & B) from the parents and participants to make an audio recording of each session. These forms were given to the social workers who ensured completion from parents and participants before the researcher met with each participant. Before each interview the researcher confirmed with each participant that they understood the content of the documents that they had to sign and that they agree to the audio recording. All the participants agreed to the audio recording of the interviews.

#### **4.4.4 Data analysis**

With regard to the data analysis, the interviews were transcribed from the digital voice recording. The transcribed interviews were analysed and emerging themes and sub-themes were identified. Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:397) confirm that data analysis refers to bringing structure, order and meaning to the collected data. The researcher analysed the data collected for this study in order to bring structure, order and meaning to the themes and sub-themes that emerged. These themes and sub-themes were further analysed to interpret the empirical evidence. After conducting the interviews, the researcher analysed the data by following the steps discussed below (Bachman & Schutt, 2011:254):

- Organising and detailed reading: after organising and preparing the data, the researcher read through the data several times in order to gain a sense of the information and to reflect on the general themes that emerged.
- Themes and descriptive information: the researcher organised this material into relevant sections and then generated a description of the themes. The themes were then used to draw up descriptive information about each participant. The researcher was careful not to make judgements since qualitative research is so intense and personal in nature and in addition she made every effort to remain open to information that was provided by the participants (Campher, 2006:99). According to Dastile (2004:153) the process of putting aside one's own beliefs and not making judgement refers to a technique called bracketing.
- Interpreting of information: the researcher made an interpretation of the data by presenting a scientific report and thereby contributing to the body of

knowledge in this field (Creswell, 2003:190-195). In order to formulate and convey the findings as accurately and objectively as possible, the researcher correlated the analysed data of this study to the literature she reviewed in chapter 2. Strydom and Delport (2011:278-279) cautions researchers that the information must be formulated and conveyed clearly and unambiguously to avoid or minimise misappropriation by subjects, the general public and even colleagues.

- Presenting and concluding: the last process of data analysis includes the conclusion and recommendations for further research. This information together with the findings will be provided in chapter 5 of this report.

#### **.4.4.5 Trustworthiness**

Neuman (2006:196) mentions dependability or consistency as one way of ensuring that qualitative researchers record their observations accurately. The researcher interviewed the participants using an interview schedule to ensure that she recorded the observations consistently. Qualitative researchers are interested in the truthfulness and authenticity of the participants. According to Neuman (2006:196) authenticity of the participants refers to a fair, honest and balanced report of their social life from the perspective of the participant who lives it every day. The researcher utilised peer debriefing with fellow colleagues and experts who have experience with the topic, population or methods being utilised (Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006:11). The researcher utilised peer debriefing to ensure credibility and authenticity and to ensure that the participants were accurately identified and described (Lietz et al. 2006:11; Schurink et al., 2011:419-420).

#### **4.4.6 Pilot study**

A pilot study was undertaken with a female youth participant who had sexually offended and had been diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic. The qualitative element of the information is important because the emphasis in interviewing is placed on collecting individual and detailed in-depth information (Strydom & Delport, 2011:391). Therefore, the pilot study was conducted in order to identify any problems that might arise during the field work phase, determine whether the relevant data can be obtained from the participants, and assist in the estimation of time and costs that will be involved in this study (Strydom & Delport, 2011:395). From this pilot study one issue was identified and immediately rectified:

- The youth did not understand certain words and statements in some of the questions.

In order to address this issue the exploratory questions, statements and probing were revised accordingly. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the relevant words and statements were explained in detail to each participant and an appropriate example was given when asking the particular question.

Due to the absence of four of the participants who confirmed attendance but did not turn up for the interviews, the researcher did not interview as many research participants as was envisaged. Due to the lack of research participants who partook in the research, as well as the richness of information obtained from the interviews, the researcher chose to include the pilot study as part of the main study.

## **4.5 ETHICAL ASPECTS**

The researcher is aware that the best interest of the child is of paramount importance and this ensured that she made every effort to fastidiously adhere to all ethical aspects. The following ethical aspects were applicable to this study:

### **4.5.1 The right to anonymity and confidentiality**

Although anonymity cannot be ensured as the research consisted of face-to-face interviews, all data and information obtained was treated with the utmost confidentiality (Babbie, 2007:64-65). The presented data cannot be linked to a specific participant's name as the researcher used pseudonyms. The researcher guarantees confidentiality in that although she is able to identify the given youth's responses, she will not do so publicly. The researcher arranged for the interviews to be done in a private office at the Teddy Bear Clinic.

### **4.5.2 The right to honesty, respect, trust, human dignity and protection against harm**

The researcher ensured that the study was planned in a way that the best interest of the youth was pertinent and excluded any form of dishonesty, disrespect, harm or exploitation. Strydom (2011a:115) states that avoidance of harm is not always possible, but that a researcher should do everything possible to ensure that the participants are not exposed to any physical or emotional harm. For the purpose of

this study and during the interviews the researcher did her best to ensure that no harm came to the participants and that ultimately the best interest of the youth was always of paramount importance. As this was a sensitive exploration, the researcher did everything possible to avoid harm as best she could; she informed participants about the content of the interview and gave them the freedom to decide if they want to participate in the study. Although some of the participants cried when divulging sensitive information about their lives, the researcher ensured that there were tissues and water available for each participant. In addition the researcher waited for the participant to brace herself before continuing and also enquired if the participant wanted to continue with the interview. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that a therapist was on hand after every interview to do a debriefing if needed. None of the participants needed debriefing afterwards and in fact some of the participants mentioned that they were grateful and felt comfortable to tell their life stories to an outsider like the researcher, rather than to speak to family.

#### **4.5.3 The right to freedom of choice and full disclosure – informed consent and assent**

As mentioned above, the youth's participation remained voluntary at all times; the researcher ensured them that they were free to withdraw or terminate their part in the research at any stage without fear of prejudice. Participants were given all the necessary information regarding the identity and qualifications of the researcher, the purpose of the research, the methods that will be used, recording of the data, duration, nature of their involvement, and the possible advantages in order for them to make an informed decision of whether to participate or not (Mouton, 2001:244). The researcher obtained permission from the Teddy Bear Clinic offices in both Parktown and Soweto and ensured that informed consent (Appendix A) was obtained from the parents/guardians of the research participants. In addition, the researcher ensured that informed assent (Appendix B) was obtained from the participants prior to participation in the interviews. Furthermore, the research participants' attention was drawn to the fact that adhering to the policy of the University of Pretoria, raw data will be stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology for a period of 15 years.

#### **4.5.5 The competency of the researcher**

While honesty and openness progresses science, science could easily be retarded by ego defences and deception (Strydom, 2011a:123). The researcher showed honesty, competency and responsibility in the way in which she handled this

research project. As this study focuses on a sensitive topic, the researcher did everything in her power to ensure that every aspect of this project was conducted in an ethically correct manner. Proper respect was shown to each participant and the researcher refrained from value judgements about the actions of the participants (Strydom, 2011a:123). In addition the research was conducted under the guidance of a supervisor and co-supervisor from the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria.

#### **4.5.6 Debriefing of participants**

The researcher debriefed the participants by summarising and concluding the interviews. As debriefing of participants is a possible way in which a researcher can assist participants and minimise harm (Strydom, 2011a:122), the researcher ensured that a therapist from the Teddy Bear Clinic was available to offer debriefing services to the participants if they required it after partaking in the interview.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter comprises an exposition of the methodology that was utilised to conduct this study. In addition, the research approach and type of research was explained. Furthermore, the research design and methods were explicitly indicated. The researcher presented a detailed explanation of the ethical aspects that were fastidiously adhered to while conducting this study. Chapter 5 will consist of a detailed exposition of the transcribed data.

## **CHAPTER 5 AN EXPOSITION OF THE TRANSCRIBED DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 EXPOSITION OF THE TRANSCRIBED DATA**

The researcher transcribed the data obtained during the interviews from a digital voice recorder and typed out all the responses given by the participants. Certain extracts from the interviews will be presented in this chapter. Relevant answers to the questions that the researcher posed to the participants during the interviews will be presented verbatim where necessary. The transcribed interviews are confidential, and as such hardcopies are kept confidentially by the researcher and electronic copies are password protected. To ensure confidentiality and due to ethical reasons, the researcher referred to the research participants as Participant A to H. In addition, the researcher omitted and adapted where necessary all identifying information when repeating verbatim responses from the participants. In this way the researcher ensures confidentiality and neutrality in this study in order to avoid specific participants from being linked to individual responses.

After completing the literature review certain themes and sub-themes were identified and based on this knowledge the interview schedule was drawn up. After the transcription of the interviews, the researcher organised the data derived from the interviews and sorted it into the themes and sub-themes. In this chapter, the researcher will first provide a table with a summary of the relevant information pertaining to the themes and sub-themes as discussed by the research participants. In addition the researcher will elaborate on the themes and sub-themes and will link the information obtained during the interviews with the information provided in the literature review in chapter 2 and theoretical framework in chapter 3. Furthermore, where relevant, the information will be substantiated with verbatim quotes from the participants.

The following is a list of the different themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview schedule:

**Table 5:**  
**List of themes and sub-themes**

<b>SECTION A</b>	
Demographic background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Race</li> </ul>
<b>SECTION B</b>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Theme 1: Family and environmental factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic care and safety</li> <li>• Low socio-economic status</li> <li>• Family structure, stability and parenting capacity</li> <li>• Family dynamics and history of family criminality</li> <li>• Quality of relationships with family members</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Developmental needs and emotional status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and self-care skills</li> <li>• Self-esteem and identity</li> <li>• Assertion skills and social presentation</li> <li>• History of personal and family substance abuse</li> </ul>
Theme 3: School structure and community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and school performance</li> <li>• Extramural activities</li> <li>• Relationship with peers and teachers, and the availability of role models</li> <li>• Availability of resources in the community</li> <li>• Exposure to gangsterism</li> </ul>
Theme 4: Sexual abuse and knowledge about sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to pornography and sexting</li> <li>• Influence of the media (television, music and internet)</li> <li>• Exposure to any form of sexual abuse</li> <li>• Exposure to sex education</li> </ul>

### 5.1.1 Demographic background information

The relevant demographic information of the eight participants who participated in this study is summarised as follows:

**Table 6:**  
**Demographic information of participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age at time of offence</b>	<b>Age at time of interview</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
Participant A	13 years	14 years	Female	Black
Participant B	13 years	14 years	Female	Black
Participant C	16 years	17 years	Female	Black
Participant D	15 years	18 years	Female	Black
Participant E	15 years	17 years	Female	Black
Participant F	15 years	16 years	Female	Black
Participant G	12 years	14 years	Female	Black
Participant H	17 years	20 years	Female	Indian

#### 5.1.1.1 Age

The table clearly indicates what the ages were of each participant at the time of the offence and at the time of the interview. The researcher ensured that the age criteria were met in that each participant was between the ages of 12 and 18 years when the offence occurred. When the other participants did not show up for their appointments the researcher enquired about the availability of other participants, but due to the fact that they were younger than 12 years and did not fit the sampling criteria, she was unable to conduct interviews with them.

#### 5.1.1.2 Gender

All the participants met the criteria of gender as they were all female.

#### 5.1.1.3 Race

As indicated in the table, most of the participants' race was Black and one was Indian. Even though Participants E and G referred to themselves as 'South African' and 'Black South African' respectively, the researcher confirms that according to her

knowledge and for the purpose of this study there were 7 Black participants and 1 Indian participant.

### **5.1.2 Theme 1: Family and environmental factors**

With reference to existing literature and in accordance with this study, the researcher maintains that a number of factors emerged that could have contributed to female youth sex offending. In order to explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending, the author investigated the following high risk factors that could have led to their offending. The study focused on the three levels, namely the micro, mezzo and macro levels of high risk factors. The study confirmed the following:

- Some of the micro level contributing factors was behaviour problems and substance abuse.
- The mezzo level contributing factors consisted of family related problems, peer group pressure, and other social relationship problems.
- Some of the macro level factors consisted of the different environments that the youths were exposed to, such as their community and their physical environments.

After the data analysis was conducted for this study, the researcher compiled a summary of the family and environmental factors that may have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour:

**Table 7:**  
**Family and environmental factors**

	<b>Basic care, safety and stability</b>	<b>Family structure, stability and parenting capacity</b>	<b>Family dynamics and history of family criminality</b>	<b>Quality of relationships with family members</b>
Participant A	She did not feel well-cared for and there was no stability in the family home. Her parents had lost their jobs.	Her family consists of a father, mother and three siblings (one brother and two sisters). However, due to poverty she was sent to stay in a Children's Home to complete her studies. The family moved away to a place she has never been, but they visit her at the Home.  Her mother never finished school and she did not know about her father's schooling.	She felt happy to be with her parents, but preferred to live in the Children's Home even though she missed her family.  Her mother and father had a violent fight and the police were called in. Her father was arrested for the night as he assaulted his pregnant wife.  Her father was in trouble with the law a few times and was in and out of jail.	She never really liked her father. She liked her mother, her three siblings, and a cousin from her extended family. Her father irritated her when he got drunk and would come home late. She liked her mother more as she could talk to her about everything.
Participant B	She lived in an unstable home, felt very unsafe and not cared for. She felt lonely, stressed and unhappy.	Her family consists of a father, stepmother, a blood sister and step-siblings (a brother and a sister). However, due to her father selling drugs and being arrested she was removed from the family home and placed in a Children's Home. After the father's release from prison she was sent to a Place of Safety.	She was disgusted with her family and felt that her father was not doing his job as a father.  Her father and stepmother had a violent fight and he assaulted the stepmother.  Both she and her father left their family home and she had no contact with her mother from a very young age. Her relationship with her stepmother was not good. Her father was in trouble with the law for selling drugs and was arrested and imprisoned for five years. She has no contact with them any longer and had heard that they are divorced.	Her relationship with her father and stepmother was described as chaotic. Her mother was left in another country and she felt if her mother was with her, her mother would have done a better job of taking care of her than her father. She had no relationship with extended family.

Participant C	<p>She had an unstable home as she moved around a lot. She is unable to recall all the places they have lived.</p> <p>Although she said she felt safe, she had to move into a Children's Home due to the family struggling financially.</p>	<p>Her family consists of a father, mother and siblings (a sister and a brother).</p> <p>Her father is a construction worker and her mother is a domestic worker. She was unsure about their level of education.</p>	<p>She felt that her parents were hard working and wanted to give her a better future.</p> <p>Her father fought with her mother when he was drunk, but she did not know why the fights happened as she was told not to involve herself with their issues.</p> <p>She was unsure if any of her family members were ever in trouble with the law.</p>	<p>Her relationship with her father was a good one and she felt that she could say anything to him. She did not have a good relationship with her mother, as she was not home often due to being a domestic worker. She had a good relationship with her sister, but couldn't talk to her brother as he was too young. She had no relationship with extended family.</p>
Participant D	<p>She felt well-cared for and safe, but didn't understand what a stable home meant. After explaining this concept to her she mentioned that she lived with her mother and two brothers and then moved in with her sister and her sister's husband for a few years to be closer to school.</p>	<p>The family structure consisted of two separate homes: The first home was with her mother and two brothers and the second home consisted of her sister and her sister's husband. Her mother doesn't work, but paid for her schooling with grant money she receives and with rental money that she receives from renting rooms.</p> <p>The sister and brother-in-law both finished school and the brother-in-law completed a degree, but she could not recall what degree it was. He did have a job and was working.</p>	<p>She felt that family are people who are always there for her and they try their best to make her happy.</p> <p>She mentioned that at her sister's home, she witnessed a fight when her brother-in-law hit her sister.</p> <p>Her cousin is the only family member who has been in trouble with the law. It was because he pointed a firearm at his girlfriend. She mentioned that he spent about two years in prison, but that he had since been released.</p>	<p>She had a good relationship with her mother and explained that her mother would support her at school and attend her school activities.</p> <p>She did not know her father at all.</p> <p>The relationship with her brothers was good, but she had conflict with her sister. There were no relationships with extended family.</p>
Participant E	<p>She did not feel safe at home and she felt she was not well-cared for.</p>	<p>The family consisted of a father, mother, a sister and her own daughter. She also</p>	<p>She reported that her father used to beat her mother up badly in front of them, but that the</p>	<p>Her relationship with her father is bad. She feels it is due</p>

		<p>has three step-siblings (two sisters and a brother).</p> <p>Her father completed matric, but her mother only completed standard 8.</p> <p>Her father works, but she was not sure what he did. She assumed he was a driver because he liked driving. Her mother was a housewife.</p>	<p>beatings have stopped now. Once during a violent fight, her father had to go to the hospital because he suffers from a heart condition.</p> <p>Three of her uncles have been in trouble with the law. They were arrested and spent time in prison. She explained that one of the uncles beat up people and the other uncle was arrested for attempted murder.</p>	<p>to her falling pregnant and that he is disappointed in her. She feels that her mother only provides love, but that there is a satisfactory relationship between them. She has good relationships with all her siblings and a satisfactory relationship with extended family members. She also has a good relationship with her 'baby daddy,' that's the father of her daughter.</p>
Participant F	<p>She feels very well-cared for and safe. She also feels that she is part of a stable family.</p>	<p>Her family consists of her mother, two siblings (sisters), three aunts, grandfather and the grandmother who visits sometimes.</p> <p>She explained that she lives in a massive house with different rooms outside and inside. She shares a room with her mother and her sisters.</p> <p>Her mother did not complete school, but has obtained a college certificate. She is a baker and owns a tuck-shop. One of her sisters completed her schooling and works and studies electrical engineering at the same time.</p> <p>Her two aunts do hairdressing, but did not complete their schooling.</p>	<p>She was happy that she was part of this family and she felt that her family was a very happy family.</p> <p>She mentioned that there are a lot of fights between her aunt and her boyfriend, and then her mother gets involved. Once the aunt's old boyfriend and his new girlfriend came to fight with the aunt and then the girlfriend fainted and had to go to the hospital.</p> <p>Her mother and grandmother fights and as far as she can remember the police had to be called in two or three times.</p> <p>Her mother has been in jail for a night due to a fight with the mother's friend, but the grandmother went to the station to bail her out.</p>	<p>Her relationship with her father is non-existent. Her relationship with her mother is very good and she feels that although her mother is strict, she is very supportive. Her relationship with her eldest sister is good but strict, and the relationship with her little sister is strained as they always fight because the baby sister takes her belongings. She has a very good relationship with extended family, especially her two grandmothers</p>

				and uncles.
Participant G	<p>She lived in an unstable home and seems to move from place to place. Her mother died when she was only five years old. She mentioned that she felt cared for and safe, but her appearance did not corroborate this and neither did the interview.</p>	<p>Due to her mother passing away in 2005, she moved in with her eldest sister who was recently fired from her job and is now unemployed. She has a father who lives in a rural area and only sends money from time to time. She was unsure as to whether her sister completed her matric and she only mentions later in the interview that she has another sister who lives in the same area and a brother who passed away in 2010.</p>	<p>She felt that family are people with whom one stays and with whom one can discuss their problems.</p> <p>She mentioned that her father is always fighting with her aunt, but that they were not violent fights and none of her family members were in trouble with the law.</p>	<p>She seems to have a distant relationship with her father. She visits sometimes and she would call him if she needed something for school. She mentioned that she had a good relationship with her mother, but the researcher concluded that most of their time together consisted of Participant G visiting her mother in hospital.</p>
Participant H	<p>She lived with extended family and there was constant conflict. She admitted that she did not feel safe when she lived with them and she was scared of her aunt.</p>	<p>Her family consisted of her mother, brother, granny (her late father's mother), aunt (her father's sister) and the aunt's son who is a year younger than her.</p> <p>Her mother wrote matric, but failed. Despite this her mother works as a bookkeeper.</p> <p>Her father was shot and killed when she was 11 years old. He was a tailor. Her brother was in school and her granny and aunt did not work.</p>	<p>She suffered constant conflict in the home. This conflict contributed to behavioural problems that led to Participant H making some bad choices and getting into trouble with the law.</p> <p>Her boyfriend also got into trouble with the law, but she confirmed that no one else in her family was ever in trouble with the law.</p>	<p>Her relationship with her mother was a difficult one and they had not spoken for a while. However the relationship is improving. She mentioned that she had a very good relationship with her father before he died. Her relationship with her brother was good and she also had a good relationship with her boyfriend. The conflict relationships were with her uncle (father's brother), her aunt (father's sister), her cousin (aunt's son) and her granny</p>

				(father's mother). This constant conflict led to many problems in Participant H's life trajectory and this is explained further in the other themes.
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Research findings confirm that female youth sex offenders' families stood in the way of them being able to form positive self-images and healthy attachments (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35). It was found according to the participants that negative influences on their self-concepts and life trajectory most likely contributed to them making unwise decisions that led them to commit crime (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:22; Najman et al., 2009:371). Noteworthy examples of these negative influences were reported by Participant D, E and H. They mentioned that their experiences pertaining to negative self-concepts and the negative influences of peers, alcohol and conflict with family and extended family respectively could have contributed to their offending. In addition it was confirmed that in a country as diverse as South Africa the many cultural and socio-economic differences, as well as poverty issues unique to the country, might be some of the contributory factors related to youth who sexually offend (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:31). Most of the participants in this study reported that they lived in low socio-economic areas and six of the eight participants were forced to move from their family homes due to poverty, conflict with parents or criminality of a parent.

This study investigated the model mentioned in Rich (2009:17), namely the risk factors that are considered to be both endogenous and exogenous in relation to female youth sex offenders and how these factors contribute to their offending. This model further explained that risk resides within the individual and the environment, resulting in an emergent level of risk. The endogenous factors reside within the individual and include attitudes, sexual drive, capacity for empathy, sexual interests, and elements such as biology and social development experiences. Exogenous factors reside in the environment and may include elements such as peer group relationships, domestic violence, social messages and family functioning, amongst others. Taking this model into consideration the researcher focussed on the following risk factors in this study:

- **Family and environmental factors**

This study confirmed that family and environmental factors such as family history, housing, employment, income and community resources most probably played major roles in contributing to the female youth sex offender's behaviour. Poor relationships with family members are seen throughout the youth sex offender's life trajectory. Factors such as chaotic and dysfunctional families, family instability, substance abuse, psychopathology, criminality and violence have been found to be prevalent in female youth sex offenders' families (Booyens et al., 2013:41; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). This led the researcher to investigate the capacity of the parent or caregiver.

- **Capacity of the parent or caregiver**

As mentioned previously in paragraph 3.6.1.3 the lack of parent or caregiver capacity was a serious issue that contributed to female youth sex offending. Existing literature explained that neglect can be defined as the failure by parents or caregivers to provide the youth with basic necessities (Benokraitis, 2011:393). This study found that family dynamics such as separations, significant stress, family instability, substance abuse, criminality and violence were prevalent in some of the youth who sexually offended. This study explored these factors in the female youth sex offenders' lives and examined how these factors affected them. In some families it was found that some parents were described as disengaged and physically and/or emotionally inaccessible and distant. In addition a report of high rates of on going family conflict was rampant among the female youth sex offenders. Literature highlights the fact that aggressive and violent behaviour in female youth is linked to family and social factors such as social and financial deprivation; harsh and inconsistent parenting; marital problems; physical and sexual abuse; alcoholism; drug abuse; and poor attachment to significant others (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2). Furthermore it was found that female youth sex offenders experienced on going stress and were less able to form positive attachments and relationships. The empirical findings of this study found that a history of personal and family substance abuse was also identified in female youth sex offenders' life trajectories and will be discussed in more detail in paragraph 5.1.3.4.

Hendriks and Bijleveld (2006:35), as well as Righthand and Welch (2005:20-21), found that family factors such as separations, significant stress, family instability, chaotic and dysfunctional families, substance abuse, criminality and violence were common in some youth sex offenders' lives. This study explored these factors in female youth sex offenders' lives and examined how these factors affected their lives. The following data analysis of the transcribed interviews will indicate how family and environmental factors could have contributed to deviant behaviour in the female youth sex offender's life trajectory.

#### **5.1.2.1 Basic care and safety**

Participant A felt that she was not well-cared for and she did not feel safe at home. When asked if she felt safe her response was "somehow". Regarding basic care and stability, she answered: "My mother lost her job and also my father lost his job."

Participant B's interview revealed poor basic care and safety; she reported the following: "No... I felt very unsafe... and then my dad and mom used to fight and stuff... then my dad got arrested... I then lived in a flat with my dad and my stepmother... the flat was somewhere in Joburg... then my stepmom and dad never got along... constant fighting... not stable home... my dad got arrested cause they found drugs in his truck... then obviously that's when social workers and people were involved with the story of the house... cause they had to find out if there was a child involved... then I could not stay with my mom alone I need to get a stable place to stay... then... they asked me if I want to go to another place... home of safety... from that home my dad was out of jail... he got arrested, I don't know what year... but he came to fetch me from that home in 2006... He came to fetch me with the social worker from the Home... then we went back to the court and the court said I could not stay with them and I went to the Children's Home..." When probing further the researcher discovered that Participant B lived at the Children's Home for eight years already and that she was very happy there. It was also discovered that Participant B last saw her parents in 2009 and she added that her parents were divorced.

Although Participant C reported that she felt cared for and safe, due to poverty she was forced to leave her family to move into a Children's Home. When she was asked if she was well-cared for she responded as follows: "Yes". When the researcher probed further she replied as follows: "We went to school... they provide us clothing... I enjoyed being with them... bought food... they were working hard to give us a better future... they wanted the best for us... they wanted everything to go well... they did

*the best that they can...*” However, when the researcher asked why she left the family home, she mentioned the following: *“They were struggling financially... they lost the home and then I had to move into the Home.”*

Participant D felt that she was well-cared for and she felt safe at her mother’s home and her sister’s home. However, when the researcher probed further one could come to the conclusion that certain family factors also contributed to Participant D’s behaviour problems, such as the conflict relationship she experienced with her sister.

Participant E mentioned the following when asked if she was well-cared for: *“I would say... I had good support from my parents, but now I feel that I am on my own... from 2011 downwards I would say they cared for me... I am cared for but not financially... I am feeling left alone... I have a shelter and I have something to eat... no moral support now”*. When the researcher probed further about her safety at home, her response was as follows: *“Mmmm... No... to be quite honest no... when something happens outside I can’t open up to my parents... cause they don’t believe me... or cause its of my pride... I don’t know... Ya that’s how I got beaten up badly outside... in the past I would tell my dad and my dad would fight, but now...”* When Participant E was asked if her family had a stable home, she replied: *“...I repeated here 2011 and then during the year I fell pregnant... and then I dropped out of school... and then this year again when I gave birth... last year... I attend back... and then I ended up giving up... eh during second term... because of my financial things...”* When the researcher probed further Participant E revealed the following: *“I used to go to school with only R5... for taxi... I don’t have lunch... I don’t have taxi fare when I come back... When I used to come home I walk... I did ask other relatives at school and the teachers... so I then ended up not going back to school...”*

Participant F mentioned that she was well-cared for and she felt safe even though her family was strict. She responded as follows: *“I say... 99% cause my family is an okay family... I can say they are a very strict family... they don’t allow you to go out alone... I’m not supposed to do wrong stuff... it’s those olden fashion strict families.”*

The researcher found Participant G’s interview very confusing and the researcher attributed this to a few factors such as poor language skills, the trauma she suffered at a very young age, and the death of her mother. Her cognitive skills were also not on par with the other 14 year olds that were interviewed. When Participant G was asked about safety and basic care, she mentioned that she was receiving support

from her father and mother, however her mother had died in 2005. This was her reply when asked if she was being well-cared for by her sister: “Yes... yes”. However, when the researcher probed further, Participant G explained the following: “I mean... he support me... (Your Sister?) Yes...*he buys me food, he buys me clothes... and he gives me money for to go to eat at school... because... ha... I'm sitting with my sister and I live with him... but some people do crime... at streets... but my sister is there all the time.*”

Participant H feels safe in her new home where the family was forced to move to about a year ago. She felt unsafe and not cared for in the home where she lived previously with extended family. She reports the following: “*No! Actually it did start from about when I was 14 years of age already; my uncle them became different towards me... before my dad passed away he said he will be that fatherly type for me... but he wasn't... things just changed... his attitude changed and that's where we stop talking to each other... So ya... she (my aunt) used to chase me around with a cricket bat... so I would hide behind the couch cause I was small... she would just scare me.*”

The researcher maintains that the lack of basic care and safety in most of the participants' responses might have contributed to their sex offending. The sub-theme of poverty and low socio-economic status will be explored in order to see how this sub-theme might have contributed to the female youth sex offending.

#### **5.1.2.2 Low socio-economic status**

According to existing literature, poverty is viewed as one of the best predictors of youth abuse and neglect (Benokraitis, 2011:395). The researcher corroborates that the abused and neglected youth are more likely to present with behaviour problems and this might lead to sex offending. The discussion of the low socio-economic status of each participant is as follows:

- Three of the participants were living at a Children's Home due to problems with poverty and family.
- One of the participants lived in a flat.
- Three of the participants lived in a house.
- One of the participants referred to the place she lived in as “*a dombolo... like a house*”.

Although two of the participants mentioned that they were doing satisfactorily financially, they were also from low socio-economic areas. Most of the participants came from poverty stricken situations and some of the situations were worse than others. Participant A mentions the following: *“During 2010 our family went through poverty... My mother and my father lost their jobs.”*

When Participant B was asked about her socio-economic status, she revealed: *“I felt... I didn’t feel poor, but I felt lonely, stressed, unhappy.”*

When Participant C was asked why she had to leave her family home, she replied: *“They were struggling financially... they lost the home and then I had to move into the Children’s Home.”*

Participant D mentioned that she felt that they were doing satisfactorily, however Participant E reports the following: *“There is a bit of poverty... not that much...”* When the researcher probed further it was found that Participant E only had food at certain times and when asked if she ever went to bed hungry, she replied *“...my mother has tried harder and harder for us to sleep with something to eat... other relatives from other families help.”*

Participant F concluded that her family is self-sufficient as her mother bakes and her aunts are hairdressers. However, after further probing the researcher observed that Participant F struggled with taxi fare to get to the interview and her mother struggles to receive maintenance from her father.

Participant G mentioned that her father sends money sometimes and her sister cares for her. However, when the researcher probed further about what work her sister does, Participant G mentioned that the sister was unemployed as she was fired about two days ago. In addition, the researcher observed that Participant G was not well dressed and struggled to communicate due to poor language skills and other factors that will become clearer throughout the study.

Participant H seemed to be doing better than the other participants financially, but this could be related to her starting a job to supplement her mother’s income. She mentioned the following: *“Firstly my mother she always buys stuff for us like groceries, clothes... something for us... even sometimes she’ll say she’s broke but she will still go out and buy something for us just to make us happy... you see since*

*now that we moved we actually done a lot... when we started we had nothing so he basically... my boyfriend helped us to get couches... my mother then used the money that she saved to buy a fridge, a freezer and this and that... so we actually build ourselves very fast... we actually got a car now... I actually went for my learner's and my licence...I got a job now... so... so... ya... things are looking good..."*

The researcher concludes that most, if not all of the participants are from low socio-economic and disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition this conclusion corresponds with the literature research conducted in chapter 2 of this study. Furthermore, Benokraitis (2011:395-397) refers to youth from poor families as being 22 times more likely to be neglected. Disadvantaged and poverty stricken families and neighbourhoods are breeding grounds for exposure to all forms of sexual abuse and wrong or inadequate sex education. Righthand and Welch (2005:20) report that serious childhood experiences of sexual abuse were associated with persistent sexual offending from childhood into adolescence and it was found that the abused youth offenders began their sex offending while they were very young. In this study the researcher found that the research participants were also of the opinion that disadvantaged and poverty stricken families and neighbourhoods are contributing factors to female youth who commit sex offences. These conclusions lead us to investigate sub-theme 3, namely the family structure, stability and parenting capacity.

### **5.1.2.3 Family structure, stability and parenting capacity**

As mentioned above, Participant B's father was arrested for drugs and her stepmother was unable to care for her. The literature review corroborates the participant's responses, as female sex offenders' families tend to be chaotic and dysfunctional (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35). Participant B referred to her family life as being *"chaotic"*. The following is a recount of her experience: *"I don't think I will describe them as my family... chaotic... ya... yes... and... sad to be born into that family... yes... angry..."* The researcher continued to probe and the participant divulged the following: *"When I was young and I seen all the commotion going on... there is like chaos going on... I had this anger in me... but when I think back... ya... it was like a dream... a journey for me... I had to travel and go through it and I got to a stage in order for me to go on in life I need to forgive my family and I know that the Lord has a plan for me... Hmm... and so... I just thought that I had to forgive them and let go, as they say you can't choose your family as you choose your friends, and not to keep that anger and grudge in me... when all this was going on and when I got to Grade 2 my teachers had a problem with me and said I was bullying... I used to*

*take my anger out on other people.*” Participant B’s interview corroborates the literature study which mentions that anger and attention seeking behaviours are some of the “triggers” that have been described as related to sex offending (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2-3; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19). This confirms that aggressive and violent behaviour in girls are most probably linked to family and social factors and that these factors might contribute to female youth sex offending.

Participant C’s interview portrayed a youth who so desperately just wanted to live with her parents. She felt safe with them and wanted everything to work out well, but unfortunately due to poverty she was sent to live in a Children’s Home. Her interview also revealed that her family moved around a lot; she could not even remember all the places they have lived and the different schools she has attended over the years. She recounted the following: *“We moved around a lot... the one I remember I grew up in... I was about 5, 6, 7 years old... we moved to Gauteng... I forgot the name... then I went to school... I was 12...11 years old... we stayed there for a little while then we moved to... yes and then I attend the school from Grade 4 to Grade 7... when I was in Grade 8 in Girls’ Home...”*

Participant D reported that she felt safe and cared for, however when the researcher probed further it was found that Participant D had to move in with her sister and the sister’s husband in order to attend a good school, because it was far from her mother’s home. She also reported that there was some poverty at her mother’s home. The relationship between Participant D and her sister also contributed to poor parenting capacity, as Participant D mentions the conflict relationship as follows: *“It used to be on and off I think... ah ah... I just felt okay, but then sometimes I felt... I don’t know... like... cause when I used to do some wrong things she couldn’t sit down with me and tell me this was wrong... she would just call my mother and tell her I did this and this... hmmm... it’s not good... I think it’s not good, because I’m no more comfortable around her and I no more trust her...”* This harsh and inconsistent parenting practice correlates with the literature review in chapter 2 (Righthand & Welch, 2005:21) where research indicates that factors such as family instability, substance abuse, disengagement, or parents being physically or emotionally inaccessible to their children might have played a role in youth sex offending. Taking the findings of this study and the literature into account the researcher contends that these factors most likely contributed to Participant D’s sex offending behaviour.

Participant E's interview confirms the literature review with regard to her parents being disengaged and physically or emotionally inaccessible and they did not engage in activities that encouraged her various life trajectories. An example of this was when the researcher asked how she felt being part of her family: *"It's not very good... cause at times when I'm at school, my friends do talk... yoh yesterday my dad give me that... my mom gave me that... we went out to the mall... they bought me this and that... and I will sit and keep quiet... cause that doesn't happen in my home."* When the researcher probed further about what upsets the participant about her family, she reported the following: *"...yes... we are not united... as I said earlier... mind your own business and I'll do the same... yes... and since my pregnancy... yoh! I can say I'm feeling angry and I can't control it... angry and unhappy... yes... and I feel I'm a failure... and I cannot do anything by myself..."*

When Participant F was asked to mention what she thought about her family she replied: *"A loving home, entertainment, bakers and hairstylists, a strict family and good people."*

When Participant H was asked how she felt being part of her family she replied: *"Not very good... because it was a bad relationship... we weren't like a family... my uncle always said we should be like a family and sit together at the table and eat and laugh... but it never use to be like that cause he always used to make it go wrong..."*

The capacity of the parent or caregiver entails being able to provide basic care and emotional warmth, and ensuring safety, stimulation and guidance for the youth. When comparing the information obtained during the interviews from the research participants with the literature review the following is found: neglect can be defined as the failure by parents or caregivers to provide the youth with basic necessities (Benokraitis, 2011:393; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35). In addition Righthand and Welch (2005:20-21) reported that some families of youth sex offenders were viewed as disengaged and emotionally and physically unapproachable to their children. Furthermore, Artz & Nicholson (2009:2) mentioned that research found that there was a link between violent behaviour and aggressive female youth and family and social factors such as harsh and inconsistent parenting and parents experiencing marital difficulties. Stimulation neglect is when parents or caregivers do not hug, play or engage in activities that encourage the youth's development (Benokraitis, 2011:393, Seedat, Van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla & Ratele, 2009:1013). The researcher observed that some of the youth had parents who were disengaged and

physically or emotionally inaccessible and some parents did not engage in activities that encouraged the youth in their various life trajectories. Furthermore, this study concluded that the female youth sex offenders were of the opinion that their parents or caregivers were often unable to provide the basic care and emotional warmth they needed.

#### **5.1.2.4 Family dynamics and history of family criminality**

The summary in the above-mentioned table provides a good indication of the family dynamics and history of family criminality that emerged from each participant's interview. The most noteworthy responses were explored and the following was established:

When Participant A was asked if there had ever been a violent fight at home, she responded: *"Well, there has been with my mother and father but that was in 2004... my brother was born in 2004... the police was called in... my father was arrested just for the night... she was pregnant... he came back home drunk, he hit her."* When the researcher probed further to enquire if any of her family members were in trouble with the law, she reported the following: *"Yes... my father has... several times... I think four or three times... in and out of jail... he likes fighting... yes (fighting with neighbours and friends)... I would say when he is under the influence of alcohol."*

Participant B mentioned constant conflict between the father and stepmother and that the father beat the stepmother once. The father was arrested for drugs and spent five years in prison.

Participant C, D and G mentioned that there were the usual family fights, but nothing too serious. Participant E reported that there were violent fights between her father and mother and some of her family members were in trouble with the law: *"My dad used to beat up my mom so badly in front of us... once in a while... but that doesn't happen anymore... cause it's just mind your own..."* The researcher enquired if any other family members had been in trouble with the law: *"Yes... My two uncles... actually three... they were arrested and they spent time in prison... although I was little by then... they would say let us go to Sun City to visit your uncles... but they out of prison now... but I know the uncle from my father's side used to beat up people... my other uncle for attempted murder..."* Participant E's responses clearly confirms the literature research in chapter 2 as factors such as family instability, criminality

and violence were found to be prevalent in female youth sex offenders' lives (Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21).

Participant F mentions the following with regard to family being in trouble with the law: *"...but where I live... yoh there's lots of fights... not with my family... it's like my aunt's boyfriend comes and then there's fights with my aunt... then my mom gets involve..."* The researcher asked how often these fights occurred and the participant answered as follows: *"...say once after six months... I can say often... how do I put this so you can understand... okay... with my family if you touch one you touch all of us... so if my aunt's boyfriend comes to fight with her... we all come out and fight with him... that's how the fights are... they don't fight with each other violently, but then they fight with the people on the street..."* When asked if any of her family members have ever been arrested or in trouble with the law, she responded: *"No... but mom was in prison for one night... there was a fight between her and her friend... but I don't know what happened... My aunt was also in trouble with the law... you see these police come searching for alcohol... so my mom and my aunties are always drinking, so the police came and thought they selling the alcohol... my grandmother immediately went to the police station and bailed her out..."*

Participant H mentioned that there was only one violent fight she could remember and that was between her father and her uncle. She reports as follows: *"No... besides when my father was alive, he and his brother would fight."* When enquiring if it was a violent fight she answered: *"Yes... they would throw tables and everything..."* She also reported that none of her family members were in trouble with the law except for herself.

The literature review confirmed that certain studies vary with regard to the number of youths whose families experience significant difficulties such as separations, significant stress, or family dysfunction. Factors such as family instability, chaotic and dysfunctional families, substance abuse, psychopathology, criminality and violence have been found to be prevalent in some findings related to female youth sex offending (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). Some findings varied as some offenders came from intact families. However, even when families seem to be intact, some parents were described as being disengaged and physically and/or emotionally inaccessible and distant from their children. The empirical findings of this study and the literature study found high rates of **ongoing** family conflict among female youth who sexually abused younger children. In

addition, various studies suggest that many youths who have sexually offended have been exposed to some form of family dysfunction and may have been cut off from possible sources of emotional support (Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). A few of the participants in this study confirmed that issues relating to family dysfunction and a lack of emotional support from family most likely contributed to their sex offending. Furthermore, it was confirmed that these female sex offenders experience on-going stress and were less able to form positive attachments and relationships. Participant E's example clearly indicates that she did not receive emotional support from her family and this contributed to her experiencing on-going stress. She was also unable to form positive attachments and relationships. Violent behaviour and aggression in girls are linked to family and social factors such as harsh and inconsistent parenting; social and financial deprivation; parents having marital problems; chaotic and dysfunctional families; poor parental mental health; physical and sexual abuse; alcoholism; drug dependency; and poor attachment to significant others (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35). Participant B mentioned that she was deprived of social support from her father and stepmother and she experienced poor attachment to her father and stepmother. In addition, Participant E indicated that she was also deprived of social and financial support and that she experienced poor attachment to her father and mother. Research findings indicate antisocial youth are not islands in time or in space. These youth grew up parented or cared for by particular people in specific traditions, and in communities where some attitudes were discouraged while other attitudes were promoted (Becroft, 2009:6). When taking the literature and the research findings of this study into consideration, the researcher is of the opinion that antisocial parents tend to raise antisocial children. This study confirms that the family and environmental factors most probably contributed to female youth sex offending. Furthermore, in chapter 3 the researcher explored the seven characteristics that epitomise the ecological approach (Maguire, 2002:91-93). One of these characteristics is the life stressors that threaten fit and coping. It was indicated by the empirical findings of this study that the external life stressors fabricated negative exchanges in the level of fit. The literature study in chapter 2 and the empirical findings of this study correlate as follows: life stressors such as separations, significant stress, abuse, neglect, and cognitive distortions are evident in the youth sex offender's life trajectory (Benokraitis, 2011:393-393; Hunter et al., 2006:151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-22). Life stressors such as teenage pregnancy in Participant D and H's lives, the subsequent illegal abortion that Participant H experienced, the murder of Participant H's father, the early death of Participant G's mother, as well as the separations from family for

Participants A, B F and C were possible stressors that threatened the fit and coping strategies of these female youth sex offenders and most likely contributed to their offending.

#### **5.1.2.5 Quality of relationships with family members**

High rates of on-going family conflict are prevalent among youth offenders who sexually abused younger children. Due to these difficulties, these youths may experience on-going stress and may be less able to form positive attachments and relationships (Maguire, 2002:91). The literature research confirmed that significant difficulties such as family instability, separations, chaotic or dysfunctional families, substance abuse, significant stress, and factors such as psychopathology, criminality and violence have been found to be prevalent in female youth who sexually offend (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). There are a few examples that were identified in this empirical study regarding families who experienced significant difficulties and a detailed discussion with the relevant quotes from each interview will follow.

Participant B reported that her family life was chaotic and when the researcher enquired about her relationship with her father she replied as follows: *“I think for my dad he was not doing his job as a dad... he was not playing the dad role model.”* When asked about her mother, she replied: *“I think she would do much better if she was with me... I don’t think I would have been in this situation...”* With regard to her stepmother she mentioned: *“...hmmm... she had a certain time when she was loving to me... but when her kids came... she started saying all these mean words... I’m a devil... I’m all that...”*

When asked how she felt about her family, Participant E answered *“I don’t know what kind of family I have... other families they do go out and eat outside, ai today we don’t want to eat inside, let’s go outside... today let’s go to a gospel concert... my family doesn’t do that.. It’s just mind your own business and I will do the same.”*

The responses of some of the participants varied as some offenders came from intact families like Participant E. However, even when families seem to be intact, some parents were described as being disengaged and physically and/or emotionally inaccessible and distant from their children. This finding corroborates what was found in the literature study. When Participant F was asked about the relationship with her father she replied, *“Ha... there’s no relationship... it never bothered me at all cause I*

*didn't know him... but then my mom took him up for maintenance so when they did that I met him once in Grade 8... when they went to court... then I met him again this year... when they went to court again... cause he's giving my mom troubles with paying... ya." When asked what else she knew about her father, she replied as follows: "...how can I put this... I know... he's got businesses and companies... he's got all that and he's married... what I think of my father he is not responsible enough cause he... you know... has children all over but then he does not maintain them... ya... but at the same time it doesn't bother me cause he's got cash and my mother struggles to get this from him... but he does care for the children my stepmother has... but it's not his children... so this sounds complicated..."*

Participant H experienced conflict and tense relationships which might have also contributed to her problematic behaviour. The constant arguments between her and her uncle and aunt, and the unhealthy competition between her and her cousin can be seen in her following responses: *"I don't know why they don't like me... what is their problem with me... When I was in school and her son was in the same school as me... but I don't know... he decided to take the wrong turn and then we ended up being in the same grade and cause actually I am smaller than him... so because I actually caught up with him they got angry... he fell back and I completed school... and I don't know it just seems to them like its irritating... I'm moving up and he's not... I don't know why my father's family don't like me... it's maybe cause I did better than the son... my uncle used to call meetings with my mother, my granny and my aunty and say that I had no respect for them and wouldn't greet them and the reason why is cause I am on drugs... and even specifically said what drug I am on... he said I am on methanol... I don't even know what methanol is and if I was on drugs I wouldn't have been looking like I am looking... so they would gossip about me and my mom would just say I must go to my room... but I would hear how they are gossiping about me... so when I had the fight with my aunty I also confronted her about them saying I was on drugs... but she denied it..."*

The literature review and the findings of this empirical study suggest that female youths who have sexually offended have been exposed to significant forms of family dysfunction and may have been cut off from possible sources of emotional support and/or financial support (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). These youths may experience on-going stress and may be less able to form positive attachments and relationships. The researcher reiterates that research found that violent behaviour and aggression in girls is linked to family and social factors

such as chaotic and dysfunctional families; social and financial deprivation; harsh and inconsistent parenting; parents having marital problems; physical and sexual abuse; alcoholism; drug dependency; and poor attachment to significant others (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:2; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21).

When Participant E was asked what happened when she fell pregnant she replied: *"...no one was happy... Ha hmmm... it was painful because I didn't get any support... I didn't expect any support cause, well, I was doing wrong things at times..."* The researcher probed further to enquire the relationship with her father and she responded as follows: *"Dad doesn't care... it's extremely bad... but I only have one example that I think of... that made him very angry... ootsi... that he doesn't even talk to me anymore... yes... when I fell pregnant... that's when I think he lost love... and caring for me..."* The researcher probed by asking if Participant E felt that she let her father down. *"Yoh... much... sometimes I cry in my room... I got this diary or notebook that I write my feelings in... I write that I miss my dad so very much... It was never like this... but now what went wrong... I can't speak to my dad now... it's too difficult... so I just write it down..."* When asked if her parents financially support her and the baby, she reported: *"No... I support my baby with my grant... I get R290 and my baby gets R290..."*

When taking into account the fact that Participant H's father was murdered when she was only 11 years old, the researcher concludes that this traumatic experience might have had a detrimental effect on Participant H's life trajectory. She mentioned that she had a good relationship with her father and her relationship with her mother was unsatisfactory. In addition she lived with extended family members; her grandmother (father's mother), her aunt (her father's brother's wife) and the aunt's son, who is one year older than her. The constant conflict and tension in the family contributed to various problems in Participant H's life as mentioned above. Participant H also reported the following: *"Hmm okay that's when I was 11 years old... Ya... I was more closer to my father than my mother when I was small so my brother used to be more closer to my mother... so my father and I used to be more closer and do things together... he would take me to my friends... even though I would beg him when he was watching wrestling, but he still used to take me..."* When enquiring about her relationship with her extended family and whether they were supportive or not, she replied *"No... not really... okay maybe sometimes... but not so much... like how a family should have been..."* When the researcher asked about her relationship with

her mother during the time of her father's death, she replied as follows: *"At that age... when everything happened... it was hard... we didn't talk for a while... but we then just got over it... you know... and then we ended up talking... but not a lot... like not all at once... we started talking a little and a little..."* The researcher probed further to establish whether there was someone else she could confide in when she experienced the difficult relations with her mother. *"Yes... the only other person I could talk to was my boyfriend... I could confide in him since I was about 16."* Participant H has a good relationship with her brother. *"...ya... I think it was very good... cause we used to always talk to each other... I used to try to make him laugh... I used to read books to him just to make him sleep... ya."* She reported her relationship with her uncle as follows: *"Actually it did start from about when I was 14 years of age already, my uncle became different towards me before my dad passed away. He said he will be that fatherly type for me... but he wasn't... things just changed... his attitude changed and that's where we stop talking to each other..."* Her relationship with her granny was described as follows: *"She was my father's mother... It wasn't so good... like she didn't... I donno if she didn't like me or if she made me feel that way... we hardly used to talk... she always used to shout... I don't know if that is how old people are, but... screaming..."* Her relationship with her aunt was described as follows: *"Basically that time I was small and her son was also there... I was smaller than him, but he would do wrong things like burn teddy bears and blame it on me and then I used to get shouting from my aunty and my granny... he was a year older than me and used to do all these things and blame it on me... that's why even today he's still an angel in their eyes..."* The researcher probed further to establish the relationship with her cousin. *"Ya... like tension... cause it's always competition between us..."* When asked how the participant felt about being blamed for what her cousin did, she reported the following: *"Angry... but I never used to tell him anything... yes I was angry at him, but the competition was always in school... from Primary right up until High School."*

The key empirical findings of this study centre ~~on~~ around factors such as the lack of or neglect of significant others in female youth sex offenders' lives. Significant others are the people most important in an individual's life and they have the greatest effect on the person's self-esteem (Berndt, 1997:533). When the researcher explored the significant others in ~~the~~ female youth sex offenders' lives, she found that in most cases the people most important to ~~the~~ female youth sex offenders treated them poorly and this also contributed to their low self-esteem.

Participant C was asked if she would say that she had a low self-esteem and she replied: *“Yes”... I just feel sometimes I’m small the way people treat me sometimes...* The researcher probed further and discovered that the people Participant C referred to were her friends, her enemies and school mates. Participant D replied: *“I think I sometimes have a low self-esteem at times.”* Participant H replied: *“Before it wasn’t very good... like people used to always put me down... and sometimes I used to not take them to head... but sometimes I just felt down... they literally put me down... like an example... like... they [uncle and aunt] always accused me of being on drugs... cause that is the main important thing that they always said I was on drugs... they used to say that I don’t have respect because I was on drugs...”*

In chapter 3 the researcher explored the seven characteristics that epitomise the ecological approach (Maguire, 2002:91-93). These seven characteristics together with the empirical findings of this study were discussed throughout this chapter in order to better understand how female youth sex offenders’ lives were affected. According to the characteristic of the person and environment these research findings confirmed that most of the participants suffered from a poor fit in the environment in which they lived. This contributed to poor multidirectional interactions between the individual, their personality, behaviour and the demands of their environment. In addition the poor fit in most of the participants resulted in impaired functioning and an environment that stifled growth. In relation to this study, the female youth sex offender’s interactions between herself and her environment showed a poor fit and this correlated with the literature review which indicated that a poor fit usually develops during the different interactions between the female youth sex offender, her personality, behaviour and the demands of her environment (Hunter et al., 2006:149-152; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-25). The following noteworthy examples from this study indicate the poor fit that resulted in the female youth sex offender’s life, which impaired her functioning and it indicates how the environment stifled the female youth sex offender’s growth and motivated her offending:

- Participant D: *“...so this other day we were about to start our final exams... we were in Grade 8... some of these friends asked me to come and chill with them... so we chilled... like at school... I was .... I was... most of the girls didn’t like me... they used to say that I think I’m better and that I’m the most beautiful girl in school... so yah that’s why... but most of the other people loved me... so there were also those guys who wanted to date me... so that day... ya and there was all that people and everyone was drinking... I don’t*

*remember what happen but then... but when they told me... I heard the stories that I had sex with two guys..."*

- Participant E: *"...I repeated here 2011 and then during the year I fell pregnant... and then I dropped out of school... and then this year again when I gave birth... last year... I attend back... this year... and then I ended up giving up... eh during second term... because of my financial things... I used to go to school with only R5... for taxi... I don't have lunch... I don't have taxi fare when I come back... When I used to come home I walk... I did ask other relatives at school and the teachers... so I then ended up not going back to school... I would say... I had good support from my parents, but now I feel that I am on my own..."*
- Participant H: *"I failed so it was my second year in Grade 10... my second year in grade 10, that's when I was pregnant... they actually thought I was going to fail... Okay... it was all that problems I did have in my house... like I don't know... that like when I had sexual intercourse with my boyfriend... I ended up being pregnant and then I had an abortion, but an illegal one... then we buried it at the back of his house... but then the dog dug it up... that is when we got caught... and then they called the police and then we spend the night in jail and the next day we had to appear in court, but then it got thrown out... because it wasn't that I wanted to get pregnant... but because there was so much of problems at home, so I didn't want to make it more worst..."*

When taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the researcher concludes that conflict with family members and poor quality relationships with family can be seen as criminogenic risk factors which most likely contribute to female youth sex offending.

### **5.1.3 Theme 2: Developmental needs and emotional status**

Dobson (1999:164-165) refers to adolescence as a cultural term that means the age between childhood and adulthood in a society. He further explains that it is a stage where an individual has neither the privileges of childhood nor the freedoms of adulthood. Righthand and Welch (2005:21) assert that youth sex offenders display behaviour problems and that they have considerable deficits in social competence, such as inadequate social skills, shyness, poor peer relationships and social isolation. Furthermore they emphasise that youth sex offenders experienced fewer peer attachments. Most of the research points to the eminence of isolation and poor social adjustment as unique characteristics of youth sex offenders. This study and

the literature research conducted in chapter 2 regarding female youth sex offending allude to the developmental needs and emotional status of the female youth sex offender. The female youth sex offender is often viewed as a person with a lack of health and self-care skills which obviously hamper the developmental needs and emotional status of the youth (Benokraitis, 2011:393; Hunter et al., 2006:153-155). This study found that a significant percentage of the participants suffered from health issues, from infancy up to their youth life cycle. In addition, one of the participants severely lacked self-care skills that hampered her developmental needs and emotional status. The empirical findings of this study also found that emotional and behavioural problems were viewed as high risk factors for female youth sex offenders.

The developmental needs and emotional status of the female youth sex offender will be summarised in the table below.

**Table 8:**  
**Developmental needs and emotional status**

	<b>Health and self-care skills</b>	<b>Self-esteem and identity</b>	<b>Assertion skills and social presentation</b>	<b>History of personal and family substance abuse</b>
Participant A	She described herself as a healthy girl that doesn't really get sick, except for the flu sometimes. She contracted German measles in 2011. She has good self-care skills and likes to dress up wearing neat and comfortable clothes.	She felt that she is a beautiful girl and she liked her outer appearance. She is a kind, fun, humble person with confidence. She is hard working.	She is assertive and has good social skills. She visits friends and walks to the park.	She does not smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs. Her father smokes and uses alcohol and her mother used to drink alcohol before her pregnancies. No one in her family uses drugs.
Participant B	She feels that she is a healthy girl and attends doctor visits when requested by the Girls' Home. She has good self-care skills and likes to dress up wearing makeup and very nice clothes.	She has a satisfactory self-esteem. At times she felt shy and not very proud, other times she would feel better about herself. She described herself as confident, but not patient and very moody.	She did not see herself as assertive. She had good social skills and has good friends who understand her. She also had a friend from outside the Children's Home who adopted her as a sister.	She doesn't smoke cigarettes but used a 'hubbly' once. She drinks alcohol, but doesn't like it. Her father smokes, and her mother and stepmother drink alcohol. She knew that her father sold drugs, but was not sure if he used drugs.
Participant C	Although she mentioned that her health was okay,	She reported to have a poor self-esteem and	She did not see herself as assertive. She showed	She did not smoke or use drugs, but reported that she

	<p>the researcher noticed that she sounded nasal. She mentioned she would get the flu at least once a year and had tonsil and teeth problems. She has moderate self-care skills and her uniform was not as tidy as her two peers. She likes to dress up with nice clothing, but doesn't like using makeup.</p>	<p>mentioned that she gives up easily. She reported that she felt confident and liked helping others and that she is a kind and happy person.</p>	<p>moderate social skills and would go out with friends to meet up with their boyfriends.</p>	<p>abused alcohol once and would drink on occasion. Her father used to smoke but she was unsure if he still does, and her uncle smokes. Her father would use alcohol and again she was unsure if he still does. Her uncle and aunts drink alcohol on occasion. She was unaware of any family members who abuse drugs.</p>
Participant D	<p>She reported that she was a healthy child and feels healthy now. The researcher noticed a constant cough throughout the interview and asked her about it, but she said the cough only started the day before the interview. She has good self-care skills but does not like makeup. She likes to dress up and wear good clothes.</p>	<p>She felt at times that she has a low self-esteem, but that she is an overcomer. She saw herself as being honest, faithful, responsible and mature.</p>	<p>She reported that sometimes she would be assertive but other times she was not assertive. She had good social skills and sang in the church choir at various functions.</p>	<p>She never smoked or used drugs, but she abused alcohol. Her uncle smokes and uses alcohol and her cousins also use alcohol. Nobody in her family uses drugs.</p>
Participant E	<p>She was happy to report that she is healthy and as a baby she never got sick and never had allergies. She has good self-care skills and likes to dress up like a lady wearing makeup and high heels.</p>	<p>She felt that her self-esteem was better than before and she attributed this to the life skills groups she attended after the offence. She reported that she sees her identity as being a woman of her own words and that she is kind and sharing.</p>	<p>She acquired self-assertion and social skills when she completed certain life skills groups. However, when the researcher probed further she found that the participant was a loner with no close friends and she experienced family conflicts.</p>	<p>She explained that she does not smoke or use drugs, but she abuses alcohol. She feels that the alcohol helps her to express her feelings. Her father smokes and both her father and mother use alcohol. She also mentioned that on special occasions her siblings, uncles and aunts also use alcohol. Her uncle uses dagga and her 'baby daddy' used to use drugs.</p>
Participant F	<p>She recounted that she was a sickly child and is experiencing various health problems as a youth. Nevertheless</p>	<p>Even though she battles with health issues she has a high self-esteem. However after probing further the researcher found</p>	<p>She feels that she is assertive and she has good social skills. She feels that her mother is overprotective and will not allow her to</p>	<p>She does not smoke or use drugs, but she does abuse alcohol and admitted that she uses the alcohol to hide her problems.</p>

	she demonstrated good self-care skills. She loves to dress up and although she is not supposed to wear makeup, she does. She has good self-care skills.	that although she was confident, she was short-tempered and angry and this led to self-inflicting injuries. She reported that she had a strong identity and intends to be an independent and great woman.	visit with friends, so the only friends she has are at school. She reported that she has to sneak around to socialise.	Her grandfather smokes and her grandmother and two aunts are alcoholics. Both her aunts smoked dagga once.
Participant G	She reported that she was a healthy baby and a healthy youth. She showed poor self-care skills and although she said she liked to dress up, she meant in jeans, jumpsuits or a dress, and she didn't like makeup.	She battled to understand the concepts of self-esteem and identity, but mentioned that she is confident with her body and herself. She reported that when she grows up she wants to be a poet.	She was not assertive. The researcher concluded that she struggled to communicate and socialise with others, but she seems to visit with her dad, cousins and uncles often.	She reported that she did not smoke, use alcohol or drugs. She mentioned that her sister smoked a lot, about two packets of cigarettes a day. She reported that her father drinks a lot and confirmed that this is the reason he fights. She reported that nobody in her family abuses drugs.
Participant H	She experienced health problems and this is discussed in further detail below. She has good self-care skills and likes to dress up if necessary, but feels quite comfortable to be in her pajamas when seeing her boyfriend.	She reported that she had a low self-esteem while living with her extended family, but that she feels it is getting better. Her confidence has also improved since she was able to get a job. She reported that she is a kind woman, hardworking, straightforward and an honest person.	She is assertive. Her social presentation was good and her socialisation skills had improved after the offence. She often socialises with family and her boyfriend. This was not the case before and during the offence.	She reported that she has been smoking since around 11 years of age and she drinks alcohol occasionally, but she does not use drugs. She reported that there are quite a lot of family members, including her boyfriend, that smoke. She also felt that her uncle and cousin are alcoholics, as they drink a lot. She thinks her uncle might be on drugs, but cannot confirm this. Her cousin abuses drugs.

One of the characteristics of the ecological approach is the life course of an individual (Maguire, 2002:91-93) and for the purpose of this study this refers to the female youth sex offender. The researcher utilised the ecological model in order to view the youth sex offender as having transitional problems and needs as they move from one life stage to another, such as adjusting to puberty, entering high school or graduating

from school (Maguire, 2002:18). The study found that each participant's life story was accurately recounted and this assisted in deriving the female youth sex offender's unique developmental pathway. In addition, each life course showed trauma and other experiences that might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour. A relevant example was revealed in Participant H's life story. She suffered the trauma of her father being murdered when she was only 11 years old. In addition, she had to live with her extended family, namely her granny, aunt and aunt's son from her father's side of the family and it was confirmed that they ill-treated her by emotionally abusing her. Furthermore, it was found that these experiences had a direct influence in contributing to her behaviour problems and might have led to her sex offending behaviours. Another example of life course trauma was experienced by Participant G. She suffered the loss of her mother when she was only five years old and this led to her having to move around from living with her father to living with her unemployed sister. Due to the complex situation and Participant G's cognitive ability, it was difficult for Participant G to clearly explain the other traumas, but there was an indication that she had been raped most probably before she was 10 years old. This traumatic incident together with the instability of parenting capacity most likely contributed to Participant G committing a sexual offence against her neighbour's son. This explanation guides the researcher to the other high risk factors that might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour. The youth sex offender's development needs and her emotional status will be discussed in more detail.

#### **5.1.3.1 Health and self-care skills**

The literature review indicated that health and self-care skills were two of the factors that contributed to female youth sex offending (Benokraitis, 2011:393; Hunter et al., 2006:153-155). According to the findings in this study, various health and self-care skills affected each participant as viewed in the above-mentioned table summary. The menstruation experience was a matter that came to the fore when discussing health and self-care skills and it is important to mention for the purpose of this study. Although Gouws and Kruger (1994:22-23) mention that the age of menstruating for girls may vary due to various factors, the average age is approximately 12.8 years. Participants A, B, C and D all reported that their health and menstruation experience was according to the norm and the researcher agreed that their experiences seem to be the same as most youth in their age group. However, it is important to note the health issues and menstruation experiences of the following participants:

Participant E reported specifically about her menstruation experience as follows: *“About 12 years... at school... I was crying thought I was dying...”* When the researcher probed further she found that the participant’s friend helped her, but that nobody explained the menstruation process to her. *“No one explained it to me... no one... I told my mother when I got back from school... she gave me a pad and told me to wash myself three times a day and said ‘here comes trouble’. She never told me that when you have your period you don’t go sit with the boys... no one told me anything...”*

When Participant F was asked about her health problems it was found that she suffered ill health since birth and is also dealing with several health problems as a youth. Her response is notable: *“Okay... I don’t know... but you know with the story my mom has given me they said that when I was born I had to stay in hospital and had to have drips and all that... and then when I was four I had all of this kind of allergies... that it came when I was four exactly on my skin... then they even transferred me to hospital to the dermatologists... That’s where I go every... maybe after three months...I go for regular check-ups at the hospital... I was there last week... Then with the breasts it start in Grade 9... I saw that my breasts ain’t equal... cause there’s something here maybe you can see that it’s bigger than normal... there’s something over here... they say it’s breasts growth... maybe they thought it was cancer at first... but they checked it... I used to attend but they said it’s fine there’s no pain... but now they think it’s just breast growth and I must go back to them when I am 18 years... And tonsils... a throat infection... sometimes I fall sick, but not most of the time... I have this disease psoriasis... its incurable... when I go to certain places everyone asks me about the same thing... it’s a skin disease... it’s gutta psoriasis... it irritates me that there is no cure for it... it bothers me cause at this age you want to do a lot of stuff, but I can’t do it... I can’t sit in the sun, I can’t go to a lot of places... it itches and it bleeds sometimes, so I can’t do most of the things that I want to do... ya there’s no cure... but there are creams... there’s a treatment, but they can’t cure it... I attend the dermatologist...”* Participant F’s menstruation experience was explained as follows: *“At 13... it happened at home.”* When asked who helped her, she said the following: *“My mom helped me... but then there is a kind of a problem... I skip a lot of months... I don’t go like normal people... right now I was on July... then I go in October for a whole month... I go like for a month, but then I skip a month or two and then I go.”*

When Participant G was asked about her health she confirmed that she was a healthy baby and she is a healthy youth who loves to eat. However, she was unable to give a clear account of her physical development. The researcher did not see that as a problem, as some of the other participants could also not recall when they were able to sit, walk or talk. However, Participant G reported that she only starting talking at the age of seven years. As mentioned previously, Participant G's language skills and cognitive ability was not on par with the other 14 year olds in the study. What became more significant was when she was asked about her menstruation, she could not understand the concept menstruation and after the researcher explained this to her she replied as follows: *"...the bleeding... or... I started now... 2013... when I was 14... I think it was March or May..."* She confirmed that the menstruation started at home and that her 34 year old sister helped her. When asked what the sister told her, she replied *"He always tell me that I must not play near boys... and I must always play nice... at the safe place..."*

Participant H was unsure of the exact age of her menstruation, but she felt it came on early due to the shock of her father's murder. The following is a recount of her health and menstruation experience: *"My health has been good from then until now... but actually when I was maybe two or three years old I used to be rushed to the hospital all the time... I used to be dehydrated... so when I was small... I used to be living in the hospital... my hospital life just ended like when I was maybe about nine... so I would be admitted cause I was dehydrated and sick all the time... and so I used to jump around and I broke my arm once..."* When questioned about her physical development the participant replied *"Mm mm... I don't know but she (mother) did tell me that I was fast... I never wait for anyone to teach me to write or colour or to do anything... I used to always make an effort to do things by myself... I used to do everything fast and by myself... I taught myself to write and colour and everything..."* With reference to when her menstruation started she reported *"Hmmm... I'm really not sure... I think it was when I was 11... I think it was because of the shock when my dad passed away."* She reported that it happened at home and her mother helped her. She explained the experience as follows: *"She did explain to me about that so I actually knew... so I wasn't really scared... but at first when I seen the blood I did scream for her... and then she helped me... but I did know off hand... she did explain to me."*

The female youth sex offender is often viewed as a person with a lack of health and self-care skills which obviously hampers the developmental needs and emotional

status of the youth (Benokraitis, 2011:393; Hunter et al., 2006:153-155). The findings of the literature review related to health and self-care skills in corroboration with this study are confirmed by the above-mentioned interview recounts.

### **5.1.3.2 Self-esteem and identity**

The female youth sex offender's identity was explored. Erickson (in Berndt, 1997:534) defines identity as the sense of continuity that gives people a link to the past and a direction for the future. When the researcher explored the identity of each participant it became clear that they viewed their past as the past. In addition two participants boldly claimed the following:

- Participant D: *"...because no one used to judge me or remind me about my past... I tell myself that this is not something I planned and it's not something I'm happy about..."*
- Participant H: *"I also learnt to let go of the past."*

According to Erikson (in Berk, 2009:18) adolescence results in identity versus identity confusion where the adolescent will try to answer questions such as 'who am I?' and 'what is my place in society?' This may explain why female youth sex offenders growing up in today's world have a different understanding of their environment. The helping professions will need to consider that times have changed and find different and unique ways to assist female youth sex offenders to process these changes in their environment. In order for helping professionals to analyse problems, persons and issues, the professional would require an adequate grasp of practice theory and knowledge about human behaviour in the social environment (Hepworth et al., 2002:17).

Self-concept refers to an individual's idea about their personality traits, mental abilities, physical skills and other characteristics (Berndt, 1997:525). When the researcher investigated the concept of each participant's self-esteem, she found that Participant A and Participant B mentioned they experienced a sense of positive self-esteem, but Participant C reported a low self-esteem and recounted the following: *"Self-esteem? I don't know... I give up easily sometimes... maybe sometimes when I'm sad I just give up.... Nothing else... I just feel sometimes I'm small, the way people treat me sometimes..."* After the researcher asked her which people she spoke of, she said: *"Sometimes my friends, my enemies, school mates."* When the researcher probed the participant further regarding how she felt about her identity, she revealed the following: *"I like helping other people to be up and not down... I like*

*to love... enjoy being with friends and... I'm a kind person... I like to be happy... you never find me sad most of the time."*

Participant D also reported a sense of positive self-esteem, but Participant E seems to be struggling with a low self-esteem due to falling pregnant. This was her recount: *"Yes, I feel extreme anger and unhappiness... and I feel I'm a failure... and I cannot do anything by myself..."* When the participant was probed further about how she felt after attending a few life skills groups, she mentioned: *"I've learnt to love and understand myself the way I am... that's how I feel... by understanding I mean... hmmm... okay some people do tell me when I am angry you do this and that... so now I understand myself when I'm angry I shouldn't do this... I get irritated very quickly and I have a short temper..."* When the researcher asked the participant why she felt angry all the time, she said: *"I don't know what to say... I don't know... I think I was born like that... I think I have moods... I can laugh with you now, but a few minutes I can be very angry."*

Participant F's recount about her self-esteem is extremely significant to this study. Her initial response was: *"My self-esteem is fine... I'm confident about myself... sometimes it gets clear (skin disease)... it's not only me with the problem. Some other learners also are allergic to the grass."* When the researcher probed further to enquire as to how she felt her self-esteem has been affected, she responded as follows: *"I'm proud of myself... like with a dad like that... I've never broken down or fallen... I don't blame my dad for not being there or blaming my mom... I don't do that... I took responsibility of my actions... Okay I used to love modelling, but I gave it up cause of the breast thing and the skin... I can't do what I want to do... Also I am not sure if this thing (the nude picture story) is still hanging over my head... I hope that it will all be gone... like there was a new teacher this year at school and she brought it all up again... I got angry... I'm short-tempered... Okay we were fighting me and her... I'm always arguing... then she brought it up... saying that if I didn't have the picture... and if I warned my friend and didn't have the picture, not everybody was going to have it... so my classmates were there and they know everything and they told her that she was not the one... so I got up and walked out, cause I'm short tempered... I'm very short tempered... sometimes when I'm angry I hurt myself... I bite myself and I cut myself... that's what I do when I'm angry... I write it down sometimes... sometimes I write it down... sometimes I do cut myself... sometimes I pray... ya that's what the priest told me to pray then I will avoid cutting myself... well the church says it's Satanism and all that... but you know we have to pray for it... so it*

*makes me get angry and I hurt myself... and my body is the temple of God and I'm not supposed to do that... ya... so my mom knows and everybody knows, but with the shouting and stuff... but she doesn't know when it started.*" When the participant was asked when this behaviour started, she replied: *"Ya... cause I used to have a lot of scars but now they're all clear... in Grade 9... 2011... it was the same time the problem with the nude picture happened... with my mom screaming at me... I was pissed... I don't know, but at that time even a little thing pisses me off... the way I am I don't want to hurt people... so I rather hurt myself than to hurt another person... so that's how I feel..."* The researcher probed further to explore how the participant experiences other people's view of her *"Okay... hmmm... That popular girl who is very stubborn, that has an attitude and doesn't want people to get in her way and she's always striving to be on the top... cause I always want what I want. That's how I want others to see me."* When the participant was questioned about her identity, she revealed the following: *"An independent and a great woman... who does things on her own... who always try to be on the top and to see herself succeed."* The responses of Participant's E and F are noteworthy in that both of them struggle with anger. Both Artz and Nicholson (2009:2-3) and Righthand and Welch (2005:19) mention anger and attention seeking behaviours as factors that were related to sex offending.

Participant G struggled to express herself in each theme and this theme was no different. Her recount of her self-esteem and identity was reported as follows: *"I'm... I'm feeling confident and I'm happy... and I'm like to smile..."* However, when the researcher asked Participant G if she knew what self-esteem meant she said that she didn't. After explaining the meaning of the concept, Participant G replied: *"Hmmm... my confident... I'm always confident with my body and myself..."* Participant G was probed further about her identity and she mentioned the following: *"Okay... you see I am a kind person... I like to share my lunch... or... when I grow up I want to be a poet... Ha me... I'm a kind of person like... I like to laugh and I like to share with another... each other and ... I like to help people..."* When the researcher asked the participant if she is the type of person to assert herself, the participant requested an example. The researcher asked the participant what would happen if she had to go home, but the researcher asked her to do something instead, and she responded as follows: *"I will do it... I do as you said... I can't say no."*

While Participant H lived with extended family, she struggled with her self-esteem and she often felt sad, angry and depressed. Since she moved with her mother and

brother to a place of their own, Participant H seems to be doing better with regard to her self-esteem and confidence. Her response confirms this: *“Before it wasn’t very good... like people used to always put me down... and sometimes I used to not take them to head... but sometimes I just felt down... they literally put me down... like an example... like... they always accused me of being on drugs... cause that is the main important thing that they always said I was on drugs... they used to say that I don’t have respect because I was on drugs...”* When the participant was asked how she felt about what her uncle and aunt said about her, she replied: *“I was depressed always when I was home... but... I wasn’t home the whole day, but the minute I go home... like in the evening... I don’t eat, I just go to my room... always... always depressed... sad... angry... I never used to... I always used to watch TV at night... but then... but then I never did... but I would come in not even eat and just go to my room... that’s basically where I used to live... in my room.”* Participant H was probed about how she experiences her self-esteem since she moved away from her extended family: *“Now my self-esteem is very good... my mother actually says good things about me now... even my mother’s brother... they would always ask of me... okay sometimes my granny them would ask how am I... my granny will show some concern, but not all the time... but I don’t care about that family as I’m not with them anymore... you see since now that we moved we actually done a lot... when we started we had nothing... I work now... so I’m doing the administration... they tell me I’m very good and I do things fast... I sometimes put myself down, but they know I can do it.”* Participant H was probed further to enquire about her identity and she revealed the following: *“I don’t know how to say... Okay let me give you an example... I see myself as a kind woman... I’m hard working... I’m a very straightforward person... that’s first... very honest... I will tell it like it is... If it’s bad I will say it like it is... I won’t put it any other way... and then... I am very kind... I’m quiet with people I don’t know, but at home I’m very talkative... I’m actually a loud mouth... I am kind... people can talk to me... in school my friends would come to me for advice and they would say sometimes I do give good advice and it helps.”*

Another characteristic that is included under the ecological approach is healthy and unhealthy habitats and niches (Maguire, 2002:91-93). As explained previously, the habitat is the physical environment that the individual lives in and the niche refers to the status a person has in that specific environment. Two concepts that are relevant in the social context are *habitat* and *niche* (Hepworth et al., 2002:18; Maguire, 2002:92). *Habitat* refers to the physical and social settings within cultural contexts. Rich *habitats* provide resources in which individuals can grow and develop. However,

poor *habitats* lack resources, and thus growth and development is stifled. For example, the current literature review and the empirical findings of this study indicate that in the female youth sex offender's life trajectory there may be a lack of support and encouragement from significant others and due to this there may be a deficiency in vital resources and this could have resulted in dysfunctional behaviour (Hunter et al., 2006:149-151; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19-21). The types of habitats and niches that involve the female youth sex offender were established in this study as follows. In corroboration with the literature research one clearly sees that unhealthy habitats and niches that might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour includes factors such as a history of child abuse, physical and emotional neglect, poverty, academic difficulties, adjusting to puberty, identity confusion, harbouring feelings of shame, guilt and mistrust, and the like (Hunter et al., 2006:149-153; Moore et al., 2005:7-9; Righthand & Welch, 2005:18-25). The researcher investigated the habitats and niches of each participant in order to establish which aspects contributed to their offending. It was found that most of the participants came from poverty stricken households and most of them suffered academic difficulties. Three of them suffered from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and two of them had no parental support. The term *niche* refers to the status one occupies in the community. In relation to this study, a female youth sex offender will find her *niche* in society by achieving self-respect and a stable sense of identity. Nevertheless, this could only occur when positive opportunities for human needs exist in the community. The helping professions dealing with female youth sex offenders must do everything possible to promote social justice, which may lead to expanding opportunities and the creation of appropriate *niches* for female youth sex offenders (Hepworth et al., 2002:18, 255).

### **5.1.3.3 Assertion skills and social presentation**

Research shows that youth offenders with sexual behaviour problems have considerable deficits in social competence. In addition, inadequate social skills, shyness, poor peer relationships and social isolation are some of the difficulties identified in these youth offenders (Benokraitis, 2011:397). Righthand and Welch (2005:20) state that this and other research point to the primacy of isolation and poor social adjustment as distinguishing characteristics of youth sex offenders. These findings of previous research can be seen clearly in the interview responses mentioned below.

Most participants showed some kind of assertion skills and social presentation. Participant A reported that she was assertive and that she was confident to assert herself if she needed to, but Participant B recounted the following: *“To be quite honest as I see myself I’m drinking cooldrink... although I will be very hungry... eish... I end up giving... I’m not really assertive.”* When Participant C was asked if she was assertive she replied: *“I will rather do what they ask... not assertive.”*

Participant D responded only after the researcher explained to her what assertive skills meant: *“...sometimes I will be assertive, but other times I will just do what people ask.”* Participant E responded: *“I’ve learnt to be assertive at all times... not being aggressive... as I said... when I am angry... I need to calm down and then I talk to you in an assertive manner.”*

Participant E was asked to give an example of a recent experience and this was her response: *“Okay... he would come shouting... ‘why you doing this?’... ‘why you didn’t you do that?’... then I will come and say ‘ahah... stop shouting cause when I talk to you I am not shouting... I did this because of this and that’...”* Participant E was asked if she liked to dress up *“Yoh! Very much... mascara, eyeliner... like a lady, high heels... ya... I dress up for myself, for special occasions, family gatherings... or going to the mall.”*

Participant F reported that she was assertive. Participant H explained as follows: *“No... If it’s like half an hour left I will tell them like look I can do a certain limit for you, but I cannot finish all...”*

Five of the eight participants reported that they were not assertive, while one of the participants had to attend assertiveness and social skills classes in order to assist her to be more assertive. The researcher concludes that most of the participants lacked confidence and therefore struggled to assert themselves and this most probably contributed to their sex offending behaviour. Another high risk factor was the history of personal and family substance abuse that will subsequently be explained in more detail.

#### **5.1.3.4 History of personal and family substance abuse**

Research varies on the significance of substance abuse as a factor in youth sex offending. Righthand and Welch (2005:24) indicate that between 3.4% and 72% of youth sex offenders were found to have abused drugs or alcohol when committing

their offences. Furthermore, even though substance abuse has been a problem for several youth sex offenders, for some substance abuse may not be related to sex offending. In addition the role of substance abuse in sex offending remains unclear. Nevertheless, research confirmed that substance abuse could have a disinhibiting effect and might therefore contribute to problems such as poor social skills, poor impulse control, problem-solving difficulties that could be aggravated by substance abuse and this might increase the risk of sex offending (Booyens et al., 2013:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:24). Research mentioned that drug use was reported to be especially related to female youth's involvement in violence (Artz & Nicolson, 2009:3). However, in this study the researcher did not find any evidence of chronic drug abuse among participants.

Participant A reported that she did not have a history of personal substance abuse and her family's substance abuse is summarised in the above-mentioned table. Participant B's response regarding personal substance abuse is noteworthy: *"To be honest ne... I don't smoke, but this year I tried to smoke hubbly... the pipes... only once... ya I've drank alcohol, but it's not my thing... I don't like drinking until I'm tipsy."*

Participant C reported that she did not have a history of personal substance abuse, although she drank alcohol once only and a summary of her family's substance abuse is mentioned in the table above. Although Participant D did not smoke or do drugs, she reported that she abused alcohol once: *"Hmmm... only in 2010... for hours... just for fun."* When the researcher probed further it was found that due to Participant D's abuse of alcohol, this had a disinhibiting effect which contributed to her having sex with two boys on the school grounds. In the researcher's opinion the abuse of alcohol in Participants D's recount might have led to her poor impulse control which in turn probably contributed to her sex offending behaviour.

Participant E was asked if anyone in her family used drugs, this was her reply: *"My uncle, dagga... those they do with a bottle and a lighter. But my baby daddy used to do drugs... but after I gave birth... he stopped and started taking responsibility... the type of drugs he used to take is Taiwan... Nwapi... they say it was from Thailand... it was a dangerous drug, those people they dirty all the time and they steal..."* When asked if she abused alcohol her recount was as follows: *"I can say I abused... no he he... When I drink ne, I think it's the easy way out to express my feelings."* In the researcher's opinion Participant E's substance abuse might have had a disinhibiting effect and could therefore have contributed to her problems such as poor impulse

control and poor social skills, which could explain the sex offending behaviour of having her nude picture on her cell phone. Furthermore, the empirical findings of this study together with the literature review confirm that problems can be aggravated by substance abuse and this may increase the risk of sex offending (Righthand & Welch, 2005:24)

Participant F was questioned about her own substance abuse and she admitted the following: *“A little bit... the last day of school... we overdid drinking... When I’m drunk I forget about everything and I’m free... I use the alcohol to hide my problems.”*

Participant G reported that she does not smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs. She however mentioned that her sister smokes a lot, at least two packets of cigarettes a day, and her father drinks a lot. She feels that this is the reason he is always fighting. Participant H recounted her story as follows: *“Ya I do smoke... I started when I was around 11... that’s when my cousin actually taught me how... so she influenced me... after that I stopped... then I started again when I was about 15.”* Participant H was probed further in order to establish if she drank alcohol: *“Not all the time, only occasionally... if we have a braai or something, but no I don’t use drugs.”* When the participant was asked if her family smoked she replied: *“Yes my cousin, my boyfriend, my uncle (father’s brother)... quite a lot of smokers... except my mom.”* When the participant was asked if anyone in her family abused alcohol and drugs her response was noteworthy: *“My father’s brother doesn’t know his limits... he’s always drunk... By me looking at him I think he is an alcoholic, I used to go to the temple with my cousin and he used to drink a lot... he used to go to the temple and drink a lot... he’s always with my uncle and they drink a lot... and his eyes are always red... I asked people about my uncle, but nobody knows if he does drugs... so I don’t know... but my cousin does marijuana, dagga, he does cat... like crystal myth... he is bad on it... he even owes people... you see that’s what I’m saying... it’s like the one that does wrong in the family is like the angel and the ones who always do the right thing is like the devil.”*

A history of personal and family substance abuse was also identified in youth sex offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:9; Benokraitis, 2011:395, 405; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:24; Seedat et al., 2009:1015). Youth whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are three times more likely to be abused and five times more likely to be neglected (Benokraitis, 2011:395, 405). The researcher proposes that the female youth sex offender whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs

are far more likely to feel neglected and resort to behaviour that might have increased their risk of sex offending. The discussion of the above-mentioned case studies clearly corroborates the findings of the literature study in that three of the participants abused alcohol, most of their significant others abused alcohol, and two of the participants' significant others abused drugs. Furthermore, in this study the researcher was able to conclude that a few of the participants' substance abuse had a disinhibiting effect and therefore could have contributed to problems such as poor impulse control, problem-solving difficulties and poor social skills which might have increased their risk of sex offending (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:9; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1; Righthand & Welch, 2005:24; Seedat et al., 2009:1015).

#### **5.1.4 Theme 3: School structure and community resources**

As stated in the literature review, youth who sexually offend experienced school and academic difficulties (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3-4; Booyens et al., 2013:40-41; Righthand & Welch, 2005:23). Reported difficulties in this study include disruptive behaviour, academic problems, learning disabilities, and placement in special classes. However, academic functioning should not be determined solely by intellectual or neurological functioning. Arts & Nicholson (2009:3), in agreement with the empirical findings in this study, indicates that school difficulties experienced by girls, like poverty, lack of support from parents, social rejection by peers, low connectedness to school and learning disabilities might lead to being absent from school and eventually dropping out of school. These factors were clearly seen in Participant E's situation, namely that she experienced poverty, social rejection by peers and lack of support by parents, which may have contributed to her dropping out of school.

The school structure and community resources relevant to the female youth sex offender will be summarised in the table below.

**Table 9:**  
**School structure and community resources**

	<b>Education and school performance</b>	<b>Extramural activities</b>	<b>Relationship with peers and teachers, and the availability of role models</b>	<b>Availability of resources in the community</b>	<b>Exposure to gangsterism</b>
Participant A	She completed grade 8. Very good school performance.	She exercised on the trampoline.	She reported that she had best friends, but no favourite teachers as they hit her. Her role model is Adele, the singer.	Resources were available in the community, but she only used the library.	No exposure to gangs.
Participant B	She completed grade 7 in a special needs school. She requires individual attention. Her school performance is good, but she does not enjoy school.	She reported that she sleeps after school and sometimes plays netball at the Girls' Home.	She reported that she had best friends and two favourite teachers. Her role models are Natalie du Toit and Caster Semenya.	Resources were available in the community, but she only used the library. She refuses to use the swimming pool due to hygienic reasons.	No exposure to gangs, but she bullied other children in primary school and because of her misbehaviour she was suspended from school.
Participant C	She completed grade 9. Her school performance is poor. She failed and is repeating the grade.	She reported that she plays netball at the Girls' Home, does gymnastics two days a week and attends Master Maths two days a week.	She reported that she had a few best friends, but no favourite teachers. Her role model is someone who does fashion designing.	Resources were available in the community and she used the library and the recreational centre for gymnastics.	No exposure to gangs.
Participant D	She completed grade 11. Her school performance is satisfactory.	She would go home and read a book and on Fridays she has choir practice.	She reported that she had lots of friends and two favourite teachers. Her role models are Mandela and Oprah Winfrey.	Resources were available in the community, but there is no recreational centre. She only used the library.	She had exposure to gangs and felt scared of the gangs in her area. She was scared to walk alone.
Participant E	She was in grade 9 at the time of the offence. Her school performance is moderate, but she only	She reported that she participated in swimming in Grade 8.	She reported that she had best friends and favourite teachers, but no role models.	Resources were available in the community, but she reported that she does not use the	She mentioned that there were gangs in her area that do drugs, but they do not affect her.

	completed Grade 9. She went to the second term of Grade 10, but due to poverty and teenage pregnancy it was difficult to continue her schooling.			resources due to having a baby.	
Participant F	She is currently repeating grade 10 and her school performance is poor.	She reported that she does drama after school.	She reported that she has best friends and favourite teachers. Her role model is her mother.	Resources were available in the community, but she only used the library.	She had exposure to gangs in her area and she feels that they irritate her.
Participant G	She is currently in grade 7. Her school performance is poor. She failed the first two semesters, but hopes to graduate to High school.	Participant G mentioned that she participated in swimming and netball after school.	She reported that she had a best friend and favourite teachers. Her role model is her sister.	Resources were available in the community, but she only used the library.	No exposure to gangs.
Participant H	She was in grade 10 at the time of the offence. Her school performance was poor. She failed and was repeating grade 10 when she fell pregnant.	She would visit her boyfriend after school.	She reported that she had no best friends except for her boyfriend. She had no favourite teachers. Her role models are her father and her mother.	Resources were available in the community, but she only used the library.	She was involved in a gang in school and had exposure to gangs in her area.

#### 5.1.4.1 Education and school performance

When one looks at the summary of the education and school performance for each participant the following can be noted: besides Participant A performing well in school, Participants B, C, D, E, F, G and H all had poor school performance with four of them repeating a grade. For the purpose of this study, the following responses regarding education and school performance are noteworthy:

- Participant A articulated: *“I am in Grade 8... My performance? Very good... ya... especially in English, I get by the 70s, Arts and Cultures I get by the 80s and NS I’m probably by the 60s... Afrikaans not that bad... maths not that bad either... EMS... I don’t really like that subject... I’m struggling with that.”*
- Participant B articulates: *“I’m in a special school... I’m supposed to be doing Grade 8, but ya... well the school made me go back... Grade 7... Special*

*School... hmmm my problem was when I was in the mainstream... teachers were focusing on the whole class, not individual attention... at this school I get individual attention... I enjoy Maths 60s and English... 80s... school performance is good... not enjoying school that much... I don't like Afrikaans especially, but I pass it... To be quite honest I don't enjoy Grade 7... I feel bored."*

- Participant E articulated: *"Not attending school... finished Grade 10 in 2012 and this year to second term of 2013... I had to leave school due to the financial situation... I was supposed to be doing Grade 11. At the other school I did get a remove... to attend another school... but that's where the problem happened... my nude picture was sent around... when I left there it was also because of funds... Okay my academic performance... when I attended at the Model C school... if your marks are below 50% you fail dismally... pass mark is 75%." The researcher enquired as to the school she moved to in her neighbourhood: "...the pass mark is 30%... and I remember that I corrected the Maths teacher... 'ai ai', they would say 'this kid came from a Model C school'."*
- Participant G articulated: *"Ahh... first term I didn't pass... yes I failed the first and second term... 3<sup>rd</sup> term I passed..."*
- Participant H articulated: *"I failed so it was my second year in grade 10... my second year in grade 10 that's when I was pregnant... they actually thought I was going to fail... but I pulled myself up and I did pass... and the next year in Grade 11 and 12 I went to another school... I completed my matric... my academic performance... it wasn't so good because of my family... but in my second year of grade 10 when I was pregnant... my marks were actually good and then Grade 11 to 12 I was average and passed my matric... I would go outside and study cause I was still living with them... like with that family."*

#### **5.1.4.2 Extramural activities**

The researcher noticed that most of the participants were not participating in extramural activities, except for some of them who played netball or attended drama classes. However, Participant C mentioned that she entered competitions on Saturdays for the gymnastics club she belonged to. For the purpose of this study Participant H's response is noteworthy: *"Because I wasn't so far from my boyfriend's house, I would walk there and go eat there and then take a break and then he would drop me off on the corner cause my family didn't approve of him because he wasn't the same religion..."* The researcher attributes the lack of participation in extramural

activities as a factor that might have contributed to the risk of sex offending behaviour. Artz and Nicholson (2009:2-3) and Righthand and Welch (2005:19) refer to boredom as one of the factors related to sex offending. One of the characteristics of the ecological approach is the life course of an individual (Maguire, 2002:91-93) and for the purpose of this study this refers to the female youth sex offender. The researcher utilised the ecological model in order to view the youth sex offender as having transitional problems and needs as they move from one life stage to another, such as adjusting to puberty, entering high school or graduating from school (Maguire, 2002:18). In chapter 3 the researcher explored the seven characteristics that epitomise the ecological approach (Maguire, 2002:91-93). One of these characteristics is the life course of the female youth sex offender. Here the researcher considered the different levels of fit when describing the *adaptedness* and the *adaptation* of the female youth sex offender. The empirical findings of this study indicated that most participants did not transition into the varied levels in their environments. Some of them used the library and the parks, but most of them did not make use of the recreational centres or other opportunities such as participating in sport. It was found that only one participant took part in drama after school and another participant was involved in her church choir after school on Fridays. In addition, the researcher is of the opinion that due to the fact that most of the participants are not involved in sport and do not participate in any constructive extramural activities could have contributed to their sex offending.

#### **5.1.4.3 Relationship with peers and teachers, and the availability of role models**

In relation to this study, the literature research demonstrates that the female youth sex offender often struggles with a productive attachment to significant others and this hampers her competence and self-esteem (Benokraitis, 2011:397; Gouws & Kruger, 1994:22; Righthand & Welch, 2005:20-21). In theme 1 the researcher explained the seriousness of poor attachment to significant others and in addition she explained how female youth sex offenders' poor relationships and attachment to significant others most probably contributed to their offending.

Relationships with peers, teachers and the availability of role models were explored in order to investigate the effect these relationships could have had on the female youth sex offender's behaviour. These relationships are crucial to the youth. The following responses from the interviews highlight the factors that might have affected each participant with regard to this sub-theme:

- Participant A responded as follows: *“My best friend... At school my best friend is Angie (pseudonym) Shhhh... well we have in common, she likes laughing... she makes me laugh... and we sit together in class... my friends think I’m funny, nice... ya... the rest I don’t know... “Hmmm... not any favourite teacher at the moment... most of my teachers hit me and some of them are just boring.”* The participant articulated the following when asked about her role model: *“I think it is Adele... She’s a singer... She sings nicely, she’s successful... she’s working very hard to earn money and she’s doing a good job and she doesn’t care about what people say about her... I’m a little bit like that.”*
- Participant B responded as follows: *“My best friend is Sarah (pseudonym)... we call each other sisters... no, I don’t have lots of friends... just a set of friends... my favourite teachers are... I only have two... Ms X (pseudonym)... is my teacher and Mr Y (pseudonym)... Ms X likes me and she always encourages me... Mr Y... he is just a fun teacher and he is just understanding... My role models are... Natalie du Toit... the swimmer... and Caster Semenya... I love sports... Natalie... perseverance and Caster... for all like people been saying bad stuff about her... saying she’s a she/him and sending rumours around and she... she takes those words and makes the best out of it... she’s a very strong person.”*
- Participant C responded as follows: *“Is hard... I have a few best friends, Pretty, Mary and Martha (pseudonyms)... I tell them about myself and they tell me about themselves... we keep secrets... yes... we trust each other... yes.... I don’t have any favourite teachers.”* When the researcher probed as to why the participant does not have any favourite teachers she reported *“They most of them is the subjects that they teach... they don’t teach it well.”* The participant answered the following when asked about her role model: *“I would like someone who would do fashion design... maybe David Tlali.”*
- Participant D responded as follows: *“I got many friends... two of them are Mary... and Martha (pseudonyms)... hmm... Mary is a caring person... we used to do so much things together... she used to understand my situation... even though I told her about my past... she didn’t care, she just took me like a new person... my favourite teacher is... Mr M (pseudonym)... cause he teaches my favourite subject... and he also encourages... he doesn’t teach maths only, but he teaches us about life... and... he also teaches us about God...”* When the participant was asked whether she has any role models she

replied: *“Yes! Mandela and Oprah... Mandela... he stood out because he stood up for what he believed in and he forgave... Oprah... She has left her past and she's... she's... put her past in the back and she's... I don't know how to put it... and she shares her past... and she's trying to help people what she's been through and she now helps girls to get education.”*

- Participant E responded that she had no best friend and when the researcher probed further she mentioned the following: *“Cause as I said... I left all of them at my other school... it was Sandy (pseudonym)... we understood each other... we knew our feelings... we knew when we did wrong how we going to solve that problem... we knew how to correct each other... that kinds of things...”* When asked about her favourite teacher: *“My Teacher, Mrs Z (pseudonym)... she's an Afrikaaner ne... she didn't treat us by race... she was supportive, she was understanding... she treated us like we all the same and like we are her children... ya... so when I had problems at home or school or somewhere else I used to talk to her and she would give me advice and how to deal with that problem.”* The participant responded that she did not have any role models, however the researcher probed to investigate what would she look for in a role model: *“Someone I can look up to... someone who can inspire me... ya... I don't have that someone now, but when I grow up I can say I want to be just like her or him.”* When the researcher asked if the participant had not seen this type of person in her community, she answered *“No”*. It is noteworthy to mention that Participant E's responses confirm that she experienced social isolation and poor peer relationships as corroborated by the literature study conducted in chapter 2 (Righthand & Welch, 2005:21).
- Participant F responded as follows: *“My best friend is Mandy (pseudonym)... I can talk to her about everything... we know each other and we can't hide anything from each other... my favourite teacher is Mrs M (pseudonym)... we always fighting in a good way... I'm the one that can communicate with her... she tries to help me in everything... she's very old and it's her last year... and she was protecting us and always defending me.”* Participant F's response regarding her role model is noteworthy: *“My mom... she has three kids but she is independent.”*
- Participant G responded as follows: *“Ah! My best friend is Lily (pseudonym)... cause he helps me with homework... I help her to clean... ya... Lily is a helpful person and we always help each other... ya... she's a kind person.”* Participant G was asked who her favourite teacher was and she named a few:

*Madam Sandy, Madam Mandy and Mr T (pseudonyms)... because Madam Sandy is a good, kind teacher... he likes to laugh and make us happy... Mandy... Mandy is a strictly person... but he's eh... he's eh... eh... eh... he's a wonderful teacher... Mr T... Mr T... yoh... he likes jokes.*" Participant G did not know what the term role model meant and after the researcher explained the concept to her she responded as follows: *"Okay... a role model is someone you would look up to... someone you would like to be like when you grow up? Oh! My role model is... ahhhhh... hmmm... role model... let me see... Sally (pseudonym)... he likes nails... and my sister's friend... she likes too... He likes too... he like bonding... the hair."*

- Participant H responded that she did not have any best friends and explained as follows: *"Because that time that I was in that school... I didn't really speak about my personal life... I only spoke to my boyfriend... he is my best friend... he listens to me... he always advise me on the right thing... yes."* She also mentioned that she did not have any favourite teachers and articulated the following: *"They were normal teachers... they always had their favourites... there were always young teachers in that school."* Participant H's response regarding her role models is worth mentioning: *"Yes! My mom and my dad... my mom... although people put her down she always gets up and goes on and she knows how to save money... now with me I like to spend... she teaches me how to save my money... My dad... My dad he always used to teach me... like when I did something wrong in school... he would advise me to sit with my books... I used to make up questions for myself when it comes to exams... then I will give it to him and he would give good advice and he would never refuse to help me with my work... It was difficult for parents to understand the school work then, but even if he didn't understand the work... he would make the effort to help meG82*
- *so he would know that my homework was done and I would pass my exams."*

The researcher noted that Participant H also experienced social isolation and poor peer relationships and this once again confirms the correlation between the literature review and the empirical findings of this study (Wood et al., 2000:48; Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). Furthermore, it is the researcher's opinion that social isolation and poor peer relationships could have contributed to female youth sex offending.

#### **5.1.4.4 Availability of resources in the community**

As confirmed by Rich (2009:19) it is usually a combination of risk factors and environmental conditions that ultimately allows antisocial behaviour to emerge. The researcher confirmed that there are resources available in most of the communities where the participants lived, but found that very few of the participants utilised these resources. The following resources were available to the participants: libraries, swimming pools, recreational centres and parks in most of the areas where the participants lived, as can be seen in the table above. It is the researcher's opinion that the under-utilisation of the resources in the communities might be a contributory factor to female youth sex offending.

#### **5.1.4.5 Exposure to gangsterism**

Exposure to gangsterism was not indicated as a serious problem by six of the participants and only two of the participants mentioned that they had gangs in their area. Additionally, one of the two participants who indicated that there were gangs in their community indicated that she was also involved in a gang while in school. It is important to note that one of the participants was involved in bullying in Primary School and was suspended from school. Another participant felt afraid to walk alone in the area she lived in. When Participant D was asked if she was part of a gang she responded "No". However, when asked if there were gangs in her area she reported the following: *"Yes... I see the boys that raped me as a gang... gangs have abused me... by raping me... I'm afraid to walk in the street... I'm scared... I always walk with others."* Participant H's recount of her exposure to gangsterism is as follows: *"Yes... I used to be part of a gang... at school... my reason was to fit in... and so the gang will sort others out who trouble me."* It is the researcher's opinion that the empirical findings of this study do not confirm whether the exposure to gangsterism might be a factor that contributes to female youth sex offending, except for Participant D who indicated that she was a victim of a sexual offence perpetrated by a gang.

According to Artz and Nicholson (2009:3-4) as well as Righthand and Welch, (2005:23), youth who sexually offended experienced school and academic difficulties. Most of these participants in this study experienced school and academic difficulties as mentioned above. The reported difficulties include disruptive behaviour, truancy, academic problems, learning disabilities, and placement in special classes. However, the researcher reiterates that academic functioning should not be determined solely by intellectual or neurological functioning. Other factors such as parental level of education and support should also be investigated. Some youth who

have sexually offended, however, do well in school, like Participant A in this study. In addition, Righthand and Welch (2005:23) found that 32% of the offenders in a particular study were described as above average in their academic performance. School difficulties experienced by girls like social rejection by peers, low connectedness to school and learning disabilities might lead to being absent from school and eventually dropping out of school (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3). Participant E's responses clearly indicate the school difficulties she experienced due to the sexual offence she committed and the social rejection by family and peers as a result of her deviant behaviour, as well as the rejection accompanying her teenage pregnancy. This eventually led to her dropping out of school. From the discussion above there is an indication that many factors that were highlighted in relation to the school structure and community resources might have contributed to female youth sex offending. Subsequently the theme of sexual abuse and knowledge about sex will be discussed in more detail.

#### 5.1.5 Theme 4: Sexual abuse and knowledge about sex

Factors such as sexual abuse, exposure to pornography, endless time spent on the internet or watching television are some of the prevalent issues that might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour. The researcher will recount each participant's responses in this regard in the table summary and, where necessary, verbatim responses will be presented.

**Table 10:**  
**Sexual abuse and knowledge about sex**

	<b>Exposure to pornography and sexting</b>	<b>Influence of the media (television, music and internet)</b>	<b>Exposure to any form of sexual abuse and exposure to sex education</b>
Participant A	She reported that she watched pornography only once with her cousin. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept, she reported that she was never involved in sexting but her friends received nude pictures on their cell phones.	Favourite television programmes: Cartoons like Winks, Dragon Ball Z and Ben10.  Favourite movies: Horror and comedy.  Favourite music: <i>"I like music that are sing by people who come from other townships... like Portuguese, Latino... also House."</i>  Internet: Google, YouTube Where do you access internet? <i>"At school and at the house."</i>	She reported that she was never abused.  Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.

		How often? <i>"For homework... once or twice a week."</i>	
Participant B	She reported that she watched pornography about three times a year on her friend's phone. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept she reported that she does take nude pictures of herself, but not often and that her friend sends the nude pictures and porn to others.	<p>Favourite television programmes: <i>"Generations, City, Scandal, Nanny 911 and hmm... Ghost whisperer, So you think you can dance?, Strictly come dancing, Idols... yoh... what you call this thing? Step in or step out."</i></p> <p>Favourite movies: <i>"Yoh I love horror movies and I love chick flick movies... I hate cartoons."</i></p> <p>Favourite music: <i>"R &amp; B, House, Westlife, Boys to men, Pop music... Michael Jackson... Hip hop."</i></p> <p>Internet: <i>"Yes I do for Facebook, I chat to my old friends, primary school wise... people that I have on my Facebook. YouTube I just watch videos. I use Google a lot."</i></p> <p>Where do you access internet? <i>"Access on the home internet and my phone."</i></p> <p>How often? <i>"Once a month."</i></p>	<p>Participant B was abused physically and emotionally by her stepmother and dad.</p> <p>Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.</p>
Participant C	She reported that she watched pornography only once at school when her classmates showed her the sex video of another girl. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept, she reported that she was never involved in sexting.	<p>Favourite movies: <i>"Comedies, Action movies, ya horrors."</i></p> <p>Favourite music: <i>"I love House and love music."</i></p> <p>Internet: Google</p> <p>Where do you access internet? How often? <i>"Like once a month...on my phone."</i></p>	<p>She reported that she was emotionally abused by her peers.</p> <p>Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.</p>
Participant D	She reported that she never watched pornography, but her sex video was sent around cell phones in school. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept, she reported that she was never involved in sexting.	<p>Television programmes: <i>"I used to like the Oprah Winfrey show."</i></p> <p>Movies: <i>"I like Oprah's movie and Whitney's movie."</i></p> <p>Music: <i>"Gospel and R&amp;B..."</i></p> <p>What type of Gospel? <i>"International and local."</i></p> <p>Internet? Where do you access internet? <i>"On my cell."</i></p> <p>How often? <i>"Every day."</i></p>	<p>Participant D reported that she was physically abused by two boys, emotionally abused by her sister, cousin and peers and sexually abused by two boys.</p> <p>Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4</p>

		What sites on the internet? <i>"Google, Opra mini... YouTube."</i>	
Participant E	She reported that she never watched pornography. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept she reported that she was never involved in sexting, but that her friend sent her nude picture to others.	Favourite television programme: <i>"All soopies."</i>  Favourite movies: <i>"Horror... keep you intense... suspicious... concentrated."</i>  Favourite music: Jazz  Does not access the internet	She reported that she was never abused.  Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.
Participant F	She reported that she never watched pornography. She knew what sexting was and explained that she was caught for sexting and distributing the nude picture of her friend.	Favourite television programme: <i>"Kyk bass... Keeping up with the Kardashians reality... how I look... TLC... soopies... Generations... Aspire."</i>  Music: <i>"R &amp; B, Hip-hop and House music. That's all."</i>  Internet: <i>"Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo..."</i>  How do you access the internet? <i>"My phone."</i>	She reported that she was never abused. Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.
Participant G	She reported that she never watched pornography, but that her sisters watch pornography. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept, she reported that she was never involved in sexting.	Favourite television programme: YOTV Land  Favourite movies: Comedy  Music: House and R&B  Where do you access internet? <i>"At Afro café."</i>  How often? <i>"I use it for school. Once a week."</i> What do you access? <i>"Google."</i>	She reported that she was sexually abused by two boys.  Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.
Participant H	She reported that she never watched pornography, but did receive a list of girls' names and addresses at school and the list is called the B I T C H list. She did not know what sexting was and after the researcher explained the concept, she reported that she was never involved in sexting.	Favourite television programme: <i>"It used to be Days of our lives, soopies."</i>  Favourite movies: <i>"Adventures, comedy... but not like those fighting ones... horror."</i>  Favourite music: R & B and House  Internet: <i>"Google... Newspaper."</i>  How do you access the internet? <i>"My phone."</i>  How often? <i>"I actually go on the internet every day."</i>	She reported that she was emotionally abused by some of her extended family members, like her uncle, aunt, granny and cousin.  Her exposure to sex education is mentioned in 5.1.5.4.

#### **5.1.5.1 Exposure to pornography and sexting**

According to Righthand and Welch (2005:22) investigations into the role of pornography in youth sex offending are limited, but the following research findings give an indication of the effect. Ford and Linney (in Righthand & Welch, 2005:22) found escalated rates of exposure to hard-core, sexually explicit magazines among youths who sexually offended compared to youths who perpetrated other offences. In addition, the youth sex offenders were exposed at younger ages, ranging from five to eight years. Righthand and Welch (2005:22) found that exposure to pornographic material at a young age was common among youths who sexually offended. Furthermore, high rates of exposure to pornography have been found in female youth sex offenders. According to Chetty (2009:3) the creation, production, distribution, use and possession of child pornography are offences in both the Films and Publications Act (Act, No. 65 of 1996) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007. In this study it was found that the distribution of child pornography was prevalent. However, the female youth sex offenders were ignorant about the fact that it was distribution of child pornography that they were involved in. Three of the eight participants confessed to watching pornography. However, the researcher is unsure if this is a true reflection due to the sensitive nature of this issue.

The themes of risk factors relating to youth sex offenders are consistent right across the different studies, whether related to male or female youth offending. Nevertheless, there is conflicting research with regard to the influence of pornography on sexual offending. It was found that pornography is harmful to youth, but not all youth exposed to pornography develop sexually deviant thoughts and behaviour patterns (Harris & Bezuidenhout, 2010:35). After conducting this study the researcher argues that young children unable to grasp the violent acts in pornography would most probably deal with this information in a destructive manner. Campher (2006:35) stated that when youth are exposed to sexual material that they cannot cognitively or emotionally process, their moral and mental development can be adversely affected. The researcher confirmed that in Participant G's interview it was found that her moral and mental development might have been adversely affected due to exposure to sexual material and other factors that could have contributed to her sex offending. The researcher also brings to attention the fact that child sex videos and child nude pictures that were distributed to the participants and their peers via cell phones were easily accessible. Furthermore, it is the researcher's

opinion that the ease of accessibility of child pornography on cell phones might contribute to the risk of female youth sex offending.

In summary, the table above clearly indicates the exposure to pornography and sexting for each participant. Participants A, B and C reported that they watched pornography, while Participants D, E, F, G and H reported that they never watched pornography. However, when the researcher probed further it was highlighted that certain of the participants' family members watched pornography. The researcher argues that there is a probability that these family members could have coerced the participants into watching pornography with them or could have discussed the details of the pornography with the participants. This study also found that seven out of the eight participants did not know what sexting was. Participant F was the only one who was familiar with the concept. The researcher attributes this to the fact that Participant F was involved in sexting and was caught for distributing the picture of her friend. This might offer an explanation for her awareness pertaining to the concept of sexting. The researcher found that speaking about pornography and sexting was an extremely sensitive subject for the participants. The researcher decided to probe by asking about their friends' involvement in pornography and sexting and found that the participants were more open to speak about this subject than about their personal involvement. The empirical findings of this study confirm that pornography and sexting might be contributory factors to female youth sex offending.

#### **5.1.5.2 Influence of the media (television, music and internet)**

Hunter et al. (2006:149-150) mention that factors such as endless time spent on the internet, watching violent and seductive music videos, and watching television are prevalent issues related to female youth sex offending. The researcher summarised the verbatim responses of each participant, with regard to their feelings pertaining to the influence of media in the above-mentioned table. It was unclear to the researcher how extensive the influence of media was in contributing to the female youth sex offender's offending. However the researcher would conclude that cell phones, as they relate to 'sexting' and the distribution of pornography (specifically that of child pornography), seem to have had an influence on the behaviour of female youth sex offenders. The researcher utilised the ecological model (Maguire, 2002:91-93) in order to explore the youth sex offender's vulnerability to oppression, abuse and social/technological pollution. The empirical findings of this study indicated that the female youth sex offenders experienced various types of oppression and abuse. With relevance to this study, female youth sex offenders' behaviour was explored in order

to view their vulnerability to oppression, abuse and social/technological pollution. The findings of this empirical study indicate that these factors could have contributed to the female youth sex offender's offending. However, there are three ways posited by Maguire (2002:18) in which the female youth sex offender could be empowered: the first area should focus on the youth, while seeking to develop their problem-solving, coping and developmental capacities; the second area should focus on the relationship between the youth and the system that they interact with and then link the youth to the needed resources, services and opportunities; and the third area should focus on the systems themselves, while seeking to reform these systems to meet the needs of the female youth sex offender more effectively. With these basic principles of the ecological approach, the helping professions can assist by empowering individuals to overcome these feelings of oppression and abuse.

#### **5.1.5.3 Exposure to sexual abuse**

Offenders with histories of abuse often begin offending at earlier ages (Barbaree & Langton, 2006:58-59; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19; Wyatt, 1988:111). The exposure to any form of abuse is a very sensitive issue, however the participants reported the following:

- Participant A, E and F were never abused.
- Participant B reported that she was physically and emotionally abused by her father and stepmother.
- Participant C reported that she was emotionally abused by her peers.
- Participant D reported that she was emotionally abused by her sister, cousin and two boys and that she was physically and sexually abused by the two boys who raped her.
- Participant G reported that she was sexually abused by two boys.
- Participant H reported that she was emotionally abused by members of her extended family.

Although the empirical findings of this study indicate that only two of the eight participants were sexually abused, the researcher is unsure if this is a true reflection due to the sensitive nature of this issue. However, with regard to physical and emotional abuse, six out of the eight participants were abused. The empirical findings of this study corroborate with the literature study (Hunter, 1999:27; Righthand & Welch, 2005:19) and confirm that child maltreatment has been associated with sexual violence in youth offenders.

#### **5.1.5.4 Exposure to sex education**

Some sex offenders have a tendency not to think rationally about their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. The lack of sexual knowledge or experience and poor social skills are some of the functional deficits (Hesselink-Louw & Schoeman, 2003:165). This study found that most of the participants did not know what 'sexting' meant, except for one participant who was diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic after being caught participating in sexting. It is the researcher's opinion that the lack of correct sexual knowledge might have contributed to the female youth sex offender's behaviour. In addition, according to the empirical findings of this study, most of the participants were ignorant about 'sexting' and what constitutes child pornography.

All of the participants in this study had some form of basic exposure to sex education. Participant A was taught about sex education at school by her teachers. She reported the following three concepts that she learnt about sex:

- *"I learnt that when you have sex, you might have a baby;*
- *you can get STDs; and*
- *you can also get HIV positive."*

Participant B was taught about sex education at her school by a company whose name she could not remember. She reported the following three concepts:

- *"if you decide to have sex you must have safe sex;*
- *you must know the consequences of sex; and*
- *have sex at the right time... when you feel you ready... yoh me I'm scared... I don't think you should be having sex while you still at school... if you a child and you not stable."*

Participant C was taught about sex education at her school by a teacher. She reported the following three concepts:

- *"I learnt about to female and female have sex and how do they do it;*
- *oral sex and other ones... why do we have to have sex... for us to have children; and*
- *to pleasure themselves."*

Participant D was taught about sex education at her school by her teachers. She reported the following three concepts:

- *“I’ve learnt that you should never have sex when you still young you should wait.*
- *I’ve learnt that... you should protect yourself when having sex... prevent.*
- *Abstain from sex.”*

Participant E was taught about sex education at her school by her teachers. She reported the following three concepts:

- *“We must always use protection. If we don’t there is a lot of sickness, pregnancies as well;*
- *sicknesses like STDs and STIs; and*
- *the female body, menstruation and the ovaries... ya and the... what’s this... the sperms get inside the ovaries... what they do.”*

Participant F was taught about sex education at her school by her Life Orientation teacher. She reported the following two concepts:

- *“You must use a condom at the time; and*
- *you shouldn’t go sleeping around... HIV and other diseases.”*

Participant G was taught about sex education by an organisation called Lifeline. She reported the following three concepts:

- *“hmmmm... hmmmm... it’s a hmmmm... when you are still young you must not get pregnant; and*
- *you must test first whether you are HIV positive or negative; and*
- *you must not... you must not eh... play at night... ya.”*

Participant H was taught about sex education at her school by a teacher. She reported the following three concepts:

- *“Firstly I would mention AIDS where you can’t have sexual intercourse without a condom cause AIDS is spreading too fast;*
- *if you want to have sex wait for the right time and the right person; and*
- *lastly... I would actually say that right now the girls in schools that are actually 14, 16 and 18 years old that are actually listening to their friends... and because their friends are having sex with other guys they are actually forced to... so like peer pressure... No is No... if you don’t want to do it or do what*

*your friends are doing... then you have the right to say no... and there is people in the school that you can talk to... the Principal, the teachers or you can ask the teachers to sent you to professional people so you can go get help... you know... even the police are there... so you don't have to be forced to do something that you don't want to do."*

As seen from the above-mentioned responses the offending behaviour of the female youth sex offenders are intricate and must be elaborated on in order to understand their behaviour in more detail. According to Hunter et al. (2006:149-150) poor relationships with family members, and/or peers and strong relationships with deviant peers such as gangs are seen throughout the youth sex offender's life trajectory. Sexual abuse, exposure to pornography and endless time spent on the internet, violent and seductive music, videos, and television are prevalent issues associated with family and environmental factors relating to female youth sex offending. As explained previously, it was difficult to derive a clear indication of sexual abuse, exposure to pornography, time spent on the internet, and violent and seductive media influences in this study due to the sensitive nature of the topics. However, some indication is given, for example some participants have disclosed sexual abuse, emotional abuse, exposure to pornography, endless time spent on their cell phones and the internet, and violent and seductive media influences. According to Righthand and Welch (2005:22), investigations into the role of pornography in youth sex offending are limited, but the following research findings give an indication of the effect. Righthand and Welch (2005:22) found that exposure to pornographic material at a young age was common among youths who sexually offended. Furthermore, high rates of exposure to pornography have been found in girls who have committed sex offences (Righthand & Welch, 2005:22). According to Chetty (2009:3) the creation, production, distribution, use and possession of child pornography are offences in both the Films and Publications Act (Act No. 65 of 1996) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007. Most of the participants did not know that the distribution of their nude pictures amounts to the distribution of child pornography. This study confirms that such information should be taught to children as soon as they are able to grasp the concept and this will make them aware of the seriousness of the matter.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter comprises of a detailed exposition of the transcribed data and a discussion of the findings of this study. The final chapter will consist of the formulation of conclusions and recommendations, based on the findings as described in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The researcher embarked on this study as there is a dearth of research focusing on female youth sex offending. In addition, it is confirmed by research that the number of incidents of female youth sex offenders has increased over the last few years (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:2). Two recent South African newspaper articles reported that a 12 year old girl allegedly raped her 5 year old male cousin and a 17 year old girl was convicted for manufacturing and distributing child pornography (Nair, 2014:7; Wagner, 2014:5). The empirical findings of this study and the literature review clearly indicate that there are differences between the male and female youth sex offender. As the empirical findings of this study indicate, menstruation to the female meant far more than a physical change to her body. The findings of this study confirmed that some females experienced the onset of menstruation differently due to the guidance they received from their significant others prior to their first menstruation (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:23). It was confirmed that those females who were not properly prepared for the onset of menstruation were shocked and felt humiliated instead of experiencing it as a representation of sexual maturity. Furthermore, in order to effectively assist the female youth sex offender, professionals would need a clearer understanding of their characteristics, perceptions and factors that contributed to their offending.

#### **6.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending. The researcher reports that this goal was achieved and significant information regarding female youth sex offending was obtained and presented in this study.

In order for the researcher to achieve the goal, the following objectives were developed and operationalised:

- **To theoretically conceptualise the context of female youth sex offending.**

The objective to theoretically conceptualise the context of female youth sex offending was reached by conducting a comprehensive literature study. Search engines such as Ebscohost and Sabinet were accessed. Relevant books, internet resources, articles and media reports with regard to female youth sex offending were accessed. Furthermore, using the information obtained in the literature review, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview schedule that guided the researcher when conducting the interviews with the participants. This leads the researcher to discuss the second objective, namely:

- **To explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.**

The objective to explore the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending was reached by interviewing the female youth sex offenders that were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic. Subsequently, this objective was met as the participants were interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule as a basis for conducting the interviews. In addition the researcher obtained written permission from the participants and their parents/caregivers to digitally record their responses. After a comprehensive data analysis of the transcribed interviews the researcher interpreted the data as explained in chapter 4, in order to present the perceptions of female youth sex offenders pertaining to factors that contributed to their offending. This leads the researcher to discuss the last objective:

- **To formulate recommendations to address female youth sex offending more effectively.**

The objective to formulate recommendations to address female youth sex offending more effectively was met in that various recommendations were formulated in conjunction with the extensive literature review and the empirical findings from the interviews that were conducted with the research participants. These recommendations will follow later in this chapter. This leads the researcher to discuss the specified key findings that were identified within the empirical study.

### **6.3 DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

Giguere and Bumby (2007:9) in conjunction with the empirical findings of this study corroborate that the key findings of risk factors pertaining to female youth sex offending were as follows: dysfunctional families, sexual and physical abuse, personal and family substance abuse, pregnancy, parent and youth conflict relationships, and poor academic performance. In addition, the key themes and sub-themes that the researcher identified in this study are discussed below.

#### **6.3.1 Theme 1: Family and environmental factors**

In chapter 5 a detailed discussion focusing on various family and environmental factors that most likely played a role in contributing to female youth sex offending was given. These factors include basic care and safety of the youth, the socio-economic status of the youth, their family structure, stability in their family, their parents' capacity, certain family dynamics and history of family criminality, as well as the quality of relationships with family members. Researchers conclude that youth are exposed to various forms of emotional violence and neglect, with one study confirming that 35-45% of youth witnessed domestic violence (Seedat et al., 2009:1013). In addition, the empirical findings of this study discussed in chapter 5 and the literature review in chapter 2 confirmed that female youth sex offenders' families were more likely to be unstable, were more likely from lower socio-economic backgrounds and their parents were more likely to be unable to protect them (Booyens et al., 2013:41; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Tardif, Auclair, Jacob & Carpentier, 2005:162). The newspaper article mentioned earlier (Wagner, 2014:5) confirms that the 17 year old female youth who was convicted for manufacturing and distributing child pornography was from an unstable home where parents were unable to protect and care for her. Another theme that emerged in this study was the developmental needs and emotional status of the female youth sex offender.

#### **6.3.2 Theme 2: Developmental needs and emotional status**

In conjunction with the literature review and the empirical findings of this study the researcher found that factors such as health and self-care skills, self-esteem and identity, assertion skills and social presentation, and history of personal and family substance abuse most likely played a role in contributing to female youth sex offending. Seedat et al. (2009:1015) mention that "South Africa has one of the

highest alcohol consumptions in the world per head for all individuals who drink alcohol.” The literature review in chapter 2 and the empirical findings of this study found that alcohol abuse is one of the serious factors that could contribute to female youth sex offending (Benokraitis, 2011:395, 405; Langlois & Talbot, 1999:1). Furthermore, the recent newspaper report highlights the fact that the 17 year old female’s mother “was often drunk and never had time to be with her daughter” (Wagner, 2014:5). In addition, the empirical findings of this study and the literature review also confirm that female youth sex offenders suffered more symptoms of anxiety and depression, experienced difficulties with assertiveness and had lower self-images (Booyens et al., 2013:42; Kubik et al., 2003:67; Hunter et al., 2006:153-155; Righthand & Welch, 2005:21). In the researcher’s opinion developmental needs and emotional status were factors that most likely contributed to the sex offending of the female youth sex offender. This leads the researcher to discuss the following theme which focuses on school structure and community resources.

### **6.3.3 Theme 3: School structure and community resources**

In this theme the researcher found that factors such as education and school performance; extramural activities; relationship with peers and teachers, and the availability of role models; availability of resources in the community; and exposure to gangsterism might have had an influence on the female youth sex offender’s behaviour problems. The empirical findings of this study corroborate the findings in other studies that female youth sex offenders performed poorly at school (Artz & Nicholson, 2009:3-4; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35; Righthand & Welch, 2005:23). Booyens et al. (2013:34-35) rightly states that lack of motivation, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia and the like could most probably also contribute to poor performance in school. Furthermore the researcher concluded in chapter 5, after the empirical findings were analysed, that factors such as the lack of participation in extramural activities and the lack of availability of positive role models in the community most likely also contributed to the female youth sex offender’s behaviour. As explained in chapter 5, most of the participants were not involved in extramural activities. One of the participants mentioned that she did not have any role models and that there were no good role models in her community. This leads the researcher to discuss the last theme and sub-themes that emerged from this study.

### **6.3.4 Theme 4: Sexual abuse and knowledge about sex**

The researcher focused on the following sub-themes which emerged from the literature study: exposure to pornography; the influence of the media; the exposure to

various forms of sexual abuse; and exposure to sex education. This study and the literature review confirmed that severe and extensive sexual victimisation histories were more prevalent in female youth sex offenders than male sex offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007:7; Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006:35). Research findings also confirmed that 39% of young females reported that they suffered some form of sexual violence, such as forced sex or unwanted touching before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Kubik & Hecker, 2005:45; Seedat et al., 2009:1013). Consequently female sexual abuse most likely contributed to female youth sex offending. A study conducted on clients' experiences of services with regard to child sex abuse (Nicolaidis, 2012:100) reported that one of the findings was that clients present with various factors such as developmental and cognitive difficulties, childhood trauma and the like. Even though this specific study was conducted on female youth sex offending, the researcher documented similar findings. Although female youth sex offenders were diverted to the Teddy Bear Clinic for therapeutical intervention, the researcher found that the female youth sex offenders not only presented with the sex offending behaviour, but also presented with factors such as developmental and cognitive problems, childhood trauma, poverty, and language difficulty. These factors might have also contributed to the female youth's offending. The researcher would therefore recommend that professionals working with children would need to be equipped to deal holistically with female youth sex offenders. This leads the researcher to discuss the value of this study.

#### **6.4 VALUE OF THIS STUDY**

It is the researcher's opinion that this study has made a contribution with regard to the knowledge of female youth sex offending in South Africa. According to the researcher's knowledge to date, this research study is the first of its kind in South Africa and thus adds to the knowledge base of Criminology. Even though this study consisted of a small sample, the research was conducted in Parktown and Soweto and these areas are similar to other communities in South Africa. In addition this study can assist professionals working with female youth sex offenders. Even though the sample was small, professionals working with female youth sex offenders will be able to draw information from this study in order to better assist the female youth sex offender. This leads the researcher to discuss the limitations of this study.

## 6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The following limitations were identified during this research study:

- Due to the fact that female youth sex offending is a contemporary, sensitive and complex issue there is a dearth of knowledge in this field of study. Due to the dearth of knowledge of female youth sex offending and the small samples of international studies that were available, the researcher had limited sources which she could consult. In addition, the researcher was unable to find any South African studies focusing on female youth sex offending.
- The researcher is of the opinion that there are no criminological theories relevant to explain the reasons for female youth sex offending.
- Only a small sample of participants was available.

Furthermore, with reference to the literature review and the empirical research in this study, the following recommendations for further research with regard to female youth sex offending are necessary.

## 6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the empirical findings of this study and on the literature review, the following needs for further research were identified:

- A larger study exploring the perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending should be undertaken in South Africa. Such a study can further increase the knowledge base pertaining to this phenomenon and can assist professionals working with female youth sex offenders.
- A study focusing on the sexual education of female adolescents will add value to the subject field. Further study should be conducted on female youth and their understanding of the concept of sex and the criminal aspects attached to it. This type of study should explore the sex education available to the female adolescents in order to give recommendations regarding what the needs are pertaining to sex education, in order to equip female adolescents with the necessary and relevant information.
- Further research with a larger sample that examines the unique developmental circumstances of female youth sex offenders is needed. The

study the researcher conducted is made up of a small sample and a larger study will help to confirm the unique developmental situations of the female youth sex offender. The findings of such a study will better equip professionals working with female youth sex offending.

- Criminological theories which could be applied to female youth sex offending should be developed.
- Further research should be conducted on the various diversion and treatment programmes available to female youth sex offenders. In the researcher's opinion this type of study could aid in informing professionals working with female youth sex offenders of the availability of such programmes and can highlight shortcomings that should be addressed to ensure effective and comprehensive diversion and treatment programmes.
- A larger study focusing on the risk factors pertaining to female youth sex offenders is essential. This type of study would indicate the relevant risk factors and better equip professionals working with female youth sex offenders.
- A study focusing on the victims of youth sex offending. The findings of such a study will better equip professionals working with the victims of female youth sex offending, to understand the impact that this type of offence has on the victims of such an offence.

The above-mentioned recommendations for further study pertaining to female youth sex offending leads the researcher to the following conclusions.

## 6.7 CONCLUSIONS

At the opening of the Gauteng Legislature, Premier Nomvula Mokonyane stated that "The solution to sexual offences does not lie in the successful arrest, prosecution and incarceration of offenders only, but in more comprehensive, socially embedded solutions, thus sexual offences are fundamentally a social problem" (Republic of South Africa, 2013:9). The researcher agrees that sexual offences are a social problem and a multidisciplinary approach is required to address this issue. Hopefully this study will motivate and encourage continued research in order to explore effective methods of assisting the female youth sex offender and break the vicious cycle by abating this phenomenon and ultimately preventing further female youth sex offending. There is a paucity of research with regard to female youth sex offending in

South Africa and this matter needs to be urgently addressed. According to Petersen, Bhana and McKay (2005:3) early adolescence is a critical age for entrenching normative sexual behaviours. In the light of the results of this study the researcher would advocate for earlier intervention. Female youth sex offending is occurring far earlier than 12 years of age; one of the participants of this study seems to have been involved in sexual relations from about 10 years of age and the researcher is aware of female youth sex offenders who started with deviant sexual behaviour from the age of 9 years. Negative attitudes and behaviours about sex are learned from an early age and therefore intervention to assist with positive attitudes and appropriate sexual behaviour should be stressed in multidisciplinary focus areas of every child's life trajectory.

McCann and Lussier (2008:379) urge researchers to develop the body of knowledge in regard to the risk factors in terms of the youth sex offender's developmental age. Based on the limited literature that is available, further research that examines the unique developmental circumstances of the female youth sex offender is needed. The researcher has also mentioned this as one of the recommendations for further study.

The empirical findings of this study confirm that the female youth sex offender is of the opinion that certain problems within their families possibly contributed to their offending behaviour. Some of these characteristics include factors such as divorce, poor parenting skills, domestic violence, poor quality of relationships, substance abuse, and lack of basic care and safety, just to mention a few. This study found that poor parental capacity and support was most likely a contributory factor to female youth sex offending. The intra-personal level of the female youth sex offender includes aspects such as a lack of assertiveness, low self-esteem and identity issues which most probably contributed to their sexual offending. Poverty was another factor that most likely played a contributory role, as the majority of the participants' parents were unemployed and due to poverty in the household some of these youth were forced to relocate to Children's Homes, change schools or drop out of school. In order to curb female youth sex offending one would need to address these factors in a multidisciplinary and holistic manner. This study reports an in-depth qualitative understanding of the perceptions of female youth sex offenders related to factors contributing to their offending behaviour. As mentioned previously, there is a dearth of literature focusing on female youth sex offending. This study aims to add to the body of knowledge and as it is the first study of its kind in South Africa, it adds

valuable empirical knowledge. Furthermore, it is the researcher's opinion that the empirical findings and recommendations of this study will motivate and encourage continued research in order to explore effective methods of assisting the female youth sex offender.

Rich (2011:3) states that several things have changed with regard to how researchers and practitioners view and understand youth offenders. Subsequently the way in which researchers and practitioners approach, view and understand youth sex offenders is extremely important. The researcher believes that most youth who have offended in South Africa have a chance to be rehabilitated. In addition, when researchers choose to examine female youth sex offenders according to the ecological systems perspective, where the youth is viewed in the context of their environments, the continuous interactions and reciprocal influence with their environments are emphasised (Maguire, 2002:90). This type of view is advantageous and assists professionals working with female youth sex offenders to have a holistic and better understanding of the female youth, her perceptions about her offence, and her social context. In the words of the late former President Nelson Mandela (Saboo, 2013:1), "the true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children." When researchers commit to continued research to assist our youth in South Africa, there is a commitment to advance the character of our society by treating our youth with respect and ensuring their safety and well-being.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT-PARENT/GUARDIAN

**Researcher: Gloria Elizabeth Da Costa**

**Name of participant** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of guardian** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** : \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Title of the study

The perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.

### 2. Purpose of the study

To explore the perceptions of the female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.

### 3. Procedures

The above-named youth, of whom I am the legal guardian, will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview to respond to questions and themes relating to her perception regarding the factors that contributed to her offending. The interview will take place at the child's convenience and the duration will be approximately 1 to 2 hours.

#### **4. Risks and discomfort**

I understand that there are no known risks or discomfort associated with this project. If I should find that my child is upset about the content of the interview in any way, I will phone the interviewer immediately and debriefing or therapy will be arranged for the child by the Teddy Bear clinic.

As a guardian, I would like to see that if my child experiences stress or fatigue during the interview, he or she will be given as many breaks during the interview as necessary.

#### **5. Benefits**

I understand that there are no direct benefits to me or my child for participation in this study. However, participation in this study might contribute to better understanding and service delivery to female youth who sexually offend.

#### **6. Participant's rights**

My child may withdraw from this study at any time.

#### **7. Financial compensation**

I understand that neither I nor my child will gain financially or in any other way from this study.

#### **8. Confidentiality**

In order to assure that the exact facts are recorded, the interview will be audio taped and/or notes will be taken during the interview. All information will be dealt with in a confidential manner. The results of this study may be published in professional

journals or presented at professional conferences, but the identity of the child will not be revealed.

### 9. Questions

If I have any questions or concerns, I can phone the researcher at 079 494 4683.

**I hereby give my permission for the child, of whom I am the guardian, to participate in the research project.**

This document was signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2013.

.....

Parent's signature

.....

Date

.....

Researcher's signature

.....

Date

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Faculty of Humanities

Department of Social Work & Criminology

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED ASSENT

**Researcher: Gloria Elizabeth Da Costa**

Name of participant : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. The title of the study

The perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.

### 2. The goal of the study

To explore the perceptions provided by female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending.

### 3. Procedures

I will ask questions to clarify uncertainties related to the study before giving my written assent. I will only share information I feel comfortable with. I am informed that the interview will be recorded and that debriefing will take place if requested. If I feel pressured or intimidated during the interview, I will inform the researcher. I am aware of the fact that I may withdraw from the study at any given time.



## **APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:**

### **The perceptions of female youth sex offenders regarding the factors that contributed to their offending**

#### **DEMOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Age  
Gender  
Race

#### **THEME 1: FAMILY AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS**

Basic care and safety  
Low socio-economic status  
Family structure, stability and parenting capacity  
Family dynamics and history of family criminality  
Quality of relationships with family members

#### **THEME 2: DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND EMOTIONAL STATUS**

Health and self-care skills  
Self-esteem and identity  
Assertion skills and social presentation  
History of personal and family substance abuse

#### **THEME 3: SCHOOL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Education and school performance  
Extramural activities  
Relationship with peers and teachers, and the availability of role models  
Availability of resources in the community  
Exposure to gangsterism

#### **THEME 4: SEXUAL ABUSE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEX**

Exposure to pornography and sexting  
Influence of the media (television, music and internet)  
Exposure to any form of sexual abuse  
Exposure to sex education