

# 7

## **SUMMARISED CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

With this study the researcher sought to contribute towards equipping social workers to deal with the daunting task of dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse reported to them on a regular basis. In chapters two, three and four a literature study was described. In chapter five the proposed seven-phase forensic interview protocol was discussed and in chapter six the empirical study is explained.

In this chapter summarised conclusions and recommendations will be made from the literature and the results of the empirical studies. The purpose of the study, the testing of the goals, the objectives, as well as the hypothesis will be evaluated and discussed. This chapter will refer to the objective for this study stated in chapter one, namely to develop, implement and evaluate a legally defensible interview protocol for social workers, which will assist them to facilitate disclosure of child sexual abuse of children in the middle childhood. The aim is also to make recommendations for further research and intervention (phase six of intervention research).

### **7.2 EVALUATION OF THE PURPOSE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

#### **7.2.1 Purpose of the study**

For the purpose of this study, the exploratory as well as the descriptive designs were used. Firstly the researcher explored the perceptions, concerns and expectations of relevant professionals like social workers, psychologists, magistrates and state prosecutors regarding the forensic interviewing of victims of child sexual abuse. Relevant literature and the researcher's own experience were

explored in order to develop the proposed forensic interview protocol. The seven-phase forensic interview protocol and the self-developed checklist were described, implemented and the results were documented.

### **7.2.2 Goal of the study**

The goal of this study was:

**To develop, implement and evaluate a legally defensible interview protocol for social workers, to facilitate disclosure of child sexual abuse for children in the middle childhood years.**

The researcher succeeded in developing a structured forensic interview protocol which consists of legally defensible fundamentals and it was proven during the study to be implementable (Taken into consideration the small sample used in this study). The study further suggests that five of the seven phases of this newly developed interview protocol are not in its totality implemented in social work practice.

In chapter six the data collected during the empirical study, were interpreted. From the analysis of the data it was clear that the proposed seven-phase forensic interview protocol, with exclusion of a few fundamentals, was successfully implemented with ten children, and suggests that this exact protocol is possibly not being used in practice. The researcher therefore succeeded in achieving the goal of the research study.

### **7.2.3 Objectives of the study**

The various objectives that were set for the research will be discussed individually.

#### **7.2.3.1 Objective one**

Objective one was to develop a theoretical framework regarding:

- child development in the middle childhood;
- dynamics in interviewing children;
- a sound knowledge base regarding child sexual abuse;
- the facilitation of disclosure of child sexual abuse; and
- forensic interviewing of children.

This objective was connected to phase two of the intervention research. During phase two and in chapters one, two, three and four, the literature study for this research was discussed and a theoretical framework for the development of a forensic interview protocol (intervention model) was created. The researcher conducted a thorough literature study and consulted with experts from different professions namely: social work, psychology, state prosecutor from a sexual offences court, magistrate from a sexual offences court, advocate of the High Court and investigating officers of the South African Police Service who investigate crimes against children. International forensic interview protocols were also explored. The researcher also incorporated her experience gained while working in the South African Police Service for ten years and in private practice for four years.

Based on the above, it can be said that the researcher did succeed in reaching the first objective. From the empirical results discussed in chapter six it was evident that the fundamentals highlighted in the seven-phase forensic interview protocol were indeed implementable.

### **7.2.3.2 Objective two and three**

Objective two and three was:

- to develop a forensic interview protocol for social workers to facilitate disclosure of child sexual abuse victims in the middle childhood; and

- to develop a checklist, containing all the fundamentals included in the seven-phase forensic interview protocol, in order to evaluate interviews conducted with children in the experimental and comparison groups.

In phase one of intervention research, the researcher has identified various professionals' concerns regarding the absence of a structured interview protocol, as well as recommendations in this regard. Their main concerns were that there is no existing structured interview protocol, and that due to time constraints they recommended that the structured protocol should not be time-consuming. However, it is imperative that anybody who works with children accommodates the child's unique process. If time is a problem, it could lead to an innocent person being arrested and charged for a crime that he/she has not committed. It is also then possible that a sexually abused child is sent back to a situation where the abuse would continue.

The seven-phase forensic interview protocol will thus address the concern of various professionals, namely providing a structured interview protocol. However, it does not accommodate social workers who would want to conduct forensic interviews quickly. The courts would also not accommodate this and lack of time will never be an excuse.

The implementation of objectives two and three is connected to phase four of intervention research, namely developing a prototype or preliminary intervention.

The seven-phase forensic interview protocol and self-developed checklist is pilot tested with three alleged victims of child sexual abuse. The necessary adjustments were made and the interview protocol was then ready to be implemented during empirical study. Objective two and three were thus achieved.

### **7.2.3.3 Objective four**

Objective four was to implement the forensic interview protocol with ten girls in the middle childhood (experimental group) and evaluate it by means of a self-developed checklist.

Objective four was connected to phase five of intervention research, namely evaluation and advanced development. In this study the quasi-experimental design was applied. The experimental group was exposed to the newly developed seven-phase forensic interview, and interviews were evaluated by means of the self-developed checklist to determine whether the newly developed interview protocol (X) facilitates disclosure in a legally defensible manner by means of adhering to specific fundamental (O<sub>1</sub>). Audio-recordings made it possible for the researcher to code the interviews comprehensively.

It can be concluded that, after the necessary and final changes were made to the seven-phase forensic interview protocol, and it was successfully implemented that objective four was accomplished.

Fifty percent of the interviews were independently coded by another professional. The assistance of the Department of Statistics of the Pretoria University made statistical analysis possible.

### **7.2.3.4 Objective five**

Objective five was to evaluate an independent social worker's interviews with children who were allegedly sexually abused, by means of a self-developed checklist.

Audio-recordings were received from the social worker of the comparison group soon after interviews have been conducted. The researcher then evaluated the independent social worker's interviews by means of the self-developed checklist.

The researcher monitored the ages of children to ensure that the subjects are of the same ages.

As for the experimental group, 50% of the interviews of the comparison group were independently coded by another professional. The assistance of the Department of Statistics of the Pretoria University made statistical analysis possible.

It can be concluded that objective five was achieved.

#### **7.2.3.5 Objective six**

The evaluation of the newly developed seven-phase forensic interview was the aim of objective six.

During a seminar which was presented by the researcher in July 2007, various professionals from social work organisations, private practices, police departments, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, various universities, psychology departments, legal professionals from the Johannesburg Bar and religious leaders of various churches gave their input regarding the proposed protocol. Recommendations were mainly made regarding the different levels on which it should be implemented and proposals for follow-up research were made.

In chapter six the results of the empirical study, as well as the interpretation thereof, were presented. The success of the intervention was measured by the percentage of fundamentals which were covered during the different interviews. The findings of the researcher were that the seven-phase forensic interview protocol could be successfully implemented during interviews with alleged sexually abused children, and that the protocol as proposed in its totality is not yet used in practice.

From the above, it can be noted that objective six was achieved.

### 7.2.3.6 *Objective seven*

Objective seven was to make recommendations for further utilisation of the protocol by social workers, which is addressed in this chapter.

## 7.3 Testing the hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is:

**If this interview protocol will be applied in cases of alleged sexual abuse against children of the middle childhood, it will facilitate disclosure in a more legally acceptable and defensible manner.**

According to the problem formulation in chapter one, there is no national research-based forensic interview protocol for social workers in South Africa. A social worker working at a welfare organisation, state department or private practice may be confronted with an allegation of child sexual abuse and may not know how to handle the situation properly.

From literature study, consultations with experts, studying specific international interview protocols, and the researcher's experience, fundamentals which are legally defensible were identified and developed into a seven-phase forensic interview protocol. Each fundamental and step followed in the seven-phase forensic interview protocol is therefore justified by literature and experience.

After testing and evaluating the seven-phase interview protocol with thirteen children (three interviews for pilot study and ten for the empirical study) and evaluating ten interviews from the experimental group, the researcher found that although the sample of this study prevent generalization, interesting trends were found indicating that the seven-phase forensic interview protocol may well be implementable. The legally defensible fundamentals have mostly been covered during the interviews in the experimental group.

It was also found that in some instances the researcher did not follow the proposed protocol 100% and various reasons for that could be stated, namely professional errors, the child's process and nature of the allegation. However, it was found that the fact that the researcher's knowledge of the fundamentals, and increased awareness on what needed to be done, in many cases resulted in better ratings than those of the social worker in the comparison group.

In chapter six the seven-phase forensic interview protocol was evaluated. The results suggest that the newly developed forensic interview protocol, consisting of legally defensible fundamentals, should be considered a new development and contribution to the field of social work.

## **7.4 CONCLUSIONS**

From this study the following conclusions can be drawn:

### **7.4.1 Research process and orientation of research study**

Despite awareness campaigns and crime prevention strategies from the police, children are sexually abused on a daily basis. Due to legislation, cases of child sexual abuse are reported most often to either to the police or social workers. The fact that social workers are more accessible motivates schools, community members, parents and other professionals to refer children who they suspect are being sexually abused to a local welfare organisation. The social worker in the organisation has to conduct a thorough forensic interview in order to decide if a case should be filed with the South African Police Service.

Due to a lack of a structured, defensible forensic interview protocol, many social workers would rather refer cases, resulting in children being interviewed by many professionals and often referred for second or third opinions. This results in legal professionals not wanting to believe the child's statement if the child was



interviewed by social workers or psychologists before the statement has been taken.

The study thus aimed to equip and empower social workers to be able to receive an intake of alleged sexual abuse, follow the seven-phase forensic interview protocol and be able to defend every process followed. The researcher did not aim to prove that the seven-phase forensic interview protocol facilitates the obtaining of legally defensible information, but firstly aimed at developing a new intervention instrument and secondly to explore whether or not the instrument is indeed implementable.

Due to the fact that the researcher did not focus on obtaining qualitative data, the quantitative approach was chosen, which led the way for comparing the experimental and comparison groups with the assistance of the Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria.

The five phases of intervention research gave a structured guideline and empowered the researcher to firstly analyse the problem, gather information, design the protocol, develop and pilot-test it, and afterwards evaluate and effect advanced developments.

#### **7.4.2 Sexual abuse and the impact on the child in the middle childhood**

It is important that social workers know what constitutes sexual abuse. It is not imperative for a professional to be able to classify the sexual abuse into the legal definitions, as it is the task of the state prosecutor to bring the specific charge to the court. The social worker, however, could determine and describe the nature of the offence in his/her report, which will then assist the state prosecutor or police official in his/her decision.

It is important that social workers are aware of the types of sexual abuse that exist. A child may describe certain sexual behaviour and if the social worker does not know of the existence of such behaviour, it may cause disbelief and have serious

implications for the outcome of the case. Social workers must also be aware not to only concentrate on sexual behaviour involving the child's body, but also explore the possibilities of whether the child had to touch the perpetrator's body.

The definition of child sexual abuse was explored and it was determined that "child sexual abuse" will refer to any behaviour and/or acts that have a sexual connotation, including rape and non-contact sexual acts like exposure to pornography and computer-facilitated sexual exploitation.

Social workers must be aware that sexual abuse of children does not always only involve one perpetrator and one child. Their interview protocol must also include questions to determine who were present when the sexual abuse occurred, whether "anything else" happened than were disclosed, if "anyone else" has also done the same, and if the child knows anyone who has also been victimised. In order to cover the possibility of multiple perpetrators, the proposed interview protocol should therefore include continuous exploring of whether anyone else has also sexually abuse the child.

It is therefore important that social workers are aware not to dismiss a case after the child has initially denied that the abuse happened. It is apparent that a child will not necessarily disclose immediately after the abuse took place.

It is also imperative that the social worker does not try to facilitate a disclosure in the first session, as it is evident that many children do not disclose in the first interview. Building a trusting relationship which is appropriate for the age of the child is very important, and this is then also included in the proposed forensic interview protocol.

A complete investigation must be conducted when a child recants an allegation in order to determine the nature of and motive for the recantation.

Due to the grooming process that many perpetrators follow, the interviewer must allow for the fact that the child sitting in front of him/her may be afraid or hesitant, because that child has no guarantee that the interviewer is not also going to

expect things from him/her that he/she does not want to do. Physical contact and boundaries should be respected at all times.

False allegations in the context of sexual abuse investigations do exist, and every case should be handled with care as even an experienced social worker could very easily make the wrong conclusions, leaving a child in a situation where the abuse continues. It is thus important that the social worker explores multiple hypotheses from the first session and not as the only option assumes that the first person whom the child indicates is the alleged perpetrator.

It is imperative for social workers intervening in interviews with alleged child sexual abuse victims, not to only rely on behavioural indicators reported by caregivers. A thorough forensic interview with the child concerned should be conducted.

Social workers should be aware of the trauma-causing factors while busy with the interview and explore it when it is offered by the child. During the empirical study it was evident that it is very difficult to explore for these internalisations without being leading. However, it is still important that social workers keep these factors in mind when interviewing children, because if a child discloses information on it, it is evident of internal consistency.

#### **7.4.3 Developmental factors when working with middle childhood children in the field of child sexual abuse**

In chapter three developmental factors when working with children in the middle childhood in the field of child sexual abuse, were discussed.

Due to many physical changes like milk teeth that are replaced by permanent teeth, children may feel uncomfortable coming to see a strange person. To put the child at ease, professionals may comment on their own childhood, for example mentioning to the child about not having teeth themselves at the age of 8 years.

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Some children naturally write more neatly than others and social workers should never comment on handwriting that is not neat, or on any inability that the child is displaying. They should rather comment on the child's willingness to try. It could be expected from a child in this age group to make drawings, but if a child does not want to make a drawing or write something, he/she must never be forced, as there will be a valid reason why the child does not want to draw.

Although children in the middle childhood are less egocentric, social workers must not ask questions beyond what can be expected from the child. A comprehensive knowledge of the concrete-operational stage of Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory is imperative. The seven-phase forensic interview protocol includes the most important fundamentals of cognitive development in order to ensure that the interviewing process is developmentally sensitive.

It is important that the social worker does not join the opinion of many legal professionals that the child is unreliable, but rather use his/her knowledge, skills and objective attitude to interview the child in a developmentally sensitive manner to assist the child to recall. Play-related communication techniques would also assist the child to recall what happened through a developmentally sensitive process, without the confrontation of an adult asking direct questions.

Children in the middle childhood are dependent on an adult to help them tell their story. It is also imperative that the adult use developmentally sensitive and non-leading methods when interviewing the child on the alleged abuse. Specific developmental issues need to be taken into consideration.

When working with victims of child sexual abuse, it is imperative to know that children in the middle childhood become increasingly inquisitive about body parts and are curious about sex. Therefore sexual play in middle childhood is usually experimental and it has nothing to do with love or sexual urges. Social workers also need to know that the children's' increased interest in sex, and the exposure to implied sex in television programmes may cause them to have more knowledge than what is expected from them at this age. It is thus imperative that social workers ask questions regarding exposure to any explicit television programmes,

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prior knowledge on sexual issues and also exposure to a sexualised environment. The seven-phase forensic interview protocol proposes that the initial disclosure is facilitated by means of play-related communication techniques like the house-and-community plan discussed in chapter four. This technique explores exposure to explicit sexual acts.

#### **7.4.4 Interviewing allegedly sexually abused children**

The aim of forensic assessment interviews is not debriefing or therapeutic. It is a fact-finding process and should only be conducted by trained professionals. As social workers could be *subpoenaed* to testify in court at any given time after intervening in a sexual abuse allegation, they must ensure that they always conduct the interviews in a legally defensible way.

From chapter four the following aspects emerged:

- Social workers must be trained thoroughly before conducting forensic interviews.
- Social workers must be aware of their own unfinished business on the topic of child sexual abuse before engaging in this field.
- When interviewing the child, the parents or other significant people should not be present.
- Children should be familiarised with the interview setting during the rapport-building stage.
- Social workers must create awareness in the child regarding specific ground rules before abuse-focused questioning starts.
- Free narrative should be invited first before questioning starts.
- Questioning should always be done with the use of either open-ended questions or non-leading abuse-focused questions.
- Multiple choice questions and the repetition of questions should be limited, and close-ended, leading and "why" questions should be avoided.

- A developmentally sensitive question format should be used when topics are introduced, labels are explored and, concepts and names clarified. Main facts should be summarised before the new topic is introduced.
- Anatomically correct dolls and stick figures should be used in a non-leading way when necessary and only after the child has verbalised the alleged sexual abuse.

During the forensic interviewing the social worker should focus on obtaining information regarding explicit sexual knowledge and detailed context explanation. The social worker must be alert to inconsistencies in the child's statement and must ask clarifying questions. The importance of exploring consistency between the child's verbal statements and emotional reactions, as well as inconsistencies in the child's statement is also very important.

Information regarding the legal process should be done with discretion and should not impose any guilt on the child. The child has the right to leave a session on a high note, and it is necessary that the professional therefore employs empowerment exercises to contain the child before a session ends and the child has to leave.

#### **7.4.5 Empirical process**

The seven-phase forensic interview protocol does include the most important phases found in international protocols namely:

- Rapport-building.
- Ground rules.
- Free recall.
- Conducting a truth-and-lie check.
- Questioning.
- Closure.

#### **7.4.5.1 Phase one: Rapport-building and facilitation of initial verbal disclosure**

To facilitate the initial disclosure through non-leading play-related communication techniques is not only developmentally sensitive, but also legally defensible as the child is not forced or coached to disclose the abuse. If the child used a label to disclose the abuse and the social worker did not clarify it, the social worker cannot claim that her handling of the initial disclosure was legally defensible. Social workers mostly handle this phase with success as suggested by the results of the comparison group.

The first phase of the seven-phase forensic interview protocol has been successfully implemented by both interviewers from the experimental and comparison groups.

It appears that social workers:

- know how to initiate a forensic session;
- are aware of their conduct and the impact thereof on the child and the outcome of the case; and
- have knowledge on which practical arrangements relating to a forensic interview may have a detrimental impact on the child or the case.

The results suggest that this phase is not a contribution to the social work profession in South Africa

#### **7.4.5.2 Phase two: Ground rules**

Although international protocols do cover ground rules as proposed by the seven-phase forensic interview protocol, they do not conduct the ground rules after the initial disclosure, but during rapport-building. It is vital to conduct the ground rules after the initial disclosure to ensure that the child understands the seriousness of the topic to be discussed.

There was a statistically significant difference between the comparison group and the experimental group, indicating that ground rules were not successfully established by the interviewer of the comparison group.

It appears that:

- social workers are not aware of the importance of ground rules;
- social workers need to be trained in this field; and
- establishing ground rules right before abuse-focused questioning starts could successfully be implemented.

The results suggest that this phase be considered a new contribution to the social work profession in South Africa.

#### **7.4.5.3 Phase three: Truth-and-lie and morality check**

Children need to be alerted to the importance of telling the truth and the impact that a lie may have. Interviewers who fail to do so may cause the interview not to be legally defensible.

There was a statistically significant difference between the comparison group and the experimental group, indicating that a truth-and-lie and morality check were not successfully conducted by the comparison group's interviewer.

However, the interviewer from the experimental group did not comply 100% with the proposed protocol, indicating that human error can still occur even when the interviewer is fully aware of what is expected from him/her.

It appears that:

- this phase is not currently part of social workers' protocol when conducting forensic interviews;
- social workers need training in this field;



- conducting a truth-and-lie and morality check could be implemented successfully; and
- social workers should remind themselves of all the phases of a legally defensible interview protocol before an interview starts.

The results suggest that this phase be considered a contribution to the social work profession.

#### **7.4.5.4 Phase four: *Inviting free narrative***

Inviting a free narrative before abuse-focused questioning starts, is recommended internationally. Although social workers are aware of this, it does not necessarily mean that they would adhere to it. Replacing invitation for free narrative with open-ended questions may also be regarded as effective. The use of pictures to determine the number of times the alleged abuse happened, as well as the different venues, is not used in practice by social workers or in any of the international protocols. It is, however, implementable and works very effectively in practice and has been tested in a criminal case in South Africa with positive results. Training in the use of this specific procedure is essential.

There is a statistically significant difference between the comparison group and the experimental group, indicating that the phase of “inviting free narrative” has not been conducted by the interviewer of the comparison group as proposed by the seven-phase forensic interview protocol.

It appears that:

- this procedure is not part of social workers' interview protocol;
- social workers in the field need to be made more aware of the functions and importance of free narrative;
- the phase "inviting free narrative" could successfully be implemented; and
- social workers need training in this field;

The results suggest that this phase be considered a contribution to the social work field.

#### **7.4.5.5 Phase five: Questioning**

Exploring the alleged abuse by means of pictures made by the child in the previous phase makes it easier for the child, because it fits in with children's concrete thoughts. Combining the using of pictures with age-appropriate language and specific questioning format would not only be developmentally sensitive, but also empower the social worker to defend her working procedure as legally defensible. Social workers in practice do not use this method. However, a questioning format which is mostly legally defensible and developmentally sensitive is used in practice.

Although the interviewer from the experimental group had advanced knowledge on the fundamentals of the proposed interview protocol, she also failed to comply 100%. However, there was still a statistical significant difference between the comparison group and the experimental group, indicating that the questioning phase has not been implemented as proposed by the seven-phase forensic interview protocol.

It appears that the questioning format:

- is not part of social workers' protocol when conducting interviews;
- social workers need training in this field;
- the specific questioning format and use of clear and age-appropriate language can mostly be implemented.

The results suggest that this phase be considered a contribution to the social work profession.

#### **7.4.5.6 Phase six: Investigate multiple hypotheses**

Exploring multiple hypotheses as proposed by the seven-phase forensic interview protocol was not found in any of the international protocols and is mostly not done within social work practice in South Africa. Increased awareness in this regard is essential. When a social worker has covered this phase, she would be able to defend herself during expert testimony, as during cross-examination multiple hypotheses for the allegation would be explored by defense lawyers.

There is a statistically significant difference between the comparison group and the experimental group.

It appears that:

- social workers need training in this field;
- the exploring of multiple hypotheses does not take place as often as it should and is expected from the legal system; and
- exploring multiple hypotheses could be successfully implemented during forensic assessment interviews.

The results suggest that this be considered a new development to the social work profession.

#### **7.4.5.7 Phase seven: Closure**

The truth-and-lie check after abuse-focused questioning is commonly found in international protocols and also in the protocol of social workers in South Africa. Ensuring that the child is contained and explaining legal proceedings where necessary are common practice nationally and internationally.

No statistically significant differences between the comparison group and the experimental groups were found in this phase.

It appears that:

- social workers do not need additional training in this field;
- social workers are aware of the importance of conducting a truth-and-lie check after abuse-focused questioning; and
- social workers are familiar with what is expected during this phase.

The results suggest that this phase is not a contribution to the social work profession in South Africa.

#### 7.4.6 Other conclusions

- From objective one, the conclusion can be drawn that literature study is absolutely essential when compiling a checklist and developing an intervention (forensic interview protocol).
- From the data analysis it could be suggested that this seven-phase forensic interview protocol be considered a new development
- It cannot be assumed that a social worker, after four years of studies, is equipped to handle child sexual abuse allegations. Training and in-service training is thus essential.
- It is important for social workers to follow a structured interview protocol in order to rule out a subjective attitude. If a social worker would follow the seven-phase forensic interview protocol she would not only be able to facilitate the disclosure in a legally defensible manner, but also make sure that she is objective.
- Utilising the seven-phase forensic interview protocol will not only facilitate the disclosure in a legally defensible manner, but may also protect the rights of both the child and the alleged perpetrator.
- A person accused of a sexual offence against a child has the right to expect that the forensic interviewer is a trained, objective person who follows a structured defensible interview protocol. The seven-phase forensic interview protocol aims to adhere to this.



- A child has the right to be interviewed in a developmentally sensitive manner, by means of a structured protocol which aims to promote, among others things, his/her best interest in the case on hand.
- From the data analysis it is found that the researcher did not manage to successfully explore the following fundamentals due to the fact that it was difficult to explore it without being leading:
  - Exploring about the use of pornography.
  - Exploring internalisations.
  - Exploring the experience of initial boundary violations.
  - Assessing whether the child reveals a grooming process.
- Fundamentals which were not explored by the interviewers from the experimental and comparison groups were:
  - When the child heard for the first time that sexual abuse exists. It is, however, very important that interviewers must ask these questions as this may provide an explanation for the allegation.
  - The fundamental where the interviewer should explore the reasons for not telling was also not adhered to 100%. It may be that social workers are scared that the child may feel guilty or get the impression that the interviewer blames him/her for not reporting the abuse. This is however, a very important question as it is always posed in court and can also be asked to the social worker during expert testimony.
- Although the researcher had access to and was familiar with all the fundamentals of the proposed protocol, she still did not comply 100% with what was expected. Reasons for this could be: human errors, process of the interviewer, process of the child, or lack of concentration.

## 7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations will now be made and themes for further research will be discussed. Recommendations will be made on the macro-, meso- and micro level.



### 7.5.1 Macro level

- Awareness campaigns and drives held by awareness groups like People Against Women Abuse.
- Re-establishing of the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units in South Africa.
- Legislation about handling cases within child protection should be introduced, so that a minimum standard of training on forensic assessment is made compulsory for all beginner social workers, starting their career.
- Policy makers in the South African Police Service should be made aware of the current shortcomings in the conducting of forensic interviews, and policy in this regard must be set for implementation on a national level.
- A code of ethics, protecting children and forensic interviewers should be compiled.
- A specialist field within social work should be registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions.
- Social workers interested to register as experts in this field should write an entrance examination.
- The treatment of sex offenders should be addressed on a macro level by government, e.g. the implementing of chemical castration.
- Changing the criminal procedure by making video-recordings of children's testimony admissible within the South African courts.

### 7.5.2 Meso level

- The undergraduate training of social workers at universities should include developmental issues when conducting forensic interviews, as well as following a legally defensible protocol when engaged in child sexual abuse investigations.
- The seven-phase forensic interviewing protocol should be adopted by the Department of Social Development and all existing social workers should be trained in this protocol.

- All police officials should be trained in the fundamentals of the seven-phase forensic interview protocol in order to take proper statements.
- All non-governmental organisations should adapt the seven-phase forensic interview protocol in order to empower social workers to conduct forensic investigations.
- Intensive training of departmental heads of different welfare bodies in order to orientate them on the level of speciality of this field.
- Increasing the skills of professionals through practical training sessions in order to comply with what is expected from them during engagement in the legal system.

### **7.5.3 Micro level**

- All social workers should be trained in the fundamentals of the seven-phase forensic interview protocol in order to take proper statements.
- All social workers who conduct forensic interviews should be supervised.
- Police officials should be orientated and trained in some of the fundamentals of the seven-phase forensic interview protocol in order to ensure that the primary investigative interview is done correctly.
- Parents and community members should be made aware not to ask allegedly sexually abused child leading questions during a disclosure and not to imply guilt on the child.
- All teachers should be made aware how to identify the signs and symptoms of a sexually abused child, and also receive training in the questioning format when handling of a learner's disclosure.
- Other professionals, like psychologists, medical doctors and counsellors should receive training on how to handle a child's disclosure in a legally defensible manner.

#### 7.5.4 Seven-phase forensic interview protocol

From the data analysis it is found that the researcher did not manage to successfully explore the following fundamentals due to the fact that it was difficult to explore it without being leading:

- Exploring the use of pornography.
- Exploring internalisations.
- Exploring the experience of initial boundary violations.
- Assessing whether the child reveals a grooming process.

Although the above fundamentals could not successfully be explored due to the absence of a manner to ask the questions in a non-leading way, the researcher would recommend that it is still included as part of the protocol, as the interviewer should be reminded about the existence of these fundamentals. The above information should thus be fundamentals that will only be followed up after the child has mentioned something about it.

Interviewers should refresh their memory regarding the specific phases and fundamentals covered in the proposed interview protocol before conducting a forensic interview.

#### 7.5.5 Recommendations for further research

- Further research should be conducted with a larger sample of children.
- The protocol should be tested with boys who allegedly have been sexually abused.
- The protocol should be tested with black children with or without a translator.
- The protocol should be tested with children with developmental difficulties and/or physical disabilities.
- The outcome of criminal cases where the seven-phase forensic interview protocol was implemented should be researched.





- The protocol should be tested with children with attention deficiency and learning difficulties and should be adapted accordingly.
- Guidelines on the handling of a child who is recanting should be developed.
- Guidelines on corroborating interviews with significant others should be compiled.

## 7.6 CONCLUDING REMARK

A perfect interview does not exist. Conducting forensic interviews is a challenging task and is a learning process even after years of experience. Making material mistakes during the course of the interview may not only have serious implications for the child, but may change an alleged perpetrator's life for ever.

The results suggest that this seven-phase forensic interview protocol was successfully implemented and be considered a new development

If implemented with the necessary awareness and preparation, it will assist social workers to facilitate closure of child sexual abuse in a legally defensible way.