

When parents interchange love with abuse: An analysis of parental-child abuse for correctional intervention

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A great deal is known about child abuse, especially the devastating effect of abuse on the child. Substantial national and international research on child abuse exists that focuses on the child as the victim. However, less attention has been paid to really understanding the abuser. This is especially true regarding the parent-child abuser in terms of abuse onset, motives, triggers, and the specific life path and influences that contributed to, and shaped the parent into a child abuser.

This article presents a case study of a parent-child abuser's life journey, influences and crimes from a qualitative-criminological perspective. The mother's distinctive needs and risks for rehabilitation efforts are derived from her life path, while practical and achievable treatment strategies are recommended and put forward to serve as indicators for effective intervention efforts. The authors furthermore allude to the effects of the abuse on the child victims and the cycle of abuse.

Keywords: parent-child abuser; sexual abuse; physical abuse; emotional abuse; neglect; criminological analysis; child victims; cycle of abuse

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that in 80% of all child abuse cases the perpetrator is a parent (Safehorizon, 2016). Corroborating this sentiment, Siegel (2016) states that parents constitute the majority of child abusers and that this phenomenon (parent-child abuse) is representative through all religious, ethnic, gender, age, educational, and socioeconomic divisions in society. Accordingly, parent-child abuse ensues in all countries and across all cultures and communities in the world (Artz, Burton, Ward, Leoschut, Phyfer, Loyd, Kassanjee & Le Mottee, 2016).

Various South African research initiatives look at child abuse and the consequences thereof on the child (Artz et al, 2016; Blackie, 2014; Bezuidenhout, 2013; Pretorius, Mbokazi, Hlaise & Jacklin, 2012; Safehorizon, 2016). In South Africa, little effort has been made to unpack the intricacies of the parent as a child abuser and only a few research studies attempt to explain parent-child abusers. Available research (Aucamp, Steyn & Van Rensburg, 2013; Bezuidenhout, 2013; Pretorius et al., 2012; Songca, 2016) touches on the aetiology of this phenomenon. In this regard, Siegel (2016) supports the aforementioned noting that abusive parents are often victims of their own negative childhood experiences in term of physical abuse, lack of love, emotional neglect and incest. Likewise, Lennings, Brummert-Lennings, Bussey and Taylor (2014) elucidate that parental substance abuse, own abuse history, poor parenting skills, unresponsiveness to the child's needs, employment difficulties, psychosocial adjustment, interpersonal skills, stress and self-esteem deficits may be factors associated with parent-child abuse.

Parent-child abuse is a form of intrafamily violence that often advances to intergenerational abuse (Artz et al, 2016; Siegel, 2016; Songca, 2016). This happens when violence and abuse perpetrated against children by parents is carried over from one generation to the next. The process becomes entrenched in the psyche of today's victims of abuse and violence who might well then become tomorrow's abusers (Siegel, 2016; Songca, 2016).

This article draws on a qualitative approach, presenting a case study narrative of a parent-child abuser. This abusive mother's criminal path and the enmeshed influences (her own childhood and adulthood trauma and abuse) are outlined while specific needs that stem from her life journey are identified for rehabilitation efforts. Effective offender-oriented and gender sensitive intervention strategies are proposed and recommendations are made for the mother's person-centered treatment. Said treatment involves an individualised approach that would encompass and recognise the mother's pathway,

experiences and involvement in child abuse. Lastly, the effect of child abuse pertaining to the cycle of abuse is discussed. The authors look at family conferencing as an inclusion to the mother's rehabilitation path.

THE MEDIA AND AWARENESS OF PARENT-CHILD ABUSERS

The most common and accessible data on parent-child abusers can be found in the media. The following recent international and national media reports hereof serve as cases in point. In Tokyo, Japan, a seven-year old Japanese boy was forced out of his parents' vehicle and abandoned in a bear populated forest as punishment. The father wanted to teach the boy a lesson for throwing stones at vehicles and at people, and for hitting a vehicle with a wooden stick at school. When left behind, the boy tried to run after his parents' vehicle, but he got confused and took the wrong path. The boy then walked alone in the dark for five hours until he came to a military hut – he survived six nights on his own until he was found by a military officer. The mother did nothing to rescue or protect the child (AFP, 2016).

In South Africa, the deplorable matter of the so-called 'Springs Monster' relates to a case wherein a father and mother were charged with the attempted murder, assault, child abuse and neglect, and rape of their two elderly children (then aged 11-years and 16-years), and for the abuse and neglect of their three younger children (then aged between two and five years) (Venter, 2016). The father committed various horrendous crimes against the 11-year old boy and teenage daughter, while the mother claimed to have been helpless and afraid of her husband – citing this as the reason why she did not protect her children from their abusive father. The father allegedly raped his teenage daughter and pepper-sprayed the boy in the face while he was cuffed with his hands to a pillar and his legs tied to another. The boy was left hanging between the two pillars for a day and a night. Both children had their bodies traumatised with an electronic cattle prod and were physically assaulted (punched with the fist in the face and slapped on the head). The boy was thrown into the air and left to fall on the ground. The younger children were neglected and abused insofar as they did not receive nutritious food and care; there was no food in the house; their teeth were rotten; they seem to have survived on take-away food, fizzy sugary drinks and starch; and none of them had attended school. All five children shared one bedroom without bedding or blankets. The presumed illiterate mother claimed to also have been a victim of abuse by her husband, alleging that he (the husband) demanded that she dress as a prostitute. She, furthermore, stated that he had hit her and the two older children with a sjambok (leather whip) (Venter, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Since there is little South African research on parent-child abusers, a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design and analysis was used to highlight this phenomenon in order to, as Babbie (2013) puts it, create a better understanding of the offender and the circumstances surrounding the crimes. A case study analysis facilitates an opportunity to obtain first-hand experience and precise perspectives of the offender, of her world and life (Yin, 2013). This basic research method allows a researcher to gain new knowledge and to enhance the gap in existing knowledge (Babbie, 2013; Sarantakos, 2013).

The aims of the study relate to (a) the criminological and victimological analysis of the life journey and influences (childhood and adulthood trauma and abuse) of an adult female parent-child abuser (a case study exploration), (b) with the objective to identify the needs of offenders to serve as rehabilitation directives, and (c) the recommendation of effective intervention (rehabilitation directives for correctional therapists) strategies for the offending parent to prevent further abuse and break the cycle of intergenerational abuse. The aforementioned foci can assist with a better understanding and early identification of parental abusers and the effect (influence of parenting styles on children and future conduct disorder) hereof on victims of child abuse (Hoeve, McReynolds & Wasserman, 2015; Janssen, Eichelsheim, Deković & Bruinsma, 2015).

Ethical approval was obtained from both the Department of Correctional Service's Research Committee and from the University of South Africa's College of Law Research and Ethics Committee for the principal project directed at 'the assessment of female offenders'. The case study presented below forms part of this overarching research project pertaining to the assessment of female offenders.

Six one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with an adult female offender. A semi-structured interview schedule with central themes was employed to collect the data (Guest, Namey & Mitchell,

2013). The mother consented to the research, voluntarily participated in the research and signed a consent form after the purpose of the research was explained. The participant was also informed that she had the right to withdraw from the study at any time should she wish to do so. The mother was assured that her identity would be protected with the publication of the case study, thus guaranteeing anonymity. The data was arranged and analysed according to pre-identified themes. According to Willig (2013), this is deemed the most suitable data analysis method for a case study.

DISCUSSION

From the outside, mothers who abuse their children appear as loving and caring parents who will always act in the child's best interest. But, in reality, these mothers reflect their own vulnerabilities, deficits, abuse, insecurities, and unresolved childhood issues (Lennings et al, 2014; Siegel, 2016).

The following case study outlines the life story of a South African parent-child abuser. The name "Lydia" is fictitious, given to the adult female offender to protect her identity. The authors use the words "Lydia" and "the mother" interchangeably below when referring to the subject of the case study. The detailed analysis below, albeit based on true facts, cannot be traced back to the offender, or expose her identity in any way. The mother's own words are used to illustrate her perspective of her life and the abuse of her children. This also gives a voice to her unique experiences.

Case study: Lydia

Lydia is a 38-year old white female offender. She is divorced and the mother of two minor children, currently aged 13 and 15-years. Regarding her health she acknowledged that she suffers from high blood pressure and depression and that she is on chronic medication for these conditions.

Childhood and school experiences

Lydia completed Standard seven (Grade 9) at a special needs school for children with learning disabilities. She described her childhood and living standard as "happy" and held that all her basic needs (food, clothing, and school fees) were provided for "although we never had money for anything else like holidays or any fancy stuff." She also confirmed to have dropped out of school because her stepfather could no longer afford her school fees. When asked about any childhood abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, neglect) experiences, Lydia disclosed that her grandmother's brother forced her, on a few occasions, to have oral sex with him, which later progressed to sexual encounters. She claimed that she never reported this to her mother or grandmother as they were depended on her grandmother for accommodation and she was scared that they would not believe her. The mother, furthermore, revealed that she used to "have sex with an old man who he lived opposite us ... I got between R70 to R80 per session, we (my sister and I) used the money for dagga (marijuana)."

Pertaining to the discipline practices endured during her childhood, Lydia engagingly mentioned that her mother "used to tie my younger sister and I together with a belt, and instruct us to hit one another ... if we did not hit each other then she would hit us while being tied up [laughing]. So, we would hit one another until my mother thought it was enough, I guess she got fed up with us fighting so much." She professed to remember four or five such incidents. Lydia elucidated that when she was about ten or eleven years old, the oldest sister (with whom she later smoked marijuana and drank beer), used to lock her (the mother) in a room for hours because of "the tantrums that I threw."

With regard to her school-going years, Lydia asserted that she did not enjoy school as she was teased a lot about her weight and skew teeth. She struggled at school (concentration and learning difficulties), and mentioned that she once hit a fellow female learner at school because "she called me a bitch." Hereafter she noted that "I was glad to stop school, it was not nice. I know schooling and qualifications are important for work, but I could not make it."

Familial circumstances

Lydia's mother obtained a Standard five (Grade 7) qualification and was briefly employed at the Post Office after which she became a full-time home-keeper. Lydia's biological father passed away in a motor vehicle accident when she was six months old. She mentioned that "my mother says he was always drunk and he was drunk when he died in the car crash." Eighteen months after her father passed away, Lydia's mother remarried and she maintained that her stepfather "is a nice man, he took us in as his own, I got on well with him and I love him, ... I still do, he came to visit me in prison a few times."

Her stepfather obtained a Standard eight (Grade 10) education and has been working for a steel company for the past 20-years. Lydia maintained that her mother and two older sisters told her that her biological father used to “beat up my mother, see he drank a lot, he had a serious alcohol problem ... no, not my mother, she just drank socially.” Despite this, her biological parents never clashed with the law. Regarding her stepfather and alcohol abuse, Lydia noted that “yes, he drinks a lot, but he does not hit my mother, he stays nice when he is drunk.”

The participant is the third oldest of six siblings – three of the siblings have the same father and three have the same mother. She stated that the eldest sister is intellectually disabled, which was, according to her, the result of “my (biological) father hitting and kicking my mother. When she was pregnant with my sister he kicked her in her stomach and that is why there is something wrong with her brain.” This sister is cared for by her mother and hence she resides with her mother and stepfather. When asked about the type of accommodation the family (Lydia, her parents and siblings) lived in, the participant replied that they all (family of eight members) lived with her grandmother in her three-bedroomed home, together with her mother’s one brother and his wife. She explained that her mother, stepfather and disabled sister stayed in one room while all the other children shared another room. The grandmother, uncle and aunt shared the third bedroom.

Crime analysis

Lydia is a first-time offender and is categorised as a maximum offender, serving two life sentences (25-years imprisonment), three eight-year sentences and three five-year imprisonment terms, all running concurrently. Her crimes relate to her two minor daughters, aged five and seven-years at the time of her arrest. The crimes include: (a) eight charges of sexual abuse (sexual solicitation / prostitution, and child pornography) and the manufacturing and possession of child pornography, (b) child neglect (abandonment, inadequate housing, lack of protection, unsatisfactory hygiene, deficient nutrition, and non-attendance of school), and (c) emotional abuse (the effect of the previously mentioned crimes on the childrens’ poor cognitive and emotional development, post-traumatic stress).

Lydia’s ex-husband, the father of the children, was found to be an accomplice to the abuse of their children in that he did not remove the children from the mother and/or contact the authorities to intervene in relation to his children’s lack of safety and security, abandonment by the mother, and subjection to poor housing and living conditions. The court found that the offender’s ex-husband did not actively arrange, engage in, or facilitate the abuse of the children, and he subsequently received a five-year imprisonment sentence.

Pertaining to this mother’s crimes it was found that she prostituted her two daughters by approaching her brother’s friends, after which the girls were solicited by ‘word of mouth’, through these friends. During the day, Lydia worked as a ‘car guard’ (at shopping centres’ parking areas - looking after patrons’ vehicles), earning between R100 and R250 per day. Her children were then left alone, without adult supervision or food in the rented room, and they also did not attend school. It was stated in court that when the social worker and police came to the rescue of the children (after a neighbour alerted the police) the room was extremely filthy - filled with empty beer and milk bottles, garbage, used condoms, dirty clothes and cutlery; and only furnished with a mattress and two blankets. The children were found dirty, sparsely dressed and with no access to food. Bruises were also apparent on their bodies. Medical and psychiatric examinations confirmed that the girls had been sexually active (were sexually penetrated), were prostituted by the mother, and that nude pictures of them had been taken.

When asked about the children’s living conditions, exposure to sex and prostitution, lack of supervision, inadequate nutrition, and them not attending school the mother replied:

“I do not know about all the charges, I do not understand where they get it from. I was hurt and confused ... I do not know about abusing them or prostitution, I would never do that to my children, I love them. I think I can remember once or twice when the girls danced on cell phone music for my friends, but that’s it. I worked very hard every day and I made sure that they have everything they need – I bought them bread, polony (cold meat) and milk every day. See, they got protein (polony), starch (bread) and calcium (milk) every day, twice a day ... I made sure they got everything their bodies need. I gave them food first before I ate, so they ate enough.” Lydia admitted that she had to leave her children without supervision during the day because “I had no one to help me, I could not afford money for care, their father was nowhere ... but, I was going to take them to school, I was trying to save money for a bigger place.”

Vis-à-vis the discipline practices Lydia meted out to her children, she asserts that: “I realised after I saw some marks on the girls that I must have hit them too hard, so I stopped it as my hand was too heavy on

the kids.” She claimed that after this realisation, when the girls were naughty (i.e. screaming, jumping around, making a lot of noise or fighting) she would make them stand in opposite corners of the room for periods of time.

Intimate relationships and marriage

Concerning her marital status, Lydia married her ex-husband when she was 18–years old and maintained that “he was five years older than I. I was shy and I never had a boyfriend before him, so I thought I had to marry him.” When asked at what age she became sexually active out of her own choice (thus, not being forced / sexually abused as a child), the offender replied “I had sex with my boyfriend (who later became her husband) just after my 15th birthday.”

Lydia indicated that her marriage “was nice in the beginning; I thought I loved him, I did not look at his faults, he loved blue movies (pornography), drank a lot ... well more than what I did, and then he would beat me. He also swore at me and the kids, and I had to be ready whenever he wanted sex ... sometimes up to three or four times a day. He liked to use beer bottles to enter me too. He had other girlfriends, and I know he had sex with gay men.” In describing the type of sexual activities they engaged in, Lydia reported that “oh, we had orgies and swing parties ... you know where you exchange partners; we held some of it at our house. When asked where her children were during these sexual encounters, Lydia explained that “they were mostly at the house, watching TV or playing outside, they also used to play with the neighbours’ kids.” The participant confirmed that most of the sexual encounters / activities occurred at night, during late afternoon, or on weekends.

When asked about her current sexual status, Lydia disclosed that she perceives herself to be bisexual, and she reflected that “before I came to prison I was involved with a women and I lived with her until I was sentenced. But, she dropped me the day I was sentenced ... so much for love, hey!” She, furthermore, projected that “it is easier to sleep with women, they are not fussy (implying demanding or difficult partners) like men.”

According to the participant, she last saw and heard of her ex-husband in 2012 when both of them were on trial. Lydia explained that her ex-husband went through periods of unemployment and added that “he was clever, after our second daughter was born he got himself a rich girlfriend, she paid for everything. I tell you, she is loaded (meaning that the girlfriend is perceived to be wealthy). It was very difficult for me and the girls, we really struggled. We rented a room in a flat and I struggled to pay the rent and to find someone to help me look after the kids. During this period we used to see my (ex) husband once a month or sometimes only after six weeks. He did not always bring us money; he said I must also provide for the girls.”

Welfare, functioning and contact with children

Lydia’s daughters are in foster care, with the placement occurring just after her arrest. The youngest daughter resides in the Limpopo province with a family member while the oldest daughter lives in Gauteng with foster parents. The mother revealed that according to the social worker, the children adapted well in foster care, their school work is satisfactory, although they are not achieving well (with high marks) at school. Lydia denoted that “my oldest daughter receives psychiatric treatment or therapy ... I don’t know ... she is on medication for her aggressive behaviour, and they say she does not have or show any feelings, especially when she does something wrong.”

Functioning in the correctional centre

The participant seems to have adapted well to prison life and she claims to have many friends. Lydia describes herself as being “very positive, friendly, supportive to the other female offenders especially the new ones who are scared – I make sure they have bowls (i.e. ice cream tubs) to eat out, because they do not know when they are new in the system that they have to have (provide) their own containers for food. I explain to them the rules and I keep them away from the trouble makers ... I am very nurturing, that is just who I am. I help where I can, even if I do not always get anything back in return, like cigarettes, I give out if I have, and once or twice when I asked for cigarettes (to the females that I gave to) they refused to give me a cigarette, but it is difficult to say no if a female needs something.”

Since her incarceration, Lydia has participated in the following correctional programmes and courses:

A Bible Study Course at the Christian Bible Institution - a free correspondence course;

Bible Way – also a free correspondence course;

Thinking of Change – According to Lydia, this programme offered by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) entails learning methods on how to control one's anger and how to control oneself;

Anger-In-Anger-Out – An anger management course of which the offender could not relate or remember any programme content;

Sexual offender programme – The participant attended this programme whilst incarcerated at another female correctional centre (for a period of two years and before being transferred to where she is currently housed). When asked what the content of the programme entailed, Lydia retorted that “no, I cannot remember, I think it was about why people commit sexual offences, or something like that.”

HIV/Aids Course – Lydia attended this course to learn more about HIV/Aids. She stated “I have been tested (voluntarily) for HIV/Aids when I first came to prison, I was scared because of my sex history, but luckily I am negative.”

New Beginnings – Lydia mentioned that this programme “is about the orientation of all new comers to prison ... yes, I think so.”

Besides the correctional programmes and courses Lydia attended, she is also enrolled at school in the correctional centre and wishes to obtain her matric certificate, or the equivalent hereof.

Cognitive wellbeing

The participant was not referred for psychiatric or psychological observation during her sentencing procedures. She however disclosed that the probation officer revealed in court that “I never showed any remorse and that I do not have guilt feelings towards what I did to my children.” When asked what this means to her, she replied that “I suppose that I do not love and care for my children, but they are wrong ... they (the court) only hear and believe what they want to.”

Lydia is actively involved with psychological services (one-on-one therapy sessions) offered at the correctional centre. She estimated to have attended about twenty psychological sessions since her incarceration. When asked why she is so positive, keeping in mind her long sentence and the fact that her children are in foster care, Lydia replied “It does not help to lie down, I have to stay positive, I am very strong. There are worst things than being in prison like kids being hurt outside, kids with no homes, kids that are assaulted or even sexually abused.”

The participant declared that she “gets down when it is my birthday or my children's birthday, then I really miss them.” Regarding the ability to control her temper, Lydia asserted that “when I am provoked, then I get very angry, I hit the walls (of the prison) at the previous prison three times, but I have not got mad since I am here. One girl at prison (at the previous prison) told me that my children are whores ... and then I lost it. I hit the wall of the cell, my knuckles bled. But outside (in the community) I also used hit the walls, I do not know why, but that is what happens.”

Support structure

Lydia receives weekend visits from both her parents and, once to twice a year, visits from her two children (under the guidance and supervision of an externally appointed social worker). She also has regular telephonic contact with a male friend, “no, he is gay, we know each other from before prison, he is very nice.”

Substance abuse

The participant proclaimed to have used dagga and alcohol since childhood – “we (the mother and her older sister) smoked dagga and drank beer when there was anything left in the bottles”. This commenced approximately at the ages of 12 or 13 years. Later on, when she got married, Lydia continued to use alcohol, dagga, Ecstasy (methamphetamine) and CAT (methcathinone) with her husband and communal (sexual) friends. Before her arrest and while living alone with her children, Lydia drank beer and smoke dagga on a daily basis (when she worked as a car guard), “but only after I bought food for my children, and if there was any money left.”

UNIQUE NEEDS IDENTIFIED FOR EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

Based on the extracted and identified factors from Lydia's background and crime pathway, the following needs have been identified that can serve as directives for purposeful intervention for the mother:

Own victimisation and trauma as a child and as an adult: Friedstad (2012) explains that certain offenders, like for instance Lydia, are disadvantaged by social learning histories where their own abuse and trauma develop into antisocial attitudes and this behaviour is then reinforced rather than inhibited, which make the control of ‘benefits versus costs’ associated with crime more biased in an antisocial direction. Artz et al., (2016) note that absent and aloof parental figures, parental mental health problems, poverty, substance abuse and sleeping density (children and adults sharing a room) are risk factors that increase a child’s vulnerability and abuse. In addition, Palmer, Hatcher, McGuire and Hollin (2014) state that female offenders display higher incidents of (a history of) victimisation and abuse, which commence from childhood and often remain throughout adolescence and adulthood. It is, therefore, of pivotal importance to understand the effect of abuse on Lydia’s mind-set, functioning and attitude and the connection hereof regarding the abuse and neglect of her own children (Friedstad, 2012; Lennings et al, 2014; Palmer et al, 2014).

Limited insight and understanding: Due to the participant’s questionable cognitive ability, as noted above in the sub-headings of “Functioning in the correctional centre” and “Cognitive wellbeing”, and as evident in her schooling experience, and upbringing; together with the abuse she endured as a child and during adulthood, the offender fails to understand the nature and extent of the harm and damage she has exposed her children to. She, furthermore, does not fully understand the crimes she has committed, as she perceives her actions as being ‘normal’ – in line with her upbringing, particular mind-set and cognitive framework (Lennings et al, 2014; Palmer et al, 2014). In her mind, the participant is and was a very good, loving, caring and nurturing mother to her children who placed her children’s wellbeing and interest above her own. Linked to this, Siegel (2016) postulates that childhood trauma, abuse and subjugation to poor parenting styles (abusive and aloof parents, violence, lack of supervision, support and involvement) can have a detrimental effect on a child’s cognitive ability to comprehend and make sense of negative and abusive behaviour and experiences. Instead, such dominations might be perceived as ‘normal’ (loving and caring) behaviour.

Denial: Lydia denies any wrongdoing, abuse or the neglect of her children, this, despite evidence in court hereof; and being found guilty and sentenced for the crimes. Her denial may be a possible attempt to avoid any internal or emotional discomfort regarding her actions and the dire consequences of her actions on her children. For this reason she maintains her innocence and self-preservation to achieve a psychologically secure or comfortable position with annulled empathy (Craissati, 2015). However, Lydia’s denial constitutes a major stumbling block to her effective rehabilitation and taking responsibility for her crimes and her denial might also be linked to her limited cognitive ability. She does not comprehend the long-term harm, damage, suffering and trauma that she has caused her children. Connected to this, Degiorgio (2015) notes that denying the extent of one’s crime(s) and the consequences thereof is a major obstacle to successful rehabilitation. In addition, Friedstad (2012) holds that denial as a thought pattern both existed before the crime and thus initiated the offending behaviour, and/or developed *post hoc* as rationalisations of what has already happened to maintain the offending behaviour. By making an excuse (or denial) for her behaviour, the participant aims to claim her status as a ‘normal’ person in society.

Cognitive deficits: Lydia displays several cognitive distortions, such as: denial (a cognitive process); lack of empathy; rationalisation (that no abuse occurred); lack of guilt, shame and responsibility (attached to emotional discomfort and humiliation); low self-esteem; antisocial beliefs (no harm was caused); and a dysfunctional attitude towards child abuse and neglect (Craissati, 2015; Friedstad, 2012). While the other cognitive distortions are explained in this section (on needs), Lydia’s low self-esteem is evident in her maternal rejection (the removal of her children), her childhood adversities and her own poor mother-child attachment that she enjoyed with her mother. This in turn explains how she perceives herself (innocent and a good mother) and how she wants to be perceived by others (as a loving, caring and warm person and mother). Lydia’s self-esteem, furthermore, relates to her identity, selfhood, and commitment to her children (Friedstad, 2012; Siegel, 2016). Regarding the other cognitive distortions, the participant is of the opinion that she did not facilitate or allow the sexual abuse of her children. She fails to grasp the long-term damage, hurt, trauma and the effect the physical and sexual abuse has had on her daughters’ cognitive development (Aucamp et al, 2013). Lydia opines that she did not neglect her children as she sufficiently provided for their nutritional needs, albeit very basically. She cannot comprehend the neglect in terms of her children’s rights to adequate education, health, social development, safety, housing and protection. She fosters pertinent antisocial beliefs, attitudes and

thinking style concerning her parenting manner, parenting skills and child abuse and neglect (Siegel, 2016). Lastly, Lydia's cognitive ability pertaining to her level of intelligence as well as possible antisocial personality traits or disorder/s, should be professionally established, especially her comprehension and understanding of her crimes in order to find a suitable way to address the offender's background, pathway to crime and criminogenic needs that are intertwined with her criminality (Aucamp et al, 2013; Steyn & Hall, 2015).

Interpersonal relationships: Lydia exhibits a history of abusive and dysfunctional intimate relationships. This link can be drawn from her childhood relationships with her mother, grandmother and siblings, through to her marriage and her own relationship with her children. She seems to have deep-seated experiences of dysfunctional interpersonal relationships that she has learned and adopted since her childhood. Siegel (2016) asserts that children who are subjected to, or exposed to examples of poor intimate relationships, poor communication styles, inadequate discipline, lack of familial support, violence, poor parental role models and abuse are more inclined to imitate these behaviours and to externalise their problems.

Poor parenting skills: Due to Lydia's own childhood experience of poor parental supervision, lack of parental involvement, experiencing aloof parents, poor parent-child bonds, lack of protection, abuse and neglect, she learned to apply similar abusive and indifferent parenting skills to her children. Research (Janssen et al, 2015; Lennings et al, 2014; Siegel, 2016) proves that there is a direct correlation between poor parenting skills, poor parental control, unsupportive and uninvolved parents, parental efficacy and involvement in antisocial and delinquent behaviour.

Limited education and skills: Lydia completed Grade 9 and is currently enrolled at the correctional centre's school to further her education. She exhibits no formal skills for the labour market, which will have a negative impact on her employability once released. Steyn and Hall (2015) posit that many female offenders display limited school achievement and labour-related skills, and that these shortfalls are often connected to their marginalised and abusive upbringings. In addition, Siegel (2016) holds that antisocial behaviour and criminality are linked to poor school achievements, dropping out and low educational levels, easing an individual's pathway into criminality.

Substance abuse: There is a clear link between substance abuse and offending behaviour – with male and with female offenders (Palmer et al, 2014). Nevertheless, female offenders are said to exhibit more serious patterns of drug abuse coupled with other antisocial behaviours (promiscuity and neglect and abuse of own children). Females' reasons for drug and alcohol abuse also differ from men, as women often 'self-medicate' to cope with the trauma and abuse in their own lives (Palmer et al, 2014). This is consistent with Steyn and Hall's (2015) profile of female offenders in which they cite that a preponderance of female offenders endured extensive childhood and adulthood abuse and traumatic experiences which are often linked to their extensive history of substance abuse. It is clear from Lydia's life history that she exhibited a pattern of substance abuse that commenced during her childhood and persisted through to her incarceration.

Socioeconomic deprivation: Due to Lydia's limited education and skills she has been subjected to both poverty and survival opportunities (working as a car guard and prostituting her children to supplement her income). According to Blackie (2014), it is not abnormal that someone in Lydia's position would abdicate her parental responsibilities in order to survive from one day to the next. The participant's substance abuse, non-caring attitude, lack of support and the fact that the father of her children was absent eased the facilitation of financial and sexual exploitation of her children to enhance her income.

Responsivity: Lydia displays a lethargic learning style. This is evident in her limited insight and understanding of her crimes and the consequences of her actions on her children. For this reason it is necessary to match her specific (and limited) learning style with her personal characteristics, (limited) cognitive ability, mental health and her specific personality (Palmer et al, 2014).

Victim empathy: Lydia's antisocial and inaccurate attitude, beliefs and thinking patterns pertaining to child abuse, neglect and sex are a result of her own experiences of abuse that she has learned to accept as normal behaviour. This was acquired through intense, frequent and long-term interaction and exposure to antisocial attitudes and behaviours (Siegel, 2016). The participant's distorted notions (pertaining to sex, love and abuse) and experiences elucidate her lack of empathy pertaining to the abuse she has bestowed on her children and explains why she cannot comprehend the consequences (harm, damage, and trauma) of the abuse and her behaviour on her children (Lennings et al, 2014). Important to

note is that victim empathy is directly linked to denial and lack of responsibility and should thus be treated within the same continuum (Craissati, 2015).

Antisocial attitude, beliefs and thinking patterns: Lydia displays antisocial thinking patterns regarding abuse and has distorted ideas about sex, love, and substance abuse. Since childhood, patterns of abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and substance abuse have been entrenched into the beliefs and (antisocial) mindset of the offender who truly perceives these behaviours to be normal and acceptable (Hoeve et al, 2015; Lennings et al, 2015). This explains why Lydia repeated this cycle of abuse with her own children (Siegel, 2016). Thus, she has endured said abuse, neglect and behaviours (substance abuse, early sexual encounters and exposure to sexual activities) as a child and learned to interchange love with abuse and became accustomed to this treatment.

Responsibility: It is evident that the participant exhibits no sense of responsibility for her behaviour and crimes. This might be connected to her distorted beliefs and thinking patterns regarding the abuse she was subjected to as a child and thus explains her denial, confusion and lack of insight and understanding into her behaviour and crimes. Therefore, Lydia lacks guilt, shame, and remorse and has a void of responsibility (Craissati, 2015).

The aforementioned needs undoubtedly explain how a parent subjected to years of abuse, maltreatment, neglect, with poor parental relations, unresponsive parents, inadequate parental skills, distorted relationships, disturbed developmental experiences, and family instability repeated and foisted her cycle of abuse upon her own children. Thus, outlining how today's victim of abuse and neglect becomes tomorrow's parent-child abuser (Lennings et al, 2014, Palmer et al, 2014; Siegel, 2016).

THE EFFECT OF ABUSE ON THE VICTIMS: CYCLE OF ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

Research (Bezuidenhout, 2013; Hoeve et al, 2015; Janssen et al, 2015; Songca, 2016) proves a strong link between exposure to childhood abuse, violence and trauma and the probability that child victims may display similar behaviour, experiences and abuse during their adolescence and adulthood years. In this regard, Lydia's children may exhibit similar repetitive behavioural patterns as their mother, inclusive of suicidal ideas, emotional dysregulation, mental health problems, chronic stress, post traumatic stress disorder, dysfunctional information processing, and low levels of empathy as a result of their abuse and trauma (Hoeve et al, 2015). As adults these child victims of abuse may repeat the same poor parenting style as they have been exposed to (Janssen et al., 2015), and research (Hoeve et al., 2015; Janssen et al, 2015; Songca, 2016; Siegel, 2016) furthermore demonstrates a positive correlation between parental substance abuse, anxiety, depression, conduct disorder, mood swings, and possible future involvement in crime.

PURPOSEFUL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Sexual reoffending creates fear among the public and more so for the victims and their families. An example hereof is the case of a South African sex offender (paedophile) who was incarcerated for the rape of a minor child and for the possession and manufacturing of pornographic material of minors. The adult male reoffended while on parole, repeating the same crimes (Otto, 2016:4). The aforementioned case questions the applicability and effectiveness of correctional efforts and services pertaining to the rehabilitation, intervention and treatment of sex offenders.

According to Gobeil, Blanchette and Stewart (2016), any correctional interventions pertaining to female offenders should be based on gender-informed (female-specific) and gender-neutral (interventions not aimed at a specific gender) intercessions because female offenders are known to respond positively to these approaches, especially if their backgrounds and pathways (life experience, causes, motives and influences to crime) to offending, linked with other gender issues, are taken into consideration. Consonant herewith, Palmer et al (2014) posit that female offenders are a different group of offenders that vary from male offenders' criminogenic needs (factors directly associated with the crime(s)), risks, pathways to crime, and responsivity (response to intervention) style. In relation to female offenders' pathways to crime, research (Degiorgio, 2015; Palmer et al, 2014) proves that own abuse, mental health problems, socioeconomic deprivation, being undereducated mothers, distress, poor judgment, susceptibility to partner influence, and substance abuse are interlinked with female criminality. It is, furthermore, believed by Friedstad (2012) that the structures of a sexual offender

programme should be founded in cognitive behavioural elements in order for any behavioural change to occur, because cognitive distortions are a core symptom among sex offenders.

A parental-child abuser (the mother) coupled with a sexual offender approach is needed to address the aetiology of Lydia's parent-child abuse. Unless correctional therapists (social worker and psychologist) successfully address the link between Lydia's own childhood and adulthood abuse and neglect; and her subsequent abuse and neglect of her own children (the cycle of violence and abuse), with special focus on her limited insight and understanding into her crimes and her cognitive deficits (thinking patterns and attitude linked to the abuse of her children) effective treatment cannot be guaranteed. It is of utmost importance to rely on gender-specific (female-designed methods and approaches) and gender-sensitive (being a mother and the abuse and neglect of own children) programmes or therapy content, because women's pathways to crime and to child abuse and neglect differ from those of men (Gobeil et al, 2016).

According to the "what works" literature (Gobeil et al, 2016), effective intervention should target the female offender's history of trauma, adverse social conditions, mental health issues, parenting stress, substance abuse, life skills, interpersonal and decision-making skills, peer and familial support and cognitive deficits (thinking patterns and attitudes). To target the criminogenic factors that are associated with the crimes, Palmer et al (2014) propose programmes and interventions that incorporate cognitive behavioural therapy or foci points. Cognitive behavioural therapy or programmes target appropriate thinking styles, beliefs, attitudes; as well the other identified criminogenic factors that are linked to the crime (Palmer et al, 2014).

RECOMMENDATION

Often female-mother offenders expect reunification with their children upon release (Degiorgio, 2015), and this is no different with Lydia even though her children were placed in foster care. In order to resume a responsible and loving mother-child relationship and prosocial parenting responsibilities when released, it is recommended that the offender be subjected to in-depth and long-term cognitive therapy that focuses on her cognitive deficits, background, unique pathway to crime and criminogenic factors that are associated with the abuse and neglect of her children.

In order to recognise the child victims' needs, family conferencing (Songca, 2016; Siegel & Bartollas, 2016) pertaining to them and their mother can be facilitated through appropriate channels. In this regard, meaningful intervention such as play therapy enabled by a social worker can be considered to address the victims' abuse and trauma. Such in-depth mediation might assist with the mother's journey in order for her to gain insight and understanding regarding the harm, damages and suffering she caused her children as well as the effect of the abuse on her children. This may contribute positively to a better reconciliation between the victims and their mother (Hoeve et al, 2015; Siegel & Bartollas, 2016; Songca, 2016).

For Lydia, the goal of treatment should be to teach her how to understand the link between her dysfunctional upbringing and abuse and the crimes committed against her children. Her deep-rooted antisocial thought patterns, beliefs and attitude pertaining to the abuse and neglect of her children, as well as the role of violence, exploitation of vulnerable persons, and substance abuse should be addressed in long-term and intensive cognitive behavioural therapy (Friedstad, 2012).

To ease and facilitate Lydia's consciousness and personality it is needed to alter the meaning of her narrative (her experience of her own abuse and trauma) and sense-making (understanding) that she has assigned to her life, and her cognitive distortions (antisocial and prosexual thinking patterns and attitudes) must be perceived as possible changeable properties rather than obstacles to her personal development into a non-criminal and empowered person (Friedstad, 2012; Hoeve et al, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Although much is known about child abuse, specifically the effect of victimisation on the child, there is a dearth of literature in South Africa regarding the parent as the abuser. In this article a criminological case study analysis depicts the criminal pathway of Lydia, a female offender convicted of sexual abuse, child neglect and the emotional abuse of her two minor children. What is evident from this case study is that Lydia also suffered abuse as a child and as an adult, accepted this as normal behaviour and replicated this on her children. Possibly due to her poor cognitive functioning, Lydia shows no insight

into her crimes or the effect thereof on her children. The rehabilitation of this type of offender, who shows no insight or remorse, is extremely difficult. However, cognitive therapy can contribute to the offender understanding own abuse and the relation to the abuse of her children and ultimately promote rehabilitation and positive reintegration.

The process of correctional intervention should include the child victims of abuse and one-on-one victim offender reconciliation through family-oriented therapy or offender-victim conferencing. This should ideally be a long-term process that includes both the parent-abuser and the child victims'. Mediation and therapeutic intervention can assist the child victims' to understand their hurt, trauma and abuse.

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