

Disclosing Child Sexual Abuse during Forensic Assessments of the Black South African Child

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Abstract

Child sexual abuse is a social and health issue that affects citizens across the globe. It has a number of physical, psychological and emotional consequences. Children are reluctant to talk about their involvement in sexual abuse owing to various reasons. Therefore, forensic interviewers need to understand the process of disclosure when conducting forensic assessments. They also need to be watchful of various dynamics that are likely to have an impact on the disclosure rate. The aim of this study was to describe the dynamics during forensic assessments in the context of the black South African child when disclosing child sexual abuse. A descriptive design using stratified random, purposive and convenient sampling techniques to select the participants was employed, resulting in 14 participants (13 were females and only one was male). The data were collected by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews and were thematically analysed using the Nvivo program. The findings reveal that personal characteristics of the child and the interviewer, their communication abilities, blind assessments and informed allegation interviews have an impact on forensic assessments of black South African children. It is concluded that the dynamics of disclosing child sexual abuse during forensic assessments in terms of the variables of the study are not unique, except in terms of sociocultural value systems, beliefs and customs. As a result, it is recommended that the forensic interviewers come to the developmental level of the child, speak his/her language or use translators for him/her to understand, and to follow blind assessments interviews as opposed to informed allegation interviews. However, informed allegations interviews are recommended when assessing very young children.

Keywords: child; child sexual abuse; disclosure; forensic assessments

Introduction

Sexual activities concerning children and adults have an undesirable effect on a child's life (Spies 2012). The integral part of child sexual abuse (CSA) is the process of disclosure during forensic assessments. Disclosure of CSA may be accidental whether through observation by a third party, signs of physical or genital injury, diagnosis of sexually transmitted diseases or the occurrence of pregnancy (Ferrara 2002; Spies 2012; WHO 1999). With accidental disclosure, intervention may be difficult because neither the child nor other family members may be willing to reveal the secret (Spies 2012). South Africa is not spared from this scourge; hence forensic social work has been introduced to facilitate disclosure of CSA. Compounding the disclosure of CSA are the dynamics during forensic assessments which the researchers sought to describe in the context of the black South African child. Specifically, the researchers wanted to describe the interviewers' competencies (communication skills), personal characteristics (age, gender and language), cultural competence, fit and sensitivity as confirmed by Maschi and Killian (2011), and possession of prior knowledge of the allegation of CSA that affects forensic assessments. The researchers intended to determine how the child's communication abilities, personal characteristics, cultural fit and sensitivity of the sexual act affect forensic assessments. The study was conducted within the black South African sociocultural context in reference to value systems, beliefs and customs in relation to disclosing CSA.

Background to the Study

CSA is a grave public health problem in society today as the consequences endured by the victims thereof are destructive (Klein 2010; WHO 2002). The WHO (2003, 75) defines CSA as "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that s/he does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violate the laws or social taboos of society". Klein (2010) defines CSA as a series of sexual activities such as intercourse, attempted intercourse, fondling of genitals directly or through clothing, oral-genital contact, exposing children to adults' sexual activity or pornography and the use of a child for prostitution or pornography. Klein further states that many children from different backgrounds are forced to engage in unwanted sexual behaviours. To this end, there are drivers towards CSA. This is confirmed by Karageorge and Kendall (2008), who aver that maltreatment often occurs in the presence of multiple problems within a family or social environment, including poverty, violence, substance abuse and unemployment.

CSA has numerous effects on both children and their families. These effects can last for a long time and affect an entire family. Rapholo (2014) adds that CSA is both a health and social issue that affects people worldwide with numerous consequences that are psychological, social and emotional in nature. Townsend (2016) argues that even though CSA does not necessarily result in death, its consequences usually persist until child victims are adults. It is therefore imperative that role players such as physicians

and other people responsible for reporting suspicions of CSA recognise the consequences of this phenomenon in adulthood. Disclosure of CSA is complex and difficult. According to Cromer (2006), intervention of any kind, be it social support, therapy, or the provision of social relief of distress, can benefit the victims' well-being but access to such interventions needs disclosure. Victims of CSA are reluctant to disclose their experiences. This is supported by Lundqvist, Hansson, and Svedin (2004) who maintain that women rarely disclose or even report their CSA experiences because they are afraid that no one will believe them. Lundqvist, Hansson, and Svedin further argue that societal factors play a significant role in that they prevent victims of CSA from disclosing their abuse, resulting in the aggravation of this phenomenon. Many incidents of CSA are not reported owing to a variety of factors such as shame or denial.

It is imperative for professionals, more especially forensic social workers, to be knowledgeable about CSA before working on allegations (Fouché 2007). The goal of forensic assessment interviews is to gather facts from the child's perspective in a more developmental, sensitive, unbiased and truth-seeking manner so as to support the criminal justice system in making an accurate and fair decision (Spies 2012). During these interviews, there are numerous techniques which can be applied to obtain facts regarding CSA (Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen 2006). Such interviewing techniques include open-ended questions, allegation blind assessment interviews, systematic touch surveys, cognitive interviewing, truth-lie discussions and anatomical dolls or drawings. There are some dynamics that affect the effectiveness of these techniques, more especially when assessing a black child within the context of South Africa.

Problem Statement

The disclosure of sexual abuse of children is a worldwide concern. The term "disclosure" is defined by Lamb et al. (2008, 203) as a "clinically useful concept to describe the process by which a child that has been abused gradually comes to inform the outside world of his plight". Taboclaon (2016) is of the view that children do not report abuse because of numerous reasons such as fear of being ashamed, harmed, losing their loved ones, and being blamed and not believed. According to Holm (2010), survivors of CSA will not only deal with the shame, fear and victimisation, but might tussle with almost every area of their social functioning. This is supported by Myers et al. (2002) and Segal, Gerdes, and Steneir (2007) who aver that children who experience sexual abuse yield a number of psychosocial problems that disturb their adulthood. It is indeed true that psychosocial problems affect the social functioning of CSA survivors.

According to Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen (2006), children find it very shameful and embarrassing to discuss issues related to sexual abuse; this frame of mind results in keeping the abuse a secret. There are a number of factors that influence disclosure of CSA such as age, gender, parental or maternal support, relationship to the perpetrators,

culture, duration of abuse and severity, dissociation, post-traumatic stress, and modesty (Dawes and Higson-Smith 2005; Lamb et al. 2008). Some children, according to Lamb et al. (2008), lack adequate communication abilities to disclose sexual abuse. Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen (2006) state that during the forensic interviews, the interview itself can be a contributory factor towards children's reluctance to provide details about the abuse.

The power to make decisions, which is informed by age, social status and gender between children and adults, plays a significant role in the disclosure of CSA. Caregivers of children coach them to abide by rules, norms and standards of the family and society. These rules, norms and standards make children to unintentionally keep sexual abuse a secret, resulting in them becoming vulnerable to adult men and women in their communities. Their relatives and friends, together with influential persons, such as their teachers and authoritative people that they trust, also take advantage of them, forcing them into unwanted sex (Dawes and Higson-Smith 2005; Ferrara 2002; Meadow, Mok, and Rosenberg 2007). According to Rapholo (2014), specifically among Northern Sotho speaking people, children are not allowed to discuss sex with their elders. For these reasons, skilful forensic interviews in CSA cases are extremely important to ensure that children are safe and protected, and that perpetrators are prosecuted and convicted. There are some interviewing techniques during forensic interviews that are found to be effective in facilitating the disclosure of CSA in the United States (Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen 2006), including structured interviewing protocols and forensic interviewing models. Some of these techniques are used by forensic social workers in South Africa, however, they have limitedly been assessed in the South African context with special reference to the black South African child.

Another critical issue during the forensic assessments is interviewing children with or without details of the sexual offence. The American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC 2002) and Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen (2006) avow that it is acceptable to gather information about an allegation of CSA before interviewing the child. Such information may be useful in orienting and clarifying the child's statements. However, the information may increase bias and cause the interviewer to ask suggestive and leading questions (Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen 2006). Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen have discovered that there is a high disclosure rate when forensic interviewers conduct blind assessment interviews as opposed to allegation informed interviews. However, irrespective of the interviewer having information about sexual abuse case, she/he should always take an objective and non-judgemental stance towards the interview. Faller (2007) argues that conducting forensic interviews with information regarding the child may affect the interviewer's neutrality, leading to the contamination of the whole interview. Consequently, Faller suggests that the interviewer should only know the name and age of the child before the interview. Given that the rate of CSA is high in South Africa, and that forensic social work has recently been introduced as a field of specialisation, through this study, the researchers

have been prompted to describe the dynamics during forensic assessments in the context of the black South African child on disclosing CSA.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the ecosystems theory, which is generally applied in social work, was used as a lens to describe the dynamics during forensic assessments in the context of the black South African child on disclosing CSA. The profession of social work was built upon an acknowledgement that individuals, families, groups and communities interact with their environments and are shaped by them. Individuals do not operate in isolation but are influenced by their physical and social environments in which they live and interact. Social environments include cultural aspects of the environment which involve those values, norms, beliefs, and language that shape the individual's views, perspectives, and expectations (Gitterman 2009). In addition, age and gender are social factors which have a bearing on the interaction of individuals. This theory focuses on how people interrelate with their environment (Colton, Sanders, and Williams 2001; Weyers 2011). It illuminates the nature of social issues as an absence of an adaptive fit between the two. The theory is germane and appropriate to elucidate the relationship between black children in South Africa and the sociocultural systems with which they interact.

It is, therefore, significant that forensic social workers be vigilant of traditional ways of understanding child development by focusing on their immediate settings and wider societal influences on how societal settings and influences develop during the assessment of sexually abused children (Smith, Cowie, and Blades 2003; Spies 2006). For instance, in the Northern Sotho culture, children sometimes are taught by their elders to conform to family and societal values, rules, norms and standards, compelling sexually abused children to (inadvertently) keep sexual abuse secret (Rapholo 2014). This affects the effectiveness of forensic interviews. Fontes (2005) states that forensic interviewers should consider different levels in the ecological system such as the family, home, ethnic culture and social systems like the school and the neighbourhood when assessing CSA cases. Fontes and Plummer (2010) postulate that cultural norms influence the probability that children will disclose sexual abuse, or even be noticed by adults, and that such cultural norms play a role in the families of the abused children's reluctance to report sexual abuse to legal authorities. Guma and Henda (2004) and Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) maintain that culture sets guidelines which shape how one belonging to a particular society should conduct himself/herself, which influences how one experiences the world. To this end, children have been socialised to conform to sociocultural values, norms and practices, and therefore keeping secrets becomes the norm.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

The qualitative research approach was followed in this study. In qualitative research, researchers attempt to gain an in-depth insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Babbie and Mouton 2001; Creswell 2014). Qualitative methods allowed the researchers to use tools that have enabled the exploration of issues in detail and allowed inductive methods in describing the dynamics of disclosing CSA during forensic assessments.

Research Design

The researchers used a descriptive design (Fouché and De Vos 2011) to describe the dynamics of disclosing CSA during forensic assessments in the context of the black South African child. According to Kreuger and Neuman (2006, 23), a descriptive design presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship and focuses on “how” and “why” questions. In addition, Botma et al. (2010) aver that descriptive designs are used when little is known about a research topic. In the context of this study, forensic social workers’ perceptions in terms of the dynamics on disclosing CSA during forensic assessments with the black South African child are described.

Population of the Study

A population refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics (Melville 2001; Wysocki 2004). In addition, Strydom (2011) defines a population as any group that is the subject of the research. The population of this study consisted of forensic social workers who are employed by the South African Police Service (SAPS). These forensic social workers were selected for their significance to the proposed study. The selection ended when data saturation was reached.

Sampling Methods

Sampling means taking part of a lesser number of units of a particular population to represent such population (De Vos et al. 2011; De Poy and Gilson 2008; Thomas and Smith 2003). The sampling methods were triangulated, i.e. stratified random sampling, purposive sampling and convenient sampling designs. The researchers used stratified random sampling to purposefully collect data from forensic social workers who were convenient or most available for the purpose of this study. The researchers obtained a list of forensic social workers from the SAPS National Office and each province was regarded as the strata. Since purposive sampling was used, depending on the availability of forensic social workers, one to two participants per strata were drawn as they are very few and unevenly distributed in the country.

Inclusion Criteria

- Forensic social workers who have experience (specialised training and/or at least five years' practical experience) of conducting forensic assessments.
- Forensic social workers who are employed by the SAPS.

Exclusion Criteria

- Forensic social workers who do not have practical experience of conducting forensic assessments.

Data Collection Methods

To obtain qualitative data, secondary data (literature) and semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to describe the dynamics of disclosing CSA within the context of the black South African child. Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole (2013) aver that secondary data are the search and study of recent writings on a particular social problem or subject under investigation. The interviews were guided by the interview schedule (Babbie and Mouton 2001; Greeff 2011). In this study, semi-structured interviews were aimed at understanding the participants' perceptions of the dynamics of disclosing CSA during forensic assessments of the black South African child. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 60 minutes per participant, and data collection was conducted over two weeks. From each province in South Africa, one to two forensic social workers were interviewed. There are very few forensic social workers and they are located countrywide. The interviews were recorded on an audiotape recording device with the consent of the forensic social workers. The recording device helped during data transcription leading to data analysis. The researcher also wrote field notes after each interview with the forensic social workers.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis is the process in which the researcher brings order and structure from a mass of collected data so as to make a meaning from it (De Vos et al. 2011; Monette, Sullivan, and De Jong 2008). This involves data reduction, presentation and interpretation. After data collection, it was necessary to order, categorise and interpret the qualitative data. It was imperative to organise the raw data so as to present it in a manner that would answer the research questions and objectives. To analyse data in this study, the researchers considered what participants said most often, words, and the context, and then determined the main idea. An analysis and interpretation of participants' open-ended responses were involved where the researchers divided the data into meaningful analytical units. The data were analysed thematically with the use of the Nvivo software.

Ethical Aspects

Strydom (2011) and Gray (2009) refer to ethics as a set of moral principles which an individual or a group of individuals suggests to offer the rules and the behaviour

expectations from the researcher and how she/he should conduct herself/himself towards the participants. Strydom (2011) posits that studies should be conducted ethically. For the purpose of this study, ethical clearance was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limpopo, and permission was obtained from the SAPS. The participants were requested to sign consent forms which outlined the aim of the study. They were also assured that their names will be kept anonymous and that the data they give will be handled and stored to maintain confidentiality. They gave written consent to show that they agree to participate in the study. These participants were informed that they were free to participate in the study and had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

Discussion of the Findings

The researchers used the ecosystems theory as a theoretical framework to analyse the dynamics of disclosing CSA during forensic assessments with the black South African child. This theory was used to understand various sociocultural systems in South Africa that may implicate the disclosure of CSA during forensic assessments. The data were analysed thematically as given below.

Profile of Participants' Demographics

A total number of 14 forensic social workers participated in the study. Out of these, 13 were female and one was a male. The age group of the forensic social workers ranged from 31 to 60 years. The majority of the participants were black followed by mixed-race and white.

The Dynamics of Disclosing Child Sexual Abuse during Forensic Assessments

The findings reveal that personal characteristics of the child and the interviewer, communication abilities, blind assessments and informed allegation interviews have an impact on making the interviewing techniques effective during the disclosure of CSA.

Personal Characteristics of the Child and the Interviewer

The findings show that language diversity among the children and the interviewers, their gender, age and sociocultural practices have an impact when assessing the black South African child during forensic assessments.

Language Competency of the Child and the Interviewer

The majority of forensic social workers identified language as a barrier when assessing black South African children who have been allegedly sexually abused. Language becomes a barrier for both children and forensic social workers when the forensic social workers are not proficient in the home language of the children. The participants indicated that some children do not speak the same language as theirs.

This was identified as a huge predicament for the forensic interviewers in South Africa. This results in children being less likely to disclose the possibility of abuse, and even if they make the disclosure, the interviewers might not understand. However, some participants indicated that they make use of translators, whereas others refer such cases to their colleagues in other regions who speak the same language as the children.

Spies (2012) supports the forensic social workers' strategy of dealing with children who do not speak the same language as their own by involving an interpreter, or referring the case to their colleagues who speak the children's language. Fontes and Tishelman (2016) have established from their study in the US on language competency that children should primarily be interviewed in their primary language. From their findings, it was discovered that even youth who speak English fluently are more comfortable to speak their mother language when they discuss sensitive and traumatic experiences related to CSA. Spies (2006) also shares the same sentiment that even if children attend English schools, it should be noted that during forensic interviews, they may say something which they can only describe in their home language, for instance, sexual activities, body parts or other contextual information.

To substantiate the above assertions, a forensic social worker said that:

Language diversity between myself and the child is a problem. For me it's very difficult and I use interpreters as I am servicing the whole province alone. I am only fluent in English and Afrikaans.

In the same wavelength, another forensic social worker argued:

It is advisable to speak the language of the child if you can. If you can't speak the language, you have to refer to the person who speaks the language. That helps in avoiding not taking notes of certain statements that children say because you did not understand. Children have their own way of pronouncing certain words depending on the background where they grew up at.

It can be seen from the findings of this study that if the child and the interviewer do not speak the same language, the likelihood is that the assessment process might not yield positive outcomes in terms of facilitation of the disclosure of CSA. Even though some forensic social workers have indicated that they make use of translators in such instances, the researchers support the strategy used by those who refer similar cases to their colleagues who speak the child's language. In support of this, Spies (2012) recommends that preferably, children should be interviewed in their home language and by someone from their cultural background. However, forensic social work is a newly introduced area of specialisation in South Africa with limited experts. Thus, the use of translators is also relevant even though it has limitations in terms of obtaining full details of the offence from the child. In order to have more details about the allegation, children should preferably be interviewed using their home language.

Gender of the Child and the Interviewer

One participant stated that the gender of the child and the interviewer has an impact on the assessment of children from black South African sociocultural backgrounds. The participant further indicated that CSA is a very shameful and embarrassing topic for children to talk about and that for them to do so, they would prefer to speak to someone of their choice. This was reported as having serious implications during forensic assessments. To support this, Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen (2006) state that children are reluctant to disclose any information related to sexual abuse as they deem it embarrassing, and a very private and shameful subject to deliberate on. For these reasons, Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen have established that individual characteristics of the interviewer inclusive of gender are a barrier to the disclosure rates of CSA during forensic interviews. The participant stated that boys are more reluctant to talk about sex-related activities than girls more especially to someone who is not of their gender. The participant further posited that boys adhere to socially defined gender roles whereby it is believed that males do not need any sort of protection. To support this finding, Easton (2013) states that there is often a delay to disclose sexual abuse among boys than girls and that girls are more likely to disclose abuse during forensic interviews. To support the issue of gender differences among children and interviewers during forensic assessments, Lamb and Garretson (2003) found that the gender of the child and the interviewer plays a significant role during the disclosure of CSA. A forensic social worker in support of the above views said:

Gender inequality amongst interviewers and children during forensic social work assessments affect the assessment and disclosure processes ... I have a lot of cases where female victims hardly open up and they can only open to male forensic social workers. Of course sometimes it's a vice versa.

It can be seen that the gender of the interviewer and the child has an influence during forensic assessments. Findings show that children have their preferred gender to disclose sexual abuse to and that boys hardly talk about sexual experiences than girls as they adhere to socially defined gender roles. The researcher is of the opinion that, from the first contact with the child, forensic social workers should assess issues around the gender of the interviewer that would be preferred by the affected children.

Age of the Child and Sociocultural Practices

The participants stated that there is a relationship between age and sociocultural practices of the child, and that these two aspects influence forensic assessments. The participants further argued that some children come from cultural backgrounds where they are socialised into not discussing sexual activities with older people. This obstructs the effectiveness of forensic assessments, leading children not to disclose sexual abuse, more especially the adolescents. Spies (2012) concurs with these findings that the child's cultural background has an influence in terms of relating to possible CSA. Spies upholds that respect for elders in some cultures may influence a

child not to tell about alleged sexual abuse. One participant made the following assertion:

Age and cultural background have implications during assessments of children in the communities during forensic assessments. When we look at our cultures, if one is talking to you as an older person you are supposed to look down and when such happens you say the person is lying when it's not the case. Children coming from such cultural background do not disclose the possibility of child sexual abuse during our assessments ...

In the same wavelength, the other participant echoed that:

If the children see authority figures in terms of their cultures, if she fears the mother she can exhibit the same to me. That is why the introduction needs to be exhaustive. Rapport building breaks down the fear.

When a child is referred for assessment, the forensic social worker should establish his/her cultural background, and assess the need to refer the case to a colleague who comes from the same cultural background. Spies (2012) supports this argument by stating that the black South African child who has never spoken to a white woman may react in fear, and this might influence the disclosure rate during forensic assessments.

Communication Abilities

The participants indicated that there is a relationship between the age of the child and communication abilities during forensic assessments. The findings show that preschool children are difficult to guide towards disclosure of possible sexual abuse. Amacher (2000), Kuehnle (1996) and Spies (2012) support these findings in that forensic interviewers working with preschool children should shorten their questions, and make them as concise as possible, and that the child's comprehension of complex linguistic skills should be accommodated and assessed. One participant argued:

Children have very weak language skills. There are some words that they cannot pronounce, however, as forensic social workers we have been trained not to speak the way children speak but it is important to come down to their level during forensic assessments.

In the same breath, another participant echoed that:

Children, more especially very young children, have poor communication skills. As a result, forensic social workers should always seek clarity from statements made by children. Normally, I expose them to drawings in order to clarify what they have said.

A conclusion can be drawn that the age of children and their communication abilities have implications during forensic assessments. The researchers have noted that

preschool children provide lesser details of sexual abuse than older ones. Cronch, Viljoen, and Hansen (2006) share the same sentiment that age differences of children determine the disclosure rate of CSA. Therefore, children should be asked short open-ended questions.

Blind Assessments and Informed Allegation Interviews

The participants mentioned that they conduct blind assessment interviews as they are more objective and non-leading than informed allegation interviews. The findings showed that the age of the child determines the use of either blind assessments or informed allegation interviews. The participants indicated that informed allegations interviews are more effective with preschool children than with older children, and that their disadvantages are that they are leading, suggestive and subjective. Poole and Lamb (1998) share the same sentiment that blind interviews require well-trained forensic interviewers, and that they are not suitable with younger children. This helps to orientate the interviewer and to clarify children's statements. One participant echoed that:

The blind assessment is the most important interviewing strategy during forensic assessments because it is history free and objective and allows one to be neutral when gathering information from the child. We only have the identifying particulars of the child not the details of the incident. The informed one is not right because it is leading. I don't recommend the informed one unless if the child is very young.

In the same breath, another participant said:

I always start my assessments with blind assessments irrespective of the child's age, however, informed interviews work well with very young children. If I realise that the child is not responding well to my strategy, I go for informed interviews where I consult with collaterals.

Bow et al. (2002) are of the opinion that forensic interviewers should not involve themselves before the case, and that they should maintain an objective and neutral stance at all times. There are no specialised guidelines on how to conduct forensic assessments in South Africa. When the interviewer conducts forensic interviews with considerable information concerning the allegation of CSA in mind, the interview process is contaminated, and this may lead to the child not disclosing CSA voluntarily. Informed allegations interviews are useful when assessing preschoolers below the age of four years.

Implications for Practice

Institutions that employ forensic social workers should consider the language spoken by the forensic interviewer as one of the job requirements because this has implications during forensic assessments. Forensic social workers should be proficient in the language of the child and be culturally sensitive during forensic assessments.

When a child is referred for assessment, the forensic social worker who is the recipient of the case must establish the cultural background of the child, and assess the need to refer the case to a colleague who comes from the child's cultural background. This will enable them to assess the child's ability to relate to possible CSA, unlike if they are assessed by those from different cultural backgrounds. However, one should also bear in mind that the field of forensic social work in South Africa is still new with few forensic social workers. In addition, forensic social workers should consider the use of translators with greater caution.

From the first contact, forensic social workers should assess issues around the gender of the interviewer that the children would prefer. Children feel comfortable when they are assessed by officers of their preferred gender. The child's comprehension of complex linguistic skills should be accommodated and assessed. Forensic social workers ought to come to the developmental level of the child during forensic assessments and seek clarity from statements given by children.

When the interviewer conducts forensic interviews with prior information concerning the allegation of CSA in mind, the interview process gets contaminated, and this may lead to the child not disclosing voluntarily. However, the developmental level of the child should always be considered to determine whether to make use of blind assessment interviews or informed allegation interviews. Informed allegations interviews are useful when assessing children who are very young, more especially those who are below the age of four years.

Conclusion

Language diversity among forensic social workers and children has implications during forensic assessments. It is therefore imperative that forensic social workers interview children in their primary language. It was established from this study that the gender of both the child and the forensic social workers also influences forensic assessments in facilitating the disclosure of CSA. From the onset, forensic social workers should assess which gender of the interviewer the children would prefer during forensic assessments.

The findings further showed that black South African sociocultural practices have implications in the facilitation of the disclosure of CSA during forensic assessments. Therefore, forensic social workers must assess children's cultural background during the pre-forensic interviews. Children must preferably be interviewed by the forensic social worker who comes from their cultural background.

Children's linguistic or communication abilities were also found to be having implications during forensic assessments owing to their cognitive development. Forensic social workers should therefore seek clarity from statements made by children. It was also established that having prior knowledge about the alleged sexual

abuse may render the forensic social worker subjective rather than taking a neutral stance during the forensic assessments. It is therefore recommended that forensic social workers conduct blind assessment interviews. However, when assessing very young children (below four years), one can conduct informed allegation interviews. The study in essence confirm what is regarded as standard forensic interviewing practice and conclude that the dynamics of disclosing CSA during forensic assessments in terms of the variables of the study are not unique.

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