

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE  
CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILD-ON-CHILD  
SEXUAL OFFENDERS BY A GROUP OF ISIZULU  
EDUCATORS**

**ANITA JULIA KRIEL**

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## Declaration

This thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anita Julia Kriel', with a horizontal line extending to the left of the first letter.

Anita Julia Kriel

## Thesis supervisor's approval of this thesis for submission

As the candidate's supervisor I have/have not approved this thesis/dissertation for submission.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B.J. Killian". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

B.J Killian

27-11-2001  
Date:

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the conceptualisation of child-on-child sexual offenders from the perspective of a group of isiZulu educators. Although a number of studies focusing on child-on-child sexual offenders have been conducted internationally, this is not the case in South Africa. The lack of literature regarding this issue, particularly in the school environment, and the increasing number of child-on-child sexual offenders provided the motivation for the research.

Three focus groups were conducted with educators representing three educational environments, namely: educators teaching at a school for mentally retarded children, educators from a rural school and finally educators from township schools.

The focus groups were transcribed and then analysed on two levels. Firstly, the data was examined in terms of explicit concepts and were based on concepts previously identified in the literature. The concepts were quantified by way of a content analysis. In relation to this, four major conceptualisations emerged, each of which were further subdivided. The four major concepts included: 1) child-on-child sexual offending as “abnormal”; 2) child-on-child sexual offending as “normal”; 3) the role of acculturation in child-on-child sexual offending; and, 4) the role of educators and the educational system in relation to child-on-child sexual offending. This analysis was useful in that it highlighted common and significant themes among the three focus groups. Secondly, the data was analysed qualitatively and emerging implicit themes examined in greater depth. During this phase a number of strategies that were used by the educators to normalise, relativise and justify the issue of child-on-child sexual offending were identified. The function of these strategies was considered to be a defensive strategy to make the issue of child-on-child sexual offending more tolerable and thus easier to talk about.

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The concept of child sexual abuse has been a difficult phenomenon for society to deal with. Much of the discourse has, and still does, focus on denying, minimizing, ignoring or even pathologising the existence of child sexual abuse. It was as recently as in the 1950's that the existence of sexual abuse was acknowledged (Vizard, Monck & Misch, 1995). Subsequently, professionals began to recognise the fact that not only do adults sexually abuse children, but that children are also capable of sexually abusing other children.

Although a number of studies focusing on child-on-child sexual offenders have been conducted internationally, this is not the case in South Africa. Furthermore, these studies have centred on studying the children directly or their parents. Educators, also play a fundamental role in a child's life yet their conceptualisation of child-on-child sexual offenders has not been studied. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the way in which a group of educators conceptualises the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. An analysis of three focus group interviews conducted with eleven isiZulu educators comprised the basis for this investigation.

### **1.1 Rationale for the study**

It seems that child sexual offending is more widespread than indicated in the literature. This too appears to be the case in South Africa with increased research focusing on child sexual offenders (Altman & Kumalo, 1995; Brown, 1984; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2001; Pettigrew, 1998). Recently the South African media has reported a substantial increase in the number of adolescents and children accused of committing violent crimes (SAPA, The Natal Witness, 28 March, 2001; SAPA, The Natal Witness, 29 March, 2001; Govender, 2001). Particularly disturbing are reports that children as young as ten are engaging in violent behaviours such as rape, murder and robbery (Kellerman, 1999; R

Schoeman, personal communication, February 19, 2001). Also of concern is that the average age of identified sexual abuse victims has dropped dramatically.

*Fifty percent of the sexually abused children coming to the NGO Childline in KwaZulu-Natal are under seven and 40% of molesters are under 18 (SAPA, The Natal Witness, March 28, 2001, p.2).*

Findings indicate that many adult sexual offenders began their offending during adolescence, which means that in order to prevent this from occurring a shift in focus needs to be made from adult offenders to child and adolescent perpetrators.

An extensive review of the literature revealed that the majority of research conducted on child sexual offenders has focused at length on the pathology of this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the medical and psychological fraternities. Furthermore, this research seemed to have been conducted almost exclusively in treatment and rehabilitation centres, primarily in the US, UK, Canada and Australia, with few studies having been conducted in South Africa. An outline of the available literature will follow later in this paper.

According to Hughes (1999), children are affected by what happens within the family as well as at school, and intervention should be comprehensive and integrated, including the child as an individual, their relationships with parents, educators, peers as well as the community as a whole. One of the locations that child sexual offenders are increasingly targeting is that of schools, an area that seems to have been neglected by research (HRW, 2001; Horsman, 2000).

*schools ... continue to be places of violence rather than safety (SAPA, The Natal Witness, 28 March, 2001).*

Schools, being the meeting place of both learners and educators may be fertile ground for research into the phenomenon of child sexual offenders. Hunt (1976, cited in Dann 1990, p. 227) suggests that "Teachers are psychologists too ... In their day-to-day teaching, teachers 'apply' their own ideas about students". He proposed that an understanding of

the psychology of educators would improve the application of psychology to the educational practice. In addition to the predominant pathological discourse of sexual offending, it may be argued that educators have knowledge of the educational context and therefore have the ability to add a valuable contribution to the understanding and conceptualisation, possibly even the re-conceptualisation, of child sexual offenders,

This study thus focuses on the attitudes and opinions of primary school educators regarding child sexual offenders. IsiZulu educators were selected for this project for a number of reasons. Firstly, based on convenience sampling and secondly because the project did not aim to compare educators in terms of racial division – thus, only isiZulu medium educators were targeted. Furthermore, this population group has largely been ignored by previous research that seems to talk about sexual offending from a “White” Western perspective. Thus, the question that needs to be asked is: how do isiZulu educators conceptualise child-on-child sexual abuse? Do they follow the psychological/medical/legal discourses or do they have alternative views?

## **1.2 Aims and goals of the study**

This study is a response to the lack of literature available on the conceptualisation of isiZulu educators around the issue of child sexual offending, particularly in the school environment.

The primary aim of this study was to explore the way in which educators conceptualise child sexual offending, to determine if their conceptualisations differ in any way from those offered in the literature.

In addition, it is hoped that this study will provide a foundation upon which further research into the difficulties that educators face regarding this issue may be conducted. By making these difficulties more salient, policy makers within the field of education may devise codes of conduct and other policies to aid educators in their difficult task.

The research question of this study may be stated as follows:

How do educators conceptualise the issue of child sexual offending in ways that differ from the legal and psychological discourses?

The hypothesis of the study suggests that educators may conceptualise child on child sexual offending differently from the ways in which medical and legal fields do and may focus more on social and cultural issues as contributing factors in child-on-child sexual offending.

### **1.3 Defining the concepts**

The central concept that needs to be defined is that of child-on-child sexual offenders. This refers to a situation where a child or children sexually abuse another child. The sexually abusive child is referred to as a “child sexual offender”.

Sexual offending by children may include sexual intercourse and for this reason it is important to understand the definition of rape in the South African context. South African law defines rape as “intentional, unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent” (HRW, 1995, p. 89). Thus, there are three elements involved in defining an incident as rape: intent, unlawfulness and lack of consent. This applies between a man and a woman and furthermore must include penetration of the penis into the vagina and does not include penetration with objects such as sticks, knives and not include oral or anal sex (HRW, 1995). It may be argued that this definition presents a narrow focus, not recognising the fact that sexual abuse often includes forced sexual acts that do not include penetration by a penis. The broadened definition that includes these other forms of sexual abuse is what will be used to define sexual abuse for the purpose of this project.

The concept “child” needs further clarification. A child refers to an individual under the age of 21, and is in line with the South African legal definition that defines an individual under the age of 21 as a minor (Bekker, 1997). For the sake of simplicity, the distinction

between a child and adolescent will not be made. It must however be noted that other definitions of what constitutes a child also exist and need to be outlined.

In traditional African culture, the definition of a child differs from Western definitions in that other factors such as physical development and status rather than age is used as a barometer from which maturation is measured (Bekker, 1997; Letuka, 1998). For example, an individual is viewed as a child until they are married, irrespective of their actual age, and acquires adult status once they are married – even if this is before physical maturation.

Since this project focuses on how educators understand child-on-child sexual abuse, it is important to clarify what is meant by their “conceptualisation” of concepts. For the purpose of this study, conceptualisation refers to cultural belief systems, based on the experiences and assumptions of the educators, which reflect their understanding of issues such as child-on-child sexual offending. Thus, phenomena are constructed and defined within a particular discursive historical and cultural context.

#### **1.4 Implications around consent**

Recently (1996), the law was amended in such a way that children aged 14 and over may be charged with serious offences including rape (Skelton, 1997). This age “cut-off” may be problematic due to increased reports of children as young as 10 committing sexual crimes so, for the purpose of this project, it is understood that a child younger than 14 is also capable of sexually abusive behaviour (HRW, 2001). This however has implications regarding the issue of consent. It has been argued that a girl under the age of 12 is not capable of giving consent for sexual intercourse, whilst sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 16 by an individual over the age of 18 is considered statutory rape (van der Vyver, 1997; van Oosten & Louw, 1997). For the purpose of this project, the above guiding principles will be accepted as guidelines.

## **1.5 Acknowledging the political nature of research**

All research is to some extent political in nature. The concepts, values and belief systems that an individual holds about society shapes what they think about as well as the position they take regarding an argument or issue (Pettigrew, 1998). An individual does not passively absorb societal ideologies but rather there is a two-way flow of knowledge from society to the individual and vice versa. The implication of this is that in studying reality, new realities are created in society as well as in the individual (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). In the collection of data from research participants, the researcher influences the participants, whether directly or indirectly, to view phenomena in a different light. In this way, their realities are altered. In view of this it may therefore be argued that research does not exist in isolation but rather influences and is influenced by a number of societal issues, thus making it political in nature.

A discussion about child-on-child sexual offenders from the viewpoint of a group of educators means that there is a focus on ideological themes around the nature of individuals and social groups (child sexual offenders and educators). In discussing this issue, not only will the educators take a political stance in attempting to express their own position but they will also grapple with opposing positions in an attempt to normalise an issue that is counter to society's norms and values. In the same way I, as a researcher, am also influenced by my own experiences, attitudes and opinions, and this may impact on the way in which I interpret the data acquired through my interactions with the educators. As a result, it was important throughout the study, and in particular during the data collection and analysis, to maintain openness. This required me to adopt a reflexive stance.

## **1.6 Overview of this study**

Chapter two presents an overview of some of the research literature in the field of child-on-child sexual offenders. Chapter three outlines the methodology that informed the processes involved in this study. Chapter four describes the results and analysis of the

findings. Chapter five is a discussion of the results of this study related to the literature review, and chapter 6 presents recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2      RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL OFFENDERS**

The bulk of the research into child sexual offending has taken place in the US, UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia with few studies offering a South African perspective. The majority of these studies have been empirically driven, focusing on child sexual offenders as individuals with stable pathological traits.

Although the international literature will form the basis of this literature, three primary studies conducted in South Africa will be used in order to contextualise the issue of child sexual offenders in the South African context and in particular KwaZulu-Natal. These being, a study by the Human Rights Watch (2001) focusing on sexual violence at school, secondly a discursive study of adolescent sexual offenders in KwaZulu-Natal by Pettigrew (1998) and finally a study by Brown (1984) focusing on the views of Zulus around the issue of juvenile delinquency. Whilst it is acknowledged that other South African research has been conducted, the studies focused on in this paper are particularly relevant to this literature review.

### **2.1 The South African literature**

In South Africa, the most recent contribution in the field of sexual abuse in schools by learners has come from the Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2001). This study is significant in that it is the first of its kind in South Africa. Although this study was notably politically driven, and lacked a focus on psychological and developmental issues around the maturation of children, its importance lies in that it highlighted the fact that sexual violence is pervasive in *all* South African schools. A limitation of this study is that it focuses only on sexual violence against girls, even though it is a well-established fact that boys too are victims of this form of violence.



Brown's (1984) study was significant in terms of its focus on understanding the construction of juvenile delinquency from the viewpoint of isiZulu people in KwaZulu-Natal. This study suggested that the ways in which different groups define delinquency differs according to their various roles in society. Pettigrew's (1998) study was more specific and focused on the discourses of male adolescent sexual offenders. The study represented an investigation into the role of dialogue in the creation of denial and the unconscious. Furthermore, it attempted to illustrate the adolescent offender's ambiguity and ambivalence towards violence and sexual abuse. Thus, the study was an attempt to understand how a particular group of individuals construct and create their reality. The significance of this being that their constructions of the world directly influences their behaviour within the world. In other words, the denial of individuals towards their abusive behaviour may serve as justification for the behaviour. In this way, the behaviour is perpetuated.

## **2.2 Social constructionism and a new understanding of child sexual offending**

There are a number of factors contributing to child-on-child sexual offending, and issues such as the socio-cultural context, opinions, sex roles, the role of the media as well as peer influence, to mention a few, only tells part of the story regarding sexuality.

Social constructionism is primarily concerned with explaining the processes by which people come to understand, explain and describe the world in which they find themselves (Gergen, 1985). It is an attempt to account for the way in which particular conceptions of the world come to be accepted as "truth" and how phenomena are constructed within a context of socially shared understandings to become institutionalised and gain a "factual status" (Durrheim, 1997). In this way, it attempts to open the possibilities for alternative means of understanding phenomena. This process of understanding is based on an interaction between a person and their environment (Gergen, 1985). Thus, the emphasis is on the social context within which individuals find themselves rather than on pathology and biological determinants driving behaviour alone. People are actively involved in the construction of reality every day and it is through constant creating and negotiating that

behaviours are defined as acceptable or unacceptable. The rules for defining behaviour are ambiguous in nature and interpretation changes and unfolds over time, depending on what function it serves to define behaviour in a particular way (*ibid.*). For example, defining child-on-child sexual offending as being the result of pathology rather than the act being seen as a crime has different implications. One of these is the impact it has on statistics reflecting child sexual offending. If it were viewed as pathological, it would not be recorded as a crime resulting in lower reported crime statistics in this area.

It has been argued that people act differently even within the same culture. The reason for this is that they follow different “scripts” or behave according to particular “discourses” (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). People are therefore constrained in their actions and attitudes by the social influences around them. Initially children and adolescents do not have scripts to guide them, and begin to create their own scripts through interactions with others, watching movies and television, and reading books and magazines (including pornography if they have access to it), and the internet. In this way, they learn what kinds of behaviours are regarded as acceptable or unacceptable by their particular society or culture. This learning is not always explicit and may be implicit as is often the case in movies or television. In Western culture, a common script for sexual development is that it is generally approved of by society and includes dating behaviour which then proceeds to the couple officially “going steady” and culminates in living together or marriage (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993).

Another part of the discourse surrounding sexual behaviour includes myths about rape as well as sexist attitudes and beliefs that function to justify it. For example the myth that masculine biological urges are so strong that they need to be satisfied at any cost, together with the myth that males who do not exhibit such strong sex drives are not “real men” puts pressure on men to behave in this way (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Furthermore, this discourse seems to suggest that male-female encounters are primarily sexual and negates the importance of friendship and non-sexual intimacy.

In light of the above, it becomes apparent that language is not only an expression or reflection of reality but is social in its nature, origins and implications (Pettigrew, 1998).

Thus, language actively produces and describes social reality. For the purpose of this paper the social reality being focused on is South Africa.

### **2.3 The South African context**

In attempting to understand and explain sexual abuse and exploitation, in this case when a child perpetrates it, it is vital to look at the culture and the norms of the particular society in which the act is perpetrated. Focusing on the wider social context wherein the status of a woman or girl in society is socially and culturally defined will aid to an understanding of the way in which a particular community operationalises terms such as sexual abuse and rape (Rwezaura, 1998).

#### **2.3.1 Political change in South Africa**

South Africa has undergone a number of significant changes during the past few decades, starting with Colonialism, through to the apartheid regime and finally the present post-apartheid political climate. Social, economic and political inequality was shaped by the apartheid system in which discrimination was the norm and extreme violence the accepted means of maintaining unequal power structures. Although the transition of 1994 ended apartheid, violence is still evident in the country (HRW, 2001). The transformations that South African society has been faced with during all these changes has had an influence on the way in which South Africans as a nation view and talk about issues.

#### **2.3.2 The effects of the political change on traditional black families**

The family is generally viewed as being the ideal context for individual growth and as a system, providing the necessary support for psychological, emotional and cognitive needs (Hlope, 1998). The influence of Westernisation, industrialisation and Christianity, together with the implementation of the Group Areas Act and Population Act of 1950, had severe implications for South African families, in particular those defined by the system as “non-whites” (HRW, 2001; Ncube, 1998). Any person who was not classified racially as

being of white (European) origin was classed as a “non-white” citizen. The Group Areas Act and Population Act placed restrictions on resources available for non-white families to provide a healthy environment for optimal development. This placed a heavy burden on them, forcing the breadwinner to move away from the family in order to work in urban areas. Thus, families were split up resulting in a loss of self-esteem, depression, anger and behavioural problems (Hlope, 1998). All these factors played a significant role in the breakdown of the extended family system, the cornerstone of the black traditional family (Brown, 1984; Ncube, 1998). Traditionally the extended family, including aunts, uncles and brothers, together with initiations, ceremonies and rituals, helped in the discipline, control and teaching of children (Ncube, 1998). However with the advent of the migrant labour system, mothers were often left to take care of the children on their own in the rural areas, and children were without the day-to-day presence of a male role model.

According to Ncube (1998), the modernisation of traditional African families into Western nuclear families has meant that childhood has become more narrowly defined away from the extended family and as a result has made children more vulnerable to abuse because they are no longer protected by the extended family. In the current South African context, most black families live according to Western standards (Ncube, 1998).

Rohner (2000, p. 278) defines enculturation as “the process by which individuals learn the culturally prescribed and valued behaviour standards of their society”. He argues that a particular predictor of stress that is generally neglected in the literature revolves around the issue of enculturation with particular focus on the degree of continuity or discontinuity of the enculturative process within a particular social context. The goal of this process is to socialise the youth in adult-like ways that are acceptable to that particular society. It is this process within traditional South African black family culture that has been negatively influenced by the past history and recent radical changes that have occurred in the country.

According to Berry (1995), the enculturation process is accompanied by social disintegration and personal crisis where the old social order changes and may even be lost. The outcome of this is that previous patterns of authority no longer function and individuals may become hostile, depressed and uncertain. Viewed in the light of the South

African context, it is clear that the environment in which adolescents find themselves at present is characterised by a discontinuity of the enculturation process. Factors such as the dense population in black townships, the breakdown of the traditional family due to the apartheid policies, high levels of unemployment, together with the general increase in crime, may play a role in the rise of violence among the youth in South African society (HRW, 1995). Added to this is the influence of the media, especially television and movies, which portray Western ideologies as being the ideal. This has led to many cultures abandoning their own belief systems in favour of Western ideals or “multicultural ideologies” (Berry, 1995). It is Rohner’s (2000) opinion that adolescent stress is directly related to the degree to which adolescents experience the discontinuity of the enculturative process. That is, adolescents become stressed when they realise that they are not equipped to deal with stressful social and personal situations.

South Africa has been characterised by violence, and it may be argued that it is this “role model” that some young South Africans follow by becoming violent themselves when their day-to-day stresses become overwhelming. In addition to this is the fact that traditionally black township youths have been marginalized by apartheid, which has excluded them from positions of authority or power within society. The resulting feelings of alienation and disempowerment may have contributed to the fact that this sector of the population present as the primary perpetrators in violent crimes in South Africa (S. Mokwena cited in HRW, 1995).

### **2.3.3 The South African educational system**

During the apartheid era, the educational system was structured in a way that ensured that non-white South Africans would not receive education beyond that which equipped them for semi-skilled labour, while white citizens were educated to fulfil dominant positions within the South African society. This was enacted through the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (HRW, 2001). Black schools were understaffed, under-funded, teachers were mostly under-qualified, education for black children was not compulsory and was certainly not encouraged, and opportunities for success were limited. Furthermore, formal education in South Africa has been based on Western ideologies and generally neglected the needs of

other cultures (Ncube, 1998). Thus, the availability of legitimate means of attaining goals or opportunities was determined by the political system, which structured life in terms of racial/population definitions (Brown, 1984). During the resistance against apartheid, schools were often the location within which the struggles took place, thus transforming them into unsafe, violent places. An example of student demonstrations is that of the Soweto uprising in 1976 where students protested against Afrikaans being the official medium of instruction in schools. The repercussions of these restrictions are still evident in the country. The present situation in South African is that, education is compulsory for all children from the ages of 7 to 15 (HRW, 2001; Maithufi, 1997). In terms of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, every child has the right to education (HRW, 2001; Maithufi, 1997).

Education plays an important socialising role especially in shaping attitudes, and is a powerful tool for empowering the disadvantaged sectors of society, including women. Despite this; the educational system seems fraught with gender inequalities that is reflected in the number of girls who drop out of school for various reasons, sexual harassment being one of them (HRW, 2001; Kabeberi-Macharia, 1998).

Sexual violence characterises South African society today, and this too has infiltrated into South African schools. It has been reported that South Africa has one of the highest figures of violence against women in the world, with reported incidences of rape and attempted rape having increased by approximately 20% from 1994 to 1999 (HRW, 2001). Approximately 40% of the reported rapes and attempted rapes are against school-aged girls under the age of 17 (*ibid*).

#### **2.4 Society's changing attitudes towards sexuality**

Sexual abuse seems to be a "slithery" kind of concept. It is difficult to grasp and define in a way that is acceptable and understood by all. Over-time it has been minimized, pathologised and ignored but has begun to reach a stage where it is becoming a phenomenon that is starting to be talked about more seriously.

Sexual abuse has been constructed by the dominant Western discourse as a social act which is punishable by law (Pettigrew, 1998). Furthermore, sexual abuse is often defined through a comparison of so-called “normal” and “abnormal” relations. Distinctions between “normal” and “abnormal” childhood and “normal” versus “abnormal” sex are talked about, and sexual offenders are generally portrayed as *adult* outcasts from whom society needs protection, ignoring the possibility of child sexual offenders.

However, this represents a contemporary discourse in which society has had difficulty in acknowledging child abuse, and has had even greater difficulty acknowledging the fact that children are capable of sexually abusing others.

*Rape is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused, though never so innocent. (Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale, 17<sup>th</sup> century England, cited in Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993, p.8).*

Court records dating back to 1730 offer additional information. At the Old Bailey, London, between 1730 and 1789, 23% of capital rape prosecutions involved victims younger than 10. Based on this growing awareness of child sexual abuse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, American and British feminists were influential in raising the age at which a child may consent to sex from age 10 in 1875 to age 16 in 1885 (Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the dominant medical discourse about mental illness did not focus on the effects of sexual abuse, although the effects of *other* forms of trauma such as male hysterics who had survived train accidents were noted (Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993). The more “modern” tendency during this time was to explain mental phenomena in “material terms”, where insanity was found in a person whose “mental constitution is originally defective” (*ibid.*, 1993, p. 9). Thus, mental illness together with the causes and cures of it was isolated within an individual rather than embedded within a social context. Conceptualising abuse in this way pathologises the individual and minimizes the social

problem of sexual abuse. Re-thinking and re-conceptualising sexual abuse allows for different definitions and a variety of possibilities in understanding sexual abuse based upon the way in which individuals within society construct this concept. One of the first revolutionary departures from the traditional medical discourse about sexual abuse was by Freud in his three papers written in 1896, where he systematically identified the traumatic effects of sexual abuse, and was the first to address the issues of sexual power, social class differences and gender issues. (Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993). Although he later changed his mind and ascribed these accounts of sexual abuse to fantasy, the significance of his earlier departure in the discourse of sexual abuse, is that it provided a framework from which alternatives could begin to be formulated.

Traditionally society permitted greater sexual freedom for men whilst women were denied these same opportunities (Knopf, 1979). In this context, that of patriarchal society, women are talked about as being the weaker of the two, and men as being stronger, more powerful with a need for sexual gratification. This resulted in men viewing women as objects, increasing inequality between genders, and placing women in a more vulnerable position and contributing to increased violence against them (HRW, 2001; Knopf, 1979).

Over the past four decades in particular, there have been substantial changes in attitudes towards sexual behaviour and practices and these are rooted in the political framework of the time. In Western culture, the 1960's and 1970's brought with it increased sexual liberation in the form of the "hippie" era, and a new way of talking about sexuality. This was a response and resistance to the Vietnam War together with the emergence of feminism and the revival of interest in child sexual abuse. According to Knopf (1979) terms such as "sexual revolution" and "new morality" began to be used to describe these changes in society, and to mark the rejection of traditional morals and value systems (p. 418). Attitudes such as sex being viewed as being "in", and sexual freedom as being the thing that will "cure all our ills" became popularised (Knopf, 1979, p. 418).

Together with these changing attitudes came a greater tolerance to pornography, nudity, homosexuality and sexual violence as depicted on television, the movies and advertising (Knopf, 1979). In South Africa, television became a part of the culture in the mid-1970's,



thus lagging behind countries such as the US. The frequency of implicit and explicit sex as depicted in the media continues to increase in response to the cry for “freedom of speech” by the media. Children are directly exposed to this kind of behaviour through television programmes such as the “soapies”, which are generally shown in the early evenings. A number of studies focusing on the effects of media violence on aggression in children have produced correlational associations between the two, with results suggesting desensitisation, imitation, arousal and positive reinforcement by children (Kellerman, 1999). Furthermore, the way in which individuals are portrayed, such as the dominant role of men and submissive role of women also influence the way in which children construct their own reality around the issue of sex roles.

The existence of rape acceptance myths reflects societal attitudes towards rape victims, and it may be argued that they serve particular functions in society such as the denial or trivialisation of the crime (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, Thies, 1999). In addition, prevailing cultural belief patterns determine which types of behaviour involving sexual victimisation should be defined as victimisation (Burt & Estep, 1981). In the HRW report (2001), a substantial number of male youths believed rape myths such as women were responsible for rape; girls who said “no” meant “yes”; and that girls “asked” to be raped, and gang rape (Jack Rolling) was viewed by many as being “just a game” (HRW, 2001, p. 28). The construction of female sexuality based on the purity of virgins has led to a number of myths resulting in the exploitation of female children (Kabeberi-Macharia, 1998). A particular myth in South Africa that has contributed to a number of very young girls being raped is that sexual intercourse with a virgin will “cleanse HIV-positive men” (HRW, 2001). This type of myth is not new and unique to South Africa as a similar kind of discourse was popular in 18<sup>th</sup> century London, where it was believed that sexual intercourse with a child would cure venereal disease (Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993).

It has been argued that the function of sexual abuse and exploitation of women and girls has been to control female sexuality (Rwezaura, 1998; Shefer, Strebel & Foster, 2000). This occurs through norms and expectations in heterosexual relationships, together with violence. Whereas men may be excused for having numerous relationships simultaneously, society’s norms prescribe that a woman should be faithful and submissive to a single

partner (Shefer, Strebel & Foster, 2000). In some African cultures, the role of women is perceived in terms of marriage and procreation and any interference in this goal is not tolerated (Rwezaura, 1998). According to Rwezaura (1998), female mutilation and virginity testing is the norm in many countries, particularly those in Africa, and is a practice that perpetuates female inequality.

## **2.5 Dilemmas in acknowledging child-on-child sexual abuse**

Sexual victimization is a widespread problem in the contemporary Western world, and figures in the US indicate that 25% of women and 15% of men are sexually victimized in their lifetime (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1998; Koss, Gidycz & Wisniewski, 1987). Given that society finds it difficult to acknowledge sexual abuse in general, it follows that society has great difficulty in acknowledging the existence of sexual abuse perpetrated by children (Masson, 1995; Pettigrew, 1998). It may be argued that this is based on the myth that children are inherently “good”, and is connected to the notion that “boys will be boys” (Masson, 1995, p. 331). James and Jenks (1994, cited in Masson, 1995, p. 331) argue that deeply emotional reactions to child-on-child violence may be connected to beliefs about childhood innocence:

*a dominant modern discourse of childhood marks out the child as innately innocent, confirming its cultural identity as a passive and unknowing dependant, and as therefore a member of a social group disempowered, but for good, altruistic reasons.*

Traditionally the problem of child-on-child sexual abuse has not been recognised, and it is only of late that public awareness into the extent and nature of the problem has increased. This increase in public awareness of the problem of child and adolescent sexual offenders, both internationally as well as in South Africa, has come from the popular media such as newspapers and magazines (Burton, Nesmith & Badten, 1997; SAPA, The Natal Witness, 28 March, 2001; SAPA, The Natal Witness, 29 March, 2001). The recent study by HRW (2001) has highlighted the increase in sexual abuse and harassment in South African

schools, as well as the reluctance by schools to acknowledge that this behaviour occurs within the confines of the school premises:

*Schools find it very difficult to acknowledge abuse in their schools...they will back the alleged perpetrator against the child who is the victim (Joan van Niekerk, Director of Childline, KZN, cited in Natal Witness, 28 March, 2001, p. 2).*

It seems that clinicians and researchers also held the view that child/adolescent sexual offences were not serious or frequent, and tended to ignore or deny the possibility that children are capable of sexually abusive behaviour towards other children (Burton, Nesmith & Badten, 1997; Johnson, 1988). This assumption may have been influenced by Freud's view that accounts of sexual abuse by children were in fact fabrications rather than reality (Burton, Nesmith & Badten, 1997).

Prior to the 1970's, very little research was carried out in the area of juvenile sexual offenders (Becker, 1990; Bourke & Donohue, 1996). Up until this time, from the 1940's to the early 1970's, juvenile sexual offenders were overlooked and the problem was not viewed as being severe or frequent (Becker, 1990; Bourke & Donohue, 1996). This behaviour was often regarded as being experimentation, innocent sex play and the result of sexually maturing males and thus should not be viewed as being deviant or pathological even if it is exploitive (Becker, 1990; Becker, Cunningham-Rathner & Kaplan, 1986; Home, Glasgow, Cox & Calam, 1991; HRW, 2001; Johnson, 1988; Vizard, Monck & Misch, 1995). Even so, there are still professionals, both in the mental health and judicial domains, who prefer to define sexually abusive behaviour of children and adolescents as "adolescent adjustment reaction" or "normal sexual experimentation" (Johnson, 1988, p. 219).

The assumption that adolescent sex offenders are just experimenting or that it is just a game may be discredited due to the fact that research has shown that approximately 86% of adolescent sex offenders had had prior interpersonal sexual experiences (Becker, et al., 1986). Furthermore, results from a five-year research project in the US found that 54% of convicted adult sex offenders reported the onset of deviant sexual arousal before the age of

18 thus leading one to conclude that this type of sexual behaviour is deviant rather than simply experimentation (Becker, et al., 1986). In the 1980's, mental health professionals began to acknowledge the seriousness of juvenile sexual offending and by 1982 there were approximately 22 treatment programmes available in the USA targeting this group of individuals (Johnson, 1988). By 1987 there were approximately 470 treatment programmes dealing with adolescent sexual offenders, (Johnson, 1988). During this time came the realisation, together with denial and minimization, of the problem of another group of sexual offenders – children under the age of 13 (Johnson, 1988). The seriousness of this behaviour was once again minimized by researchers claiming that the behaviour was experimentation and the result of normal sexually aggressive maturation (Johnson, 1988).

The fact that child-on-child sexual abuse is a pervasive and serious problem nationally, as well as internationally, child-on-child sexual offenders is of concern not only for mental health professionals but also for law enforcement agencies (Bethea-Jackson & Brissett-Chapman, 1989; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Sheridan, McKeown, Cherry, Donohoe, McGrath, O'Reilly & Tallon, 1998). For this reason it is vital that child sexual offending be taken very seriously in order to prevent these children becoming adult sexual offenders (Becker et al., 1986). In response to the increased awareness of the problem of child-on-child sexual offenders, countries such as Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and the UK have made considerable efforts to design treatment and rehabilitation programmes exclusively for the young abuser (Sheridan et al., 1998; Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1998; Ryan, 1998).

To date little research has been done in the area of sexually abusive children and adolescents whereas in contrast much research has been carried out in terms of adult sexually abusive behaviour (Awad & Saunders, 1991; Bourke & Donohue, 1996). As a result, theories and assumptions based on adult research have been used to try to explain child and adolescent behaviour.

## **2.6 Dilemmas in definitional issues surrounding child/adolescent sexual offenders**

### **2.6.1 The issue of under-reporting**

It is a well-established fact that crimes, in particular crimes of a sexual nature, are under-reported. It has been estimated that as many as 65% of sexually abused children do not report the crime (Finkelhor, 1979 cited in Bourke & Donohue, 1996). Moreover, many of the complaints are never processed and therefore never reach the courts for prosecution. According to Pierce and Pierce (1987, cited in Bourke & Donohue, 1996), an additional factor that should be considered in interpreting the reporting rates is that until recently some sexual offences may in fact have been categorised as assault offences. This implies definitional problems in terms of what kinds of behaviours are defined as sexually deviant or as acceptable and thus "normal". Therefore, it is important to first understand how sexual offences are defined and then to return to the issue of the prevalence of child sexual offenders.

### **2.6.2 An attempt to define child-on-child sexual aggression**

Horne et al. (1991), argues that the fundamental problem regarding the issue of child-on-child sexual aggression is that there is no widely accepted definition of the phenomenon. According to Vizard and Monck (1995), problems in defining sexual deviance in adolescents are greater than in adults. This is due to the confusion and a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes normal child/adolescent sexual behaviour. Moreover, there is little agreement in terms of at what stage child sexual exploration becomes inappropriate sexual behaviour, and, when inappropriate sexual behaviour becomes sexually abusive (Masson, 1995). This issue is further complicated by the fact that a certain amount of sexual experimentation by children and adolescents is accepted by society as being "normal" developmental behaviour (Williams & New, 1996). According to Renshaw (1994) 90% of boys and girls engage in "experimental, non-coercive, non-coital child-child sex play" that may be viewed as normal as opposed to harmful behaviour (p. 34). It has been argued that sexual behaviour in children under the age of 13 is nothing more than

experimentation or “playing doctor”, a view which in effect functions to minimize the seriousness of the offence (Johnson, 1988, p. 220; Renshaw, 1994).

Many attempts have been made to define child and adolescent deviant sexual behaviour, however these definitions may be criticised for the inclusion and/or exclusion of certain elements of the phenomenon. Most medical and legal definitions are often viewed as being too narrow for mental health professions (Williams & New, 1996). An example of these issues is the age of the perpetrator. The criminal justice system often has “cut-off points” for categorising a child as a criminal such as the age of 10, however these are generally arbitrary (Horne, et al., 1991, p. 150). Because of this ambiguity, children who sexually abuse other children receive inconsistent treatment especially when they are younger than 10 years of age.

According to Williams and New (1996), four key factors should be considered in a clinical definition of child-on-child sexually abusive behaviour. Firstly, it should include an explicit description of the sexually abusive behaviour, including details such as age, frequency of the abuse and the use of aggression and coercion. Secondly, the age and development of the victim and perpetrator should be considered. Third, information regarding the nature of the relationship of the victim and perpetrator is important. Finally, information regarding the attitudes of other family members as well as existing cultural norms regarding sexuality in that particular community need to be included. These key factors emphasise elements such as consent, power imbalances and exploitation in defining behaviour as sexually abusive (Masson, 1995). In addition, Williams and New (1996), include an important issue which it seems is often excluded in definitions, that of cultural norms regarding sexuality within a particular community. Although Williams and New (1996), outline some factors which may serve to aid defining an incident by a child or adolescent as abusive, this is not a simple matter because it is not always easy to identify a behaviour as coercive or not. Furthermore, where does one draw the line in terms of age and development, as children do not develop at the same rate?

Davis and Leitenberg (1987) emphasise that any sexual interaction with an adolescent and a “much younger child” is sexually abusive even if aggression or coercion were not

evident, however, defining what constitutes a “much younger child” is in itself problematic (p. 417). Generally, a child between two and five years younger than the perpetrator is accepted as being “much younger” (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). Furthermore, Williams and New (1996) highlight the fact that any definition should be gender neutral in view of the fact that some sexual offenders are female albeit a small minority.

### **2.6.3 Normal versus pathological behaviour**

“Normal” and pathological sexualised behaviour may be viewed as being on a continuum. Measuring sexually exploitive behaviour is not a simple task and in order to try to address the problematic nature of existing definitions Burton, Nesmith and Badten (1997), offer operational definitions of sexually abnormal behaviour from behaviours involved in normal child development. Normal behaviour for ages 0-6 included touching their own genitals, discussing bodily functions, showing an interest in looking at other’s bathroom activities and touching another’s genitalia but quickly responding to re-direction. Children aged 6-10 show the following normal developmental behaviour: showing genitals to peers, touching own genitals, masturbating, interest in viewing other’s bodies and using sex words and telling sex jokes. Children aged 10-12 exhibited the following normal behaviour: seeking information about sex, masturbating with peers as well as consensual kissing, fondling, sexual penetration and or same sex activity. Behaviour defined as abnormal for all age groups include the following: genital kissing, oral-genital sex, simulated intercourse, penetration with a finger, object or penis into the mouth, anus or vagina of another, sexual activity with children two or more years younger than themselves as well as the use of verbal threats, force, physical restraint or misleading and offering gifts in exchange for sexual interaction. These definitions are based on normative research, and therefore may not be acceptable in all cultures, nor do these definitions cover the question of motives or power related issues in terms of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

In view of the above, any definition of child-on-child sexual abuse raises many dilemmas, few of which are answered and not least of which have a significant impact on the estimated prevalence of child sexual offenders.

## **2.7 Prevalence of child sexual offending**

According to surveys in the U.S.A as well as in Britain, adolescent sexual offending is much more prevalent than society would like to believe (Pettigrew, 1998). The fact that this phenomenon has only recently been recognised has also had a significant impact on the statistics for incidences and prevalence (Vizard, Monck & Misch, 1995). It has been argued that the prevalence rates of child sexual abuse vary according to the definition of the abuse, data collection methods as well as the sources of the samples (Hummel, Thomke, Oldenburger & Specht, 2000). A broader definition as opposed to a more restricted one may have a significant impact on prevalence rates, and a reduction to one-fifth of the baseline prevalence may be achieved by applying a restrictive definition (Hummel et al., 2000). Even so, sexual victimization perpetrated by juveniles and children is thought to account for up to 30% of reported cases of child sexual abuse (Ryan, 1998). In addition, researchers have found that 54% of male children referred for suspected child sexual abuse had been victimized by an older juvenile (Ryan, 1998). Other research suggests that up to 20% of all sexual offences are committed by young people under the age of 18 and that juveniles perpetrate almost 60% of sexual offences against children under the age of 12 (Ryan, 1998; Johnson, 1988). These rates, although they appear relatively high, may in fact be an underestimate due to a number of reasons. As has been discussed, definitional issues play a large role in prevalence rates since some sexual offences have been categorised as assault. Therefore, differences in prevalence rates may be due to these definitional issues rather than actual differences in the rates adolescent sexual offending. These figures generally do not take into account sexual offences by children and reflect offences by adolescents only (i.e. children over the age of 13).

Furthermore, by and large, sexual offences are under-reported, and it has been estimated that approximately 65% of sexually abused children never report the abuse (Finkelhor, 1979 cited in Bourke & Donohue, 1996; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). In addition, a number of reported cases of child-on-child sexual abuse cases are not taken seriously by the legal fraternity due to the confusion around what constitutes normal, experimental behaviour and what is abusive behaviour (Bourke & Donohue, 1996; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987;



Hummel, et al., 2000; Williams & New, 1996). According to Groth and Loredó (1981, cited in Davis & Leitenberg, 1987), the families of the victims may also be reluctant to report the abuse when the perpetrator is very young and known to the family. In these cases, the behaviour is generally viewed as experimentation and sexual exploration rather than abusive.

Research suggests that young sex offenders who abuse boys are generally victims of sexual abuse themselves (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987; Worling, 1995). Data from a study by Becker and Stein (1991, cited in Worling, 1995) shows that approximately 32% of offenders against male victims were sexually abused themselves as opposed to 18% of those who sexually victimised female victims.

### **2.7.1 Prevalence in South Africa**

In South Africa, the figures reflect a similar situation. Although it is difficult to assess statistics of juvenile sexual offenders in South Africa because until recently separate statistics were not maintained for juvenile sexual offenders, it seems that the problem is more serious than it may appear on the surface (Pettigrew, 1998). The recent HRW report (2001), states that according to a 1997 South African government report there is a substantial increase in the rape and sexual abuse of children, with child rape accounting for one-third of all serious crimes reported against children. A South African Police Service statistical analysis of reported rape cases reflected females in the age group zero to 17 years to be the most vulnerable population (HRW, 2001).

The South African Police Service (SAPS), reports that there has been a significant increase in the number of children arrested for sexual crimes (HRW, 2001). The recent South African study conducted by the Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2001) seemed to indicate that sexual crimes by children are evident nationwide. They provide the example of the Western Cape township of Mitchell's Plain where an increase of up to 40% of sexual violence reported, was allegedly committed by children (HRW, 2001).

Until recently, in South Africa, a moratorium on the release of government statistics was ordered by the Minister of Safety and Security, Steve Tswete and National Police Commissioner Jackie Selebe, which in effect meant that the official statistics of sexual abuse remained even more hidden than before (HRW, 2001). Although statistics have become available, the HRW (2001) has expressed concern regarding the quality of these statistics, and as discussed above, a number of factors such as definitional issues and under-reporting, may contribute to the quality of statistics.

## **2.8 Very young child sexual offenders**

In view of the above statistics, it is clear that adolescent sexual offending is a widespread problem. However, another population of offenders also needs to be taken seriously – these being preadolescent, pre-school children who also sexually abuse other children younger than themselves. Johnson (1988) provides one of the few descriptions of child perpetrators aged between 4 and 13 years. Most research has focused on adolescents aged between 13 and above and neglected the existence of perpetrators younger than 13. Sexual behaviour between children younger than 13 has generally been dismissed as exploratory sex-play, and while this is often the case, there is a sub-group of very young children who exhibit developmentally sexually inappropriate behaviour. According to Longo (1982, cited in Becker, Cunningham-Rathner & Kaplan, 1987), 76% of the convicted adolescent sexual offenders participating in that study reported that their first sexual experience had occurred before the age of 12. Harnett and Misch (1993), report Home Office figures for England and Wales which demonstrate that of all offenders cautioned or found guilty of sexual offences, 15% were between the ages of 17-20, 13% were aged 14-16 years and 4% were between the ages of 10 and 13. In Johnson's (1988) sample, she found that the age of first reported sexual acting out behaviour was between 4 and 12 years of age with a mean age of 8 years 9 months. In view of this, it seems that a significant number of sexual offenders are very young, thus emphasising the fact that many young sexual offenders begin their offending before having reached puberty (Bethea-Jackson & Brissett-Chapman, 1989).

## **2.9 Prior sexual experience of child sexual offenders**

In a study done by Goth (1977, in Becker, Cunningham-Rathner & Kaplan, 1986), 86% of the sample of convicted adolescents that were used for that particular research had had previous sexual experience before the sexual assault for which they had been convicted. These figures discredit the assumption that this behaviour by adolescent sex offenders is simply experimentation. Furthermore, research seems to suggest that adolescent sexual offenders repeat their deviant sexual behaviour more than once, which again challenges the assumption that their behaviour is simply exploration (Becker, Cunningham-Rathner & Kaplan, 1986).

## **2.10 Female child sexual offenders**

Although research seems to indicate that the majority of young sexual offenders are male, Johnson (1989) found that a portion of perpetrators included females, some aged between 4 and 13. It has been suggested that approximately 95% of adolescent sexual offenders are males (Bourke & Donohue, 1996; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). As a result, most research had focused on boys thus neglecting female sexual offenders; however recently there has been a move towards acknowledging the existence of female sexual offenders (Harnett & Misch, 1993). Kahn and Lafond (1988), report that at Echo Glen, a juvenile corrections facility in the US, between 15% and 25% of the female population aged between 12 and 18 years are sexual offenders, and all reported having being themselves sexually abused. Although this study is somewhat dated in that it reports figures from 1988, there is no reason to believe that these statistics would have decreased substantially since then.

## **2.11 The use of coercion and force**

Research suggests that most offenders do not inflict serious injury on their victims (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987; Kahn & Lafond, 1988). More than 50% of perpetrators use some

degree of physical force in order to subdue or gain their victim's co-operation. Other's use less coercive styles such as threats, bribes or "special games" in order to carry out the abusive behaviour (Kahn & Lafond, 1988). Doherty and Anderson (1998) reported that approximately 44% of rape victims do not present with any signs of physical injury. The fact that generally victims sustain no serious injury may contribute to the problem of under-reporting of the abuse. According to Koss, Dinero and Seibel (1988), it takes a woman longer to perceive an incident as being rape when it involves an acquaintance and there is a concern that due to an absence of injury, no-one will believe her that abuse occurred.

Bearing in mind that although the prevalence of sexual abuse in the general population remains unknown, the above statistics seem to suggest that the extent and seriousness of the abusive behaviour of young perpetrators is cause for concern and can no longer be denied.

## **2.12 Victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by child/adolescent perpetrators**

Generally it seems that the victims of sexual assault by young sexual offenders know the perpetrator, and are younger than the perpetrator (Awad & Saunders, 1989; Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999; Becker, Cunningham-Rathner & Kaplan, 1986; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). The only exception it seems is in the case of non-contact offences such as obscene telephone calls and exhibitionism. In this case, the targets are more likely to be peers or adults (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). The Juvenile Abuser Treatment Program (JATP) was established in 1980 in the US, and in 1989 reported that the ages of victims ranged between 2 and 15 years, and the average age of perpetrators was 15 (Bethea-Jackson & Brissett-Chapman, 1989). This seems to indicate that victims are generally much younger than the perpetrator. It also seems to suggest that a significant number of sexual offenders begin offending before reaching puberty (Bethea-Jackson & Brissett-Chapman, 1989). According to Deisher et al. and Wasserman and Kappel (in Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999), between 50 and 66% of victims sexually abused by adolescents, were less than 10 years of age (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). Johnson (1988)

found in her sample that the ages of victims ranged between 1 and 15 years of age, and that all of the perpetrators knew their victims, thus they did not generally sexually abuse strangers.

Sexual abuse results in a number of psychological consequences for the victim. One of these is traumatic sexualisation, which results in outcomes such as behavioural manifestations and a confusion between love and sex. Empirical studies have reported that many sexually abused children display increased sexualised behaviour in comparison to children who have not been sexually abused, and that there is a link between sexual abuse and increased sexual behaviour following the abuse (Friedrich et al., 1992; Friedrich, 1993).

Research suggests that most victims of male adolescent offenders are female, and studies have shown that up to 80% of the victims of incarcerated offenders were female (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987). This too seems to be the case in South Africa (HRW, 2001).

### **2.13 A developmental perspective of child sexual offenders**

In assessing whether sexual behaviour between two children is abusive or normative, it is important to consider developmental factors. This however is a difficult task as very few large-scale studies of sexual behaviour in “normal” children have been done (Vizard et al., 1995). The reason for a lack of research into sexual behaviour in children is rooted in ethical dilemmas around exposing children to such behaviour. Additionally, norms defining “normal” child sexual behaviour vary over time and between cultures, which means that there is no single acceptable view regarding appropriate child sexual behaviour (Vizard, et al., 1995). A feature of society lies in the regulation of sexual relations between adults and children through informal sanctions, criminal legislation as well as folklore (Erooga & Masson. 1999). There seems to be agreement that some degree of sexualised behaviour is appropriate, that overt sexual behaviour declines with age, evident in both boys and girls.

Normal adolescent sexual development is more difficult to describe than child sexual development due to a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of systematic research in this age group. Furthermore, sex education is lacking in a number of cultures (Vizard et al., 1995). In addition, biological processes associated with sexual maturation are influenced by social factors, such as cultural norms, regarding what type of sexual behaviour (i.e. kissing, petting, touching) is appropriate.

According to Ryan (1999), “human development is a complex unfolding of skills which enable the individual to survive, grow and succeed in relationships and the environment” (p. 39). Thus, growth and experience are an intertwined and interrelated process that has an impact on an individual’s world-view. The process of normative sexual behaviour develops from childhood and begins with curiosity and exploration whereby children express interest in their peers’ genitals and mutual touching of genitals takes place (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999). During adolescence, sexual behaviour becomes a part of interpersonal interactions and is a feature of intimate relationships with peers. From the ages of twelve to fifteen, behaviours include kissing and touching progress to fondling, petting and finally penetrative sexual intercourse. When this behaviour is consensual and non-coercive with a similar aged peer it is viewed as being non-deviant (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999).

#### **2.14 The “storm and stress” of adolescence**

Adolescence has been described as a “turbulent and complex phase of development” characterised by “storm and stress” in which conflict and confusion accompany bodily changes, awakened sexual impulses and an increased awareness of the self and society (Campbell, 1994, p. 309; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). Anna Freud claimed that adolescents who did not experience this “storm and stress” were to some extent pathological (Arnett, 1999). Although contemporary psychology has since rejected the notion that adolescent “storm and stress” is a universal, inevitable phenomenon, evidence does support the existence to some degree of turbulence and conflict. In the US, this

conflict is particularly with reference to conflict with parents, mood swings and risk taking behaviour by adolescents (Arnett, 1999).

### **2.15 Arousal patterns**

Research on adult sexual offenders has shown that up to 42% developed deviant sexual arousal patterns from the ages of twelve to 15 (Kahn & Lafond, 1988). These patterns of behaviour are reinforced by multiple contacts with prepubescent victims often beginning before onset of puberty for the perpetrator (Kahn & Lafond, 1988). Changing deviant arousal patterns is a difficult task, and sexual education, counselling and social skills training has been found to be useful (Kahn & Lafond, 1988). Covert sensitisation techniques and behavioural techniques are also useful tools in the desensitisation of the adolescent perpetrator.

### **2.16 Psychosocial development**

Social forces shape adolescents' sexuality relating to their masculinity and femininity, by establishing norms and values (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993). These include expectations around what kinds of behaviours are regarded as acceptable, and these will vary as a function of a number of factors such as culture, social class, education and gender. Moore and Rosenthal (1993) argue that "sexuality is a normative event in adolescent development with the potential for both positive and negative consequences" (p. xii). Traditionally sex role stereotypes defines the man as the "hunter and initiator of sexual activity" who has a more powerful position in a relationship whilst the woman is defined as being passive and cooperative in the home and bedroom with respect to men (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993, p. 83).

Perpetrators may display dysfunctional attitudes and values about what is masculine and what kinds of behaviours are acceptable in relating to the opposite sex or other people in general. Stereotypes defining men as powerful, controlled and fearless and women as

devalued are very often learnt from sources such as the media or friends and family and incorporated into the adolescent's frame of reference (Kahn & Lafond, 1988).

Furthermore, other family members have also been victimised by someone other than the perpetrator, such as a father victimising the perpetrator's mother in front of the children, thus role-modelling abusive, violent behaviour.

## **2.17 Interpersonal relationships and dynamics**

In day-to-day life the child interacts with a number of people, including their family and friends. These interrelationships have an impact on and shape the child in a number of ways.

### **2.17.1 The family**

The family has traditionally been viewed as the primary source of socialisation, with parents being the role models upon which children model their own behaviour. Norms, values and belief systems relevant to society are learnt via the family. According to a social-interactionist perspective, family members play a central role in teaching a child to perform antisocial behaviours (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999). Families vary widely in terms of the degree of permissiveness relating to nudity, and television viewing standards, and this plays a role in increased sexualised behaviour among children (Friedrich, Grambsch, Damon, Hewitt, Koverola, Lang, Wolfe & Broughton, 1992). In addition, children are exposed to domestic violence, thus learning from role models that violence is an acceptable social act.

The way in which the family is organised also plays a role in increased sexualised behaviour (Friedrich et al., 1992). Families characterised by disorganised and distressed single families with little education or finances offer a greater likelihood for children to witness adult sexual behaviour. Many of these families live in small homes, offering little privacy to the adults. In the South African context, this vicarious exposure is common



especially in the lower socio-economic sector where many families live in single room homes and children are directly exposed to their parents' sexual behaviour.

It has been argued that parental absenteeism and neglect play a negative role in the development of a child. Parental attachment remains undeveloped when parents are absent for extended periods, or are emotionally unavailable. As a result, children do not learn to develop interpersonal and intimacy skills in the context of a close relationship (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999). Attachment theory has been used to explain the development of sexually abusive adolescents (Ryan, 1998). According to attachment theory, lack of communication between parents and children has been identified as an important facet in the parent-child relationship. Communication is viewed as a protective factor in the development of deviant behaviour in children (Ryan, 1998).

In the South African context many families consist of single parents; the result of factors such as death, divorce or financial circumstances in addition to the continuing effects of the apartheid era.

### **2.17.2 Peer influence**

The notion of interpersonal sexual behaviour may be introduced to children in a number of ways such as with peers during play, through vicarious exposure or sexual victimization and exploitation (Ryan, 1998). A child is greatly influenced by his/her peers, and it has been argued that socialization is context specific and takes place within the home as well as out-side of the home environment, thus making peer relationships a significant part of this socialization process (Harris 1995). Intra and inter-group processes are responsible for the transmission of culture rather than dyadic relationships within the family.

According to Harnett and Misch (1993), the peer group may be viewed as an important source of information and support when learning about sexuality and intimate relationships. The peer group affords a space in which to develop and consolidate greater understanding and awareness of "normal" sexual behaviour and provides a normalising influence regarding sexual information. Peers function to supply a child/adolescent with

attitudes, motivations, value systems and rationalisations to support possible antisocial behaviour as well as the opportunities to engage in delinquent acts (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999). Thus, the peer group has a strong influence on the behaviour of a member of the group.

The HRW (2001), reports that in South Africa gang rape, known as “jackrolling” is the norm rather than the exception. In this particular study all the girls interviewed had been sexually assaulted by two or more boys, with only a single case of rape perpetrated by a boy acting alone. These findings confirmed an earlier HRW (1995) report in which Cape Town based Rape Crisis noted that most of the female adolescents they counsel have been gang-raped. Other major South African centres such as Johannesburg and Durban reflect the same findings in terms of gang rape (*ibid*).

In contrast to this, research in the US and UK report that group sexual offending is rare, and generally child/adolescent perpetrators act alone (Awad & Saunders, 1989; Awad & Saunders, 1991). However, Renshaw (1994) reports that young offenders can and do gang rape other children. Generally, young sexual offenders have been viewed as lacking in social skills and isolated from meaningful peer relationships thus usually acting out alone (Bourke & Donohue, 1996).

## **2.18 Talking about sex**

Society tends to find communicating about sexual issues difficult and has resulted in children learning about sexual issues from elsewhere such as peers, the media, or viewing sexual behaviour between parents and in the case of single parents, the parent’s partner. Recently, sex education at schools has increased, in some cases becoming part of the curriculum. This however is controversial, as some parents do not approve of their children getting sex education at school.

In the Zulu culture sex education for girls was traditionally the responsibility of older girls and women from the community, and for boys older men (Binns, 1974). In addition, rituals

were a central aspect to the sexual development of isiZulu youths. However, the radical transformations that South African society has endured over the past few decades have led to these traditional procedures no longer functioning (S. Ntshangase, personal communication, October 17, 2001). As a result, isiZulu parents now face the challenge of having to educate their children about sex.

### **2.19 The role of the media**

The media has been accused of perpetuating sex role stereotypes by providing role models which place men in a more favourable position to women and seem to encourage the domination of men over women (Grossman & DeGaetano, 1999; Moore & Rosenthal, 1993)

According to Becker and Stein (1991, cited in Bourke and Donohue, 1996), 89% of young sexual offenders reported having easy access to sexually explicit literature such as pornographic magazines. Adolescents are further exposed to explicit and implicit sexual activity through television and movies where this activity is sometimes portrayed in a violent manner. Renshaw (1994, p. 37), outlines the significant impact the media has on today's youth:

*... today not only newspapers but also rock music lyrics boom repetitively, explicitly and admiringly about violence, power and sex. Copy-cat behaviour may duplicate porn videos, magazines and X-rated movies or prime-time soap opera sex.*

In South Africa, the media also plays a significant role in sexualised behaviour among young children, and this is illustrated by two quotes from a recent Sunday newspaper:

*Primary school pupils as young as six have confessed to re-enacting scenes of rape and sodomy from a controversial TV series (Govender, 2001, p. 5).*

*A pigtailed six-year-old girl told how she and a seven-year-old boy stripped naked in an empty classroom and 'had sex' under a desk because she wanted to 'try out' what she saw on her favourite programme (Govender, 2001, p. 5).*

The above quotes indicate that young children are being exposed to explicit sexual behaviour on television, and that children are watching these programmes without the guidance of adults or parents, may result in the sexual abuse of their peers.

## **2.20 Schools as spaces for sexual violence**

The common meeting ground of children is at school. One of the most significant challenges children face regarding learning at schools is the threat of violence within these places of learning.

*One of the greatest threats to a South African girl's safety at school is likely to be seated next to her in class. South African girls are far more likely to be sexually assaulted by one, or more – usually more – of their male classmates than by a teacher. (HRW, 2001, p. 48).*

Although quantitative data on school violence is not available, the study by the HRW (2001) seems to suggest that violence (sexual and other) is prevalent in many schools both in rural and urban areas. In South Africa, particularly in the more isolated rural areas, many learners travel long distances to school and either walk or use public transport. During this time, they are most vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment from other learners and strangers.

Reports of violence in schools in the US have focused primarily on child murderers and the high prevalence of weapons in schools (Kellerman, 1999; Lindecker, 1999; Grossman & DeGaetano, 1999). However, sexual violence in schools in the US is becoming of greater concern especially since schools are being held liable for sexual harassment (Foxhall, 1999). As a result, the need for clear guidelines concerning sexual harassment

and abuse is becoming a necessity. In South Africa, in addition to the reluctance to acknowledge sexual abuse within the confines of the school, is the confusion concerning guidelines from the department of education on how to deal with the issue of sexual abuse whether perpetrated among learners, educators or other individuals not associated with the school (Charlene Smith. The Mail and Guardian, 15 October, 1999).

According to Davis & Leitenberg (1987), not much research has been done in terms of the location of adolescents' sexual offences, however it seems that most take place indoors, with approximately 75% occurring in the home (55% in the victim's home, 22% in the perpetrator's home and 15% in a home shared by the victim and perpetrator). Research in the USA suggests that most offences take place while baby-sitting (Davis & Leitenberg, 1987).

In South Africa, the picture is somewhat different. In addition to abuse occurring at home, a significant number of children are sexually abused on their way to school, at schools in empty classrooms or hallways and in hostels (HRW, 2001).

It has become vital that schools address these problems by formulating educational training and policies that are put in place in order to safeguard society/schools. Therefore, the place that needs to be targeted for research is schools.

## **2.21 Challenging existing conceptual frameworks**

*The status quo is intolerable," Bellamy said. "We must insist that violence against girls and women be viewed as a shocking aberration, not an invisible norm".*

*(Horsman, 2000, p. 323).*

The question of "what is normal?" seems to infuse much of the literature on sexual abuse, and this too is the case in considering child sexual offenders. Sexual abuse is pervasive and commonplace in society and it seems that in many instances it has been normalised and at times even be viewed as being acceptable (Horsman, 2000). Horsman (ibid) argues

that if violence is viewed as being the norm then the risk of it being seen as acceptable is high, however if it is viewed as abnormal or traumatic then it may imply that it is “abnormal” and not a common feature of our society. Instead, different degrees of violence need to be recognised, with none of these being acceptable.

*What we need to do is see [violence] as a visible norm, not an invisible one ...  
Violence is, and must still be shocking. Therefore, it is a shocking norm...  
Acknowledging and accepting the pervasiveness of the effects of violence on  
learners should become a normal part of the teaching/learning process. (Horsman,  
2000, p. 324).*

Educators may fill an important role in questioning the notion of “normal” violence and thus open the possibilities for re-thinking and re-conceptualising violence. This may be done through educators taking cognisance of the complexity of the concept of violence, becoming aware of violence at school and the impact it has in the classroom. In this way they may draw the attention of learners to these issues, rather than subscribing to the myth of violence as being normal. Furthermore, rather than medicalising violence, one needs to take into account the fact that it is more than pathology, but is also a social and cultural phenomena. In doing this, violence becomes more visible, more tangible and less of a hidden and “acceptable” crime.

## **CHAPTER 3      METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study explored the way in which a group of educators conceptualised the issue of child-on-child sexual offending, utilizing focus group interactions and content analysis. This chapter outlines the process of the data creation and analysis in this study, and begins with a summary of the aims of the study. A description of the participants is followed by a discussion of the method of data collection and analysis.

### **3.2 Summary of the aims of the study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the discourses of educators around the issue of childhood sexual offenders using the methodology described below. The central research questions may be stated as follows: How do a group of isiZulu educators conceptualise the issue of child-on-child sexual offending?

The hypothesis of the study suggests that isiZulu educators may conceptualise child-on-child sexual offending differently to the way the medical and legal fraternities do, as reported in the literature.

### **3.3 Research design**

Since this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, it was decided to make use of a qualitative method of data collection in an attempt to understand the contextual and subjective realities influencing the educators' conceptualisations regarding the issue of child-on-child sexual offending.

Focus groups seemed the most appropriate form of interviewing for this study because it is useful in eliciting a rich source of data around issues such as social norms, opinions, attitudes and structural features of community and cultural patterns (Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi and Borgatti, 1999). Focus groups are particularly suited to exploring and stimulating discussion around issues about which little is known. In this study, this type of setting would allow different discourses to be revealed in terms of the participants' understanding of child-on-child sexual offenders.

Data collected using the focus group method is in the form of words as opposed to numbers that characterise quantitative data collection methods. In this way, the uniqueness of each participant's experiences as a source of data is recognised. This type of data collection is particularly useful when data is required from individuals from an African culture. It has been suggested that since African cultures value narratives, a context in which they are able to articulate their experiences is useful in eliciting credible data (Sifunda, 2000).

The dynamic nature of focus groups provides a space in which to capture debates as well as the expression of the paradoxical nature of ideas. These include phrases such as "yes ... but ...". In this way, the social make-up of psychological phenomena in terms of the participants' particular cultural background may be made more salient. Furthermore, qualitative data regarding shared ideas as well as important differences between individuals may be revealed. The synergistic effect of the group interaction may result in the production of data that may not have been uncovered through individual interviews, and a range of possible hypotheses may emerge from these kinds of discussions (Babbie, 1995; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). These in turn may stimulate further research within this domain.

An important facet of focus group discussions is that it produces a rich corpus of data expressed in the participants' own words. In this way, participants are able to qualify their answers and clearly outline issues that are important to them using their own categorisations and perceived associations (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). As a result, the



data is idiosyncratic and has increased ecological validity that is not possible in other traditional survey methods (ibid., 1998, p. 506).

According to Krippendorff (1980, p. 22), content analysis may be “characterised as a method of inquiry into the symbolic meanings of messages”. Since the research question of this study centred on issues of conceptualisation, and thus symbolic meanings, content analysis seemed the most appropriate method. Furthermore, content analysis allows qualitative data to be quantified. The unstructured and qualitative nature of the data collected for this study could be transformed into objective, quantifiable data through this method. Content analysis also makes use of predetermined categories in order to reduce the data. This was useful since the categories had been identified in the literature and the goal was to understand if, and to what extent, educators used the same categories. Content analysis allows for the identification of explicit themes as well as implicit themes, thus allowing the depth and richness of the qualitative data to emerge in a structured framework of categorisation.

### **3.4 The research participants**

According to Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi and Borgatti (1999), there are three important factors that influence the choice of a target population. Firstly, the purpose of the study must be considered. Secondly, it must be determined whom the study is intended to benefit. Finally, the target population for whom the information resulting from the study is intended needs to be identified. In the case of this study, the purpose was to understand the way in which isiZulu educators conceptualise the issue of child-on-child sexual offending and is in response to a lack of literature from the perspective of the target population. The results of this study are to be disseminated back to the educators who participated in the study, through workshops. In this way, they may gain a clearer understanding of the difficulties they face in dealing with these issues at school. This may facilitate them in formulating training programmes and policies aimed at helping educators cope with this social problem.

This study used a non-probability purposive sample using two sampling methods, criterion and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling was used because the strength and logic of this method is to select a sample that is “information rich” (Babbie, 1995; Patton, 1990, p. 169). For the purpose of this study, the criteria for the selection of participants were as follows: they were all isiZulu educators from the greater Pietermaritzburg area, who all knew of children who had been sexually abused by other children.

The participant sample for this study consisted of three groups of educators (N=11). Access to one group of three educators was negotiated via the Child and Family centre at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg). The other two groups comprising five and three educators respectively, was negotiated via Life Line/Rape Crisis, Pietermaritzburg, and was the result of snowball sampling, once again ensuring an information rich sample (Patton, 1990). Thus, the sample consisted of educators from three different educational settings. One group of educators teach at a school for mentally retarded children that include learners from primary and high school. The second group included educators from the Imbali Township who teach at the senior primary level. The third group of educators teach at a rural primary (junior and senior primary) school on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg.

The literature (Stewart, Shamdasani, 1998; Weber, 1985) suggests that between 5 and 15 individuals are recommended in each focus group. In this study, the aim was to have five participants in each group, however, on two occasions, two participants did not arrive, and thus it was necessary to adopt a more flexible approach and continue with the group discussion with the remaining three members.

All the participants were female isiZulu mother tongue educators. It was important to keep the focus groups homogenous since the topic of discussion was of a sensitive nature. It was felt that participants would find it easier to discuss this issue if they were of the same gender. In addition to this no male educators volunteered to take part in the study. The reason for the lack of male volunteers may be that generally few male educators teach at the junior primary and senior primary level.

The small number of homogenous participants in the sample, as well as the nature of the sampling methods limits generalisability of the results of this study to larger populations. Although the sample consisted of groups of educators teaching in a special school, township as well as a rural school, thus providing a sample from a variety of educational settings, this sample is in no way representative of the population. The study however was exploratory and the sample selected was not driven by a concern for representativeness in South Africa.

### **3.5 Setting up the interviews**

Once the participants had been identified via the Child and Family Centre and Life Line/Rape Crisis, they were contacted telephonically and invited to participate in a focus discussion group on child-on-child sexual offenders. They were informed that the discussion would be videotaped but that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. I also offered to pay each person R10.00 to cover their transport costs. Once they had agreed, a date and time was set for each of the three focus groups.

### **3.6 The focus of the interviews**

The focus group interviews were conducted at the Child and Family Centre at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. This setting was selected for practical reasons. It has a consultation room and adjoining observation room equipped with video recording equipment, which was necessary for the video recording of the interviews. Although this consultation room offered a neutral setting in which educators could reveal confidential and sensitive information, it was an artificial environment and they found the video cameras to be intimidating at first. Another benefit of using this setting was that the potential for interruption during the discussion was eliminated, thus further ensuring confidentiality.

At the outset of each interview, a brief introduction to the study project was outlined, and motivation for the study offered:

A: I am currently completing a Masters degree in Psychology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Recently the media has reported an increase in child-on-child sexual offending in schools. In many instances both the perpetrator and the victim attend the same school. This places educators in a unique position in that they are in a position to view the incident from both perspectives.

For the purpose of my research, I would like to try to understand the perceptions of educators around the issue of child-on-child sexual offenders. The discussion will last approximately one hour, and will be followed by refreshments. The discussion will be videotaped, but in order to protect your identity and to maintain confidentiality only Dr Schoeman, who is supervising this project, and I will have access to the tapes. The reason for videotaping the discussion is so that I remember what you have told me without having to write notes during our discussion.

Once I have completed my research, I will send each person who participated, a report on my findings. I am also willing to run a workshop on child sexual offenders if you would like me to.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Consent forms (Appendix C) were given to each participant to sign, indicating their willingness to participate, and their understanding of the purpose of the discussion as well as how the results will be used. It was stressed that confidentiality would be maintained and that they may leave at any time if they so wished. This option was never exercised in any of the focus groups. Due to the fact that these interviews were video-taped, it was necessary to assure the group that only my research supervisor and I would have access to the video-tapes thereby protecting their anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, they

were informed that the identities of the schools in which they teach would also be protected.

The de-briefing of participants at the end of an interview is an essential part of the research process, in that it recognises and respects that autonomy and dignity of participants (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). At the end of each of the focus group interviews, the video-recorder was switched off and refreshments were served. During this time an informal de-briefing session took place in which the participants were provided with the opportunity to ask any questions and to discuss any aspect of the focus discussion.

### **3.8 The interview process**

As I did not know the participants prior to the focus groups, it was important for me to establish rapport with them, as this was central to them being able to reveal views and opinions on a sensitive issue. The semi-structured nature of the interviews aided this in that to some extent I participated in the discussion with them. They were also encouraged to engage in the discussion as if it were a conversation.

A further issue central to the interview process was the fact that I was of a different culture to the participants, and although on the surface this did not seem to be problematic, it may well have influenced the type and depth of the information they revealed to me particularly since the topic of discussion was of a sensitive nature.

Based on a literature review, a vignette (Appendix A) had been constructed in order to orientate the participants around the focus issue. At the beginning of the discussion, each participant was given a copy of the vignette, which I then read out aloud. I used a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire (Appendix B) to guide the participants in the focus group discussions. As a result of the unstructured nature of the focus group, the dialogue was less restricted and it was possible to discuss central issues a number of times at different points in the discussion. This allowed for debate as well as a depth and richness in the data to be revealed.

Focus groups however do have limitations in that the quality and validity of the information obtained may be influenced by the composition of the groups as well as the interactions of different personalities in the group. The groups in this study comprised females only, which may have been beneficial in that they were required to discuss a sensitive topic, sexual offences, and the presence of men in the group may have negatively influenced their discussion. This was also in line with established Zulu cultural norms.

Focus groups are relatively unstructured in nature, however they are structured to the extent that the group discussion needs to be guided and remain focused on the central topic. In respect to this, the group facilitator plays an important role. Focus groups allow the researcher to focus the groups around a particular topic, and consequently produce data specifically on the topic of interest (Morgan, 1997). This is achieved using an interview guide. An interview guide may be viewed as the tool for creating the agenda of the interview and generally consists of a set of general open-ended questions regarding the topic of the discussion (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). According to Morgan, (1997), there is a concern that the facilitators presence may affect group interaction and thus the resulting data. Furthermore, contamination of data may result due to the presence of the facilitator in the focus groups together with the fact that the facilitator may have their own agenda and interests in focusing the groups.

### **3.9 Recording the focus group discussions**

Videotaping is an effective means of recording interviews, and provided the groups are small enough for all the participants to be included, everything that happens in the group is recorded in "sight, sound and colour" (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 102). In addition to verbal communication, non-verbal communication also takes place in a focus group discussion, and it is this behaviour that cannot be captured in a written transcription. This method of recording the interviews seemed the most logical since the groups in this study were small enough and the setting of the interviews was equipped with video recording equipment.

Whilst the participants agreed to the interviews being videotaped, this method of data recording may be viewed as invasive by individuals taking part in a discussion on a topic of a sensitive nature such as sexual abuse as was the case in this study. It was obvious that at the beginning of each focus group discussion the participants were very aware that they were being videotaped. The drawback of this is that it may have affected the depth of the data revealed by them.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

The narratives provided by the participants were transcribed in order to produce text. This text formed the basis from which to code emerging themes into categories previously identified from the literature. The data was then quantified by counting the number of instances in which the themes were mentioned during the interviews. The final step in content analysis involves making interpretations about the data.

#### **3.10.1 Transcribing the interviews**

Transcribing the interviews is an important facet of the data creation stage. It is in the process of transcription that a written record of the interviews is established, and the raw data is transformed into a data set for further in-depth analysis. Transcriptions are however limited in that they only reflect what was said in the interview, and do not include non-verbal communication.

Transcribing the videos was a difficult and time consuming process, with one hour of video discussion taking approximately 13 hours to complete. It was not simply a matter of typing the words from the videotape onto a word processor. The participants' were isiZulu mother tongue, and at times, it was very difficult to hear what they said because of their accent, conversational grammar as well as poor sound quality of the videotape. Because of this, there were occasions where I was forced to interpret what they were saying as best as I could. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1998), editing increases the readability of the transcripts, however one must be cautious not to change the character of the

participants comments since their responses are central to the analysis. From time to time some of the participants' sentences had to be restructured in order to make sense of them. however this was done with caution.

Although transcribing directly from the videotape meant that it was easy to identify exactly which participant had said what, and it provided a record of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, overall the transcribing process was a complex one.

### **3.11 Content analysis as methodology**

Whilst it is acknowledged that a number of other theoretical perspectives exist, the primary theoretical orientation in this study is a social constructionist approach. This theoretical perspective assumes that an individual is a social being who actively interacts with society and in so doing, is involved in a process of meaning-making and the creation of social constructs. These meanings are then used to make interpretations about the world. In this way, people are able to make sense of their lives. Discourse and communication is central to social interaction and content analysis affords the opportunity to make valid inferences from this kind of data (Weber, 1985).

Content analysis is a technique that examines the content of text and uses predetermined categories and codes that are applied to the data to generate quantifiable indices (Neuman, 1997; Terre Blanch & Kelly, 1999). This was useful since the categories had been identified in the literature and the goal was to understand if, and to what extent, educators used the same categories. Through this method, the unstructured and qualitative nature of the data collected for this study could be transformed into objective, quantifiable data. Content analysis allows for the identification of explicit themes as well as implicit themes, thus allowing the depth and richness of the qualitative data to emerge in a structured framework of categorisation.

Content analysis may range from an informal approach that seeks simply to describe the content of the data to a more formal and rigorous method emphasising reliability and replicability of the results (Krippendorff, 1980; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998). Formal



content analysis makes use of objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic nature of the content of the text (Krippendorff, 1980; Neuman, 1997). In this way, the content of the text is revealed in an objective fashion. Constructs within the text are operationalised and categorised with a coding system to allow the content of the text to be revealed,

Since this study was explorative in nature, it was not necessary to use a highly rigorous form of content analysis. A formal structure outlined by Krippendorff (1980) was used to improve the reliability and replicability of the results of the study.

### ***Step 1 – identifying units of analysis***

In order to develop themes and code the data, it was important to first identify the units of analysis. Units of analysis refer to the units used when measuring a variable and determine how the variables are to be measured. They may include words, phrases, themes and so forth. In this case, concepts were identified as the units of analysis and were distinguished from each other on a conceptual basis (Krippendorff, 1980). In terms of this, the central concepts as well as sub-concepts in the sample text were to be highlighted, and sample exemplary statements illustrating these concepts noted (Gillham, 2000). These included explicit concepts, previously identified in the literature, as well as implicit concepts that emerged during the analysis of the text.

### ***Step 2 – sampling the data***

Once the unit of analysis has been determined, the next step was deciding how to sample the text. Sampling may include all or part of the text. The sampled text forms the body of data that is to be analysed. In this study, all of the text resulting from the three focus group interviews was included in the sample.

### ***Step 3 – coding the data***

Coding the data is the most crucial and time-consuming step in content analysis because it is at this point that the symbolic communication of the text is transformed into objective quantifiable data. This level of analysis involves coding the data in order to break down, compare, conceptualise and categorise it, in this way forcing a researcher to make

judgements about the meaning of the text (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through this process, the data is reduced to “manageable chunks”, and patterns and contradictions in the data are identified (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 167).

Codes are essentially descriptive or inferential labels that are attached to the concepts found in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An essential feature of codes is that they should be mutually exclusive and exhaustive (Babbie, 1995; Gillham, 2000; Krippendorff, 1980). This is achieved by clearly operationalising each one. Before the analysis, a provisional list of codes based on existing literature on the topic being studied is created. These codes may then be further sub-divided at different levels of analysis. In order to improve the reliability of the data coding stage, a set of instructions on how to record the data from the text should be made available to all the coders (Krippendorff, 1980; Neuman, 1997).

In the process of coding this study’s text, each transcript was carefully read, and the various concepts that had been identified from the literature were highlighted in a different colour and given a label (code). For example, the central concept of sex education was coded as “SED”. Sub-concepts were further sub-divided using the code SED and a number. An example of this is the sub-concept “Parents don’t educate their children about sex” which was coded as “SED1”. Exemplary statements of each of these concepts were also noted.

The transcripts were then read again, this time with the goal of identifying implicit meanings in the text. The same process was followed as above.

Identifying concepts and coding the data were processes that seemed to merge (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). During the process of coding, themes evolved and changed. Furthermore, sub-concepts were revealed which needed further analysis. In this study, implicit concepts emerged in the process of coding the explicit concepts. In addition to this, concepts that had not been identified in the data were also revealed. These concepts will be discussed in detail in chapter 4 of this thesis.

#### ***Step 4 – quantifying the data***

Coding systems are used to identify one or more of the following characteristics of the text: frequency (counting the number of times something was said), direction (whether it was positive, negative, supporting or opposed), intensity (strength of the message) and space (the size of the message). For the purpose of this study, the frequency with which a concept was mentioned was counted. The direction of the text, in particular the debates that had taken place in the focus groups, was also highlighted. The intensity of the message was only noted when it raised intense debate or was expressed with increased emotion.

#### ***Step 5 – elaboration***

During the process of coding the data, the sequence of the text was broken up and events relating to each concept were brought together from the various parts of the text. This allowed one to get a different perspective on the data. Through this process, the finer nuances of the data are revealed, and implicit concepts emerged (Terre Blanch & Kelly, 1999). Exploring the data in this way is known as elaboration.

In this study, the elaboration stage allowed me to revise some of the categories and initial coding. Resulting from this the constructs became more clearly defined, and the implicit concepts seemed to surface from this. The process of coding, elaboration, recoding was repeated until it was clear that no further new significant insights were emerging from the data.

### **3.12 Analysing “talk”**

Although neither formal discourse analysis nor conversation analysis was used in this study, I felt that it was important to analyse the text on a deeper level than content analysis was able to do. The primary motivation for this was that during the process of coding the explicit categories in the text, a number of implicit conceptualisations emerged. Content analysis did not seem adequate enough to deal with the subtlety of this kind of discourse, and the ways in which the educators were using language to produce particular kinds of

effects, such as normalising or justifying child-on-child sexual behaviour (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

As I tried to understand the implicit and often contradictory conceptualisations offered by the educators it became clear that they were using a number of strategies in order to make sense of the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. In conceptualising the issue of child-on-child sexual offending, the educators were firstly describing events and formulating their nature, secondly accounting for these events and finally evaluating the events (Wetherell, 1998). However, describing and evaluating are not separate events but often occur simultaneously, and are flexible depending on the particular circumstance or occasion in which the issue is being discussed (Speer & Potter, 2000). In this way, conceptualisations, in this case the conceptualisations of the educators were not straight forward but instead included variability (and at times contradictions) in their accounts and formulations of the behaviour of child-on-child sexual offenders (Wetherell, 1998).

In order to understand the strategies that the educators used in conceptualising this issue I found work done by Speer and Potter (2000) as well as van Dijk (1992) useful. Although the study by Speer and Potter (2000) focused on the management of heterosexist talk, and van Dijk's (1992) work focused on the denials of racism, they were useful in helping me to understand particular strategies that individuals use in conversation, irrespective of the topic of conversation, in order to help them to make sense of the issues. These strategies included normalisation, justification, relativisation and rationalisation of the behaviour. I made use of this framework in analysing the discourses of the educators qualitatively.

### **3.13 Reliability and validity**

One of the fundamental choices facing a researcher when formally coding data is a choice between depth and specificity, which generally translates to a trade off between reliability and validity (Babbie, 1995). In terms of this, there are two types of content that may be identified: manifest (explicit) and latent (implicit) content (Babbie, 1995; Neuman, 1997). Manifest content refers to the visible, surface content of text. This type of coding is regarded as highly reliable because it only considers whether a word appears in the text or not, and is thus very specific. However, the validity of manifest coding may be compromised because it does not consider the connotations of words or phrases, nor the context in which the text has emerged (Krippendorff, 1980; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

On the other hand, latent content refers to the underlying and implicit meaning of the text. This type of coding is a process of abstraction. Latent coding is viewed as less reliable since it is based on the subjective categorisation of the researcher. However, the lower specificity strengthens the validity. Babbie (1995) suggests that one way of overcoming this dilemma is to use both methods where possible.

Since the purpose of this study was to explore and describe concepts, both the manifest and latent levels of the data were important sources of information. For this reason both levels of coding were used. In terms of this, it was important to assess the reliability and validity of the data.

#### **3.13.1 Assessing reliability**

For research results to be considered valid the results must be reliable. In order to test reliability, some form of duplication is necessary. In other words, the process or method of data analysis should yield the same results of the same phenomenon regardless of when the procedures are applied (Krippendorff, 1980).

Three types of reliability are important in content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985). These are: stability, reproducibility and accuracy.

Stability refers the degree to which the process of coding the content of the data remains stable and unchanging over time. This type of reliability becomes evident during test-retest conditions, such as when a coder recodes the data after an interval. Emerging inconsistencies and discrepancies constitute unreliability. Stability however is the weakest form of reliability since only one person is involved in coding the data. In order to obtain high levels of stability in this study, I coded and recoded the text three times over a period of three weeks.

Reproducibility refers to the extent to which the process of coding produces the same results when more than one person codes the text at different times. This type of reliability is known as intercoder reliability or external reliability, and is central to content analysis. Disagreements between the coding of different individuals reflects ambiguous coding instructions, random coding errors or intercoder differences in terms of the way in which they perceive the contents of the data.

Once I had completed the process of coding the data for this study, the texts were given to an independent researcher to code. During this process, ambiguities in the instructions as well as random coding errors were eliminated. The level of reliability was established for each focus group using the following equation (Boyatzis, 1998):

$$\text{Percentage agreement} = \frac{\text{number of times both coders agree}}{\text{number of times coding was possible}}$$

Focus group 1:                      96% =  $\frac{48}{50}$

Focus group 2:                      90% =  $\frac{44}{49}$

Focus group 3:                      95% =  $\frac{41}{43}$

Reproducibility also considers the way in which the data was collected. In the case of this study, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire was used to guide the focus group. This semi-structured questionnaire has an important role to play in terms of ensuring the approximate replication of this study by other researchers.

Accuracy is the strongest form of reliability and refers to the extent to which the results of the content of the classification conform to a standard or norm (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985). This type of reliability is rarely available for texts, and thus seldom used for this form of data. Accuracy was not established since this study was largely explorative in nature.

### **3.13.2 Assessing validity**

Validity refers to the quality of research results that leads them to being accepted as truth or empirical fact. Content analysis is considered valid if inferences are maintained in the face of independently obtained evidence (Krippendorff, 1980). In content analysis, there are two distinctions regarding validation. The first refers to the degree of correspondence between two sets of concepts and variables, and the second involves the issue of generalisability of the results (Weber, 1985). Ensuring the validity of a study requires that one validate research evidence in terms of the nature of the data, results obtained or the process connecting the data and the results (Krippendorff, 1980).

Two types of validity relating to the nature of the data are: sampling validity and face validity. Sampling validity refers to the extent to which the sample from which the data obtained is statistically representative of the population. In content analysis, the data obtained is generally from a sample selected in terms of particular criteria and is therefore not representative, as was the case in this particular study.

The small, non-random sample of this study thus limits generalisability of the results onto a greater population. However, the results of this study are useful in terms of enabling the identification of basic features of concepts unique to this group of participants, which may

then be a stimulus for further research in this area of study. Since the aim of this study was exploratory the generalisability of the findings was not an issue and sampling validity was not achieved.

Face validity refers to the degree to which a category appears to measure the construct it intends to measure, and is based on the coder's definition of a concept or category (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985). This type of validity is the weakest form of validity, but content analysis relies heavily on face validity. Generally face validity is achieved when more than one coder agree about the definitions of the concepts. In this study, two independent coders coded the data and verified the definitions in an effort to achieve face validity.

The units of analysis selected for the data analysis also have an impact on the validity of the coding. In the case of this study, the thematic units of analysis required a deep level of investigation resulting in high levels of validity. This analysis involved analysing explicit as well as implicit meanings found in the content of the text. Reliability however, may have been compromised because although general concepts are usually easy to recognise, it is often more difficult for multiple coders to reliably identify them. Furthermore, it is important to be aware of potential researcher bias during the concept formation stage of data creation. This potential bias may have negative implications on the validity of the data. In terms of this, my goal was to remain reflexive throughout the process.

Semantic validity is achieved when two or more coders classify coding units in the same categories, and both agree that these units have similar meanings or connotations (Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1985). Semantic validity was achieved in this study and confirmed by both coders.

According to Stewart & Shamdasani (1998), focus groups result in data that has ecological validity. In terms of this, rich data is obtained that is expressed in the participants' own words. During the course of the focus group, they are able to qualify and their responses, and in this way clarify any misunderstandings or ambiguities.



Taking the above discussion into consideration it becomes obvious that the issues of reliability and validity should remain in the forefront of the researchers mind during the entire research process.

### **3.14 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in this study. Throughout the process it was necessary for me to be constantly aware of issues such as reliability and validity. Furthermore, it was important to reflect on the way these issues related to the participants, the research design as well as my own subjectivities involved in categorising the concepts.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This study explored the conceptualisation of child-on-child sexual offenders from the perspective of a group of educators. The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the three focus groups and to discuss these findings in relation to the concepts identified in the literature. This discussion will take a social constructionist perspective. outline

It was decided to include a qualitative approach to the data analysis. Although a form of content analysis was utilised, the context in which these categories emerged was included in the analysis. Thus, the data was also analysed on a deeper level with the aim of identifying the various strategies used by the educators in conceptualising the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. In order to facilitate a dialogue of the concepts, the results and discussion are integrated in the form of an analytic story as outlined by Silverman (2000). process

In relation to this, four major conceptualisations emerged, each of which were further subdivided (Appendix D). These four major concepts included: 1) child-on-child sexual offending as “abnormal”; 2) child-on-child sexual offending as “normal”; 3) the role of acculturation in child-on-child sexual offending; and, 4) the role of educators and the educational system in relation to child-on-child sexual offending. Although these four broad categories have been identified and discussed as separate issues, often the boundaries between them were blurred. This was particularly the case between the categories of “abnormal”, “normal” and gender issues. A further difficulty was the fact that some of the views held by the educators were dilemmatic in nature and contained considerable variability (Billig, 1989; Wetherell, 1998). These issues will be discussed in more detail in the relevant sections. Therefore, although separating the concepts was a difficult task, it was necessary in order to facilitate discussion. result

Furthermore, in analysing the above explicit categories, a number of implicit themes seemed to emerge that warranted further investigation. These included strategies that the educators used to normalise, relativise, rationalise and justify the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. These strategies were operationally defined as follows: normalising was used to transform an abusive act into one that is “acceptable” and normative.

Relativisation is a comparative technique that was used to minimize the issue of child-on-child sexual offending by comparing it to other societal difficulties. Rationalisation and justification are strategies that were used to explain unacceptable behaviour, and to find reasons for this behaviour occurring. The educators also used an additional strategy where they shifted the focus from the issue of children sexually abusing other children, onto issues such as sexual abuse perpetrated by girls or more “tolerable” forms of sexual abuse. These strategies were often interlinked, functioning to help the educators make sense of this issue.

Gergen (1985) argues that social constructionism invites one to consider alternatives other than those with which we are familiar in terms of defining and analysing concepts.

Objective criteria for identifying concepts are “highly circumscribed by culture, history or social context” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Individuals understand the world in terms of social artifacts, which are produced in an historical context consisting of interactions between and among people. Most actions and interactions are in line with a social moral order, as defined by that particular context/society, and standards are set that determine what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour (Gergen, 1985).

Extracts from the focus groups will be used to illustrate the concepts discussed. The following notation will be used in order to give an indication of the place of the quote in relation to the interviews:

- FG 1/2/3 will be used to denote which focus group (whether 1, 2 or 3) the individual quoted was in;
- ( ) a number in brackets will denote which individual in that group made the statement, and;
- (p. ) will denote the page of the transcription in which the extract was found;

- A: refers to comments made by myself
- ... the use of dots in the middle of an extract indicates that part of the extract has been omitted in order to shorten it and to highlight only the relevant parts of the extract
- [ ] words in square brackets refer to words that I have added in order to help the reader understand the extract

## **4.2 Child-on-child sexual behaviour conceptualised as “abnormal”**

The broad category of child-on-child sexual offending being conceptualised as “abnormal” was further sub-divided into three sub-categories. These included: 1) child-on-child sexual offending conceptualised as criminal behaviour; 2) child-on-child sexual offending being conceptualised as unacceptable; and, 3) victimisation resulting from child-on-child sexual offending. Viewed in this way, child-on-child sexual behaviour that was conceptualised as “abnormal” seemed to fall along a continuum, with criminal behaviour polarised on one side, and sexual offending resulting from victimization on the other side of the continuum.

### **4.2.1 Child-on-child sexual offending conceptualised as criminal behaviour**

The category of child-on-child sexual offending as a crime included statements made by the educators in which they explicitly expressed that this type of behaviour was criminal. Furthermore, the rights of perpetrators were discussed, and punishment for this type of behaviour suggested.

Educators from all three focus groups agreed that this type of behaviour was a crime. Focus group one discussed the issue once, focus group two, four times and focus group three, three times (N=8).

*A: ... do you think they are experimenting or do you think it is a crime?*

*FG1(5)(p.5) No, it's criminal*

*FG2(1)(p. 3) A crime ... because they are taking something away from that girl.*

*It's a crime.*

*FG3(3)(p.2) I feel it is a crime if one is forced to do something. There must be an agreement and besides a girl of eleven years old is statutory rape.*

Focus group three was the only group that raised the fact that sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16 was defined as statutory rape, without me asking them explicitly (N=2). I raised this issue in the other two focus groups and focus group two indicated that they understood the concept of statutory rape. Focus group one seemed particularly confused about the issue of age and consent, and none of them indicated that they knew that sexual intercourse under the age of 16 was viewed as statutory rape. These educators were under the impression that an age difference between the boy and girl determined whether or not the incident was abusive. Although they were not explicit in exactly how big the age difference should be for it to be abusive, it seemed that it was approximately four or five years. According to Davis & Leitenberg (1987) an age difference of between two and five years is considered a significant enough age gap between children in considering whether sexual behaviour between them is abusive or experimental.

In addition to this, one of the educators seemed to think that if a girl is older than a boy is then it is always abusive:

*FG1(1)(p.6) If the girl is older than the boy then the girl is abusing the boy*

Focus groups two and three have received additional training from organisations such as Life Line and a teacher training group associated with the Child and Family Centre at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg). This may account for the fact that they understood the concept of statutory rape. On the other hand, focus group one had not received any additional training. The fact that one group did not understand this concept is rather concerning and indicates a dire need for additional training to be given to educators, especially those from traditionally disadvantaged schools. This group in particular expressed a need for additional training. On a number of occasions during the focus

group, these educators asked me for my advice and help regarding issues such as this (N=6).

Another way in which child-on-child sexual offending was viewed as being criminal was by some of the educators briefly discussing what types of punishment a child sexual offender should receive for the crime of sexually abusing another child.

Focus group one in particular spent very little time discussing punishment. One possible reason for this is the fact that these educators teach at a school for mentally retarded children where this type of behaviour is common among these children. An explanation offered by the educators was that these children do not understand the difference between right and wrong (N=2). For this reason the educators may find the behaviour more “excusable” and thus less of a crime. Focus group three also offered the explanation that children often do not understand this difference and that this may be a reason for their sexual behaviour (N=3). It is possible that the educators in focus group three were normalising the behaviour by viewing it as a consequence of a lack of understanding rather than as criminal. In this way, the behaviour is seen as more acceptable and it becomes possible to explain the behaviour.

The types of consequences for this behaviour offered by the educators included: counselling for the perpetrator (group 1, N=1; group 2, N=3), being expelled from school (group 1, N=1), sent to jail (group 1, N=1) or reformatories (group 1, N=1; group 3 N=1) and taught right from wrong (group 3, N=1).

Focus groups two and three expressed the opinion that the punishment should be severe, and this issue was discussed twice in group two and once in group three. Focus group two had particularly strong views on punishment. Castration as a form of punishment was discussed three times by the group with great intensity.

*FG2(1) (p.12) I only want one thing to happen, it doesn't matter how old – castration ... because his penis is a problem so they just have to cut it off, because it's the problem.*

*FG2(3) (p.12) But their right, everyone is talking about their rights because everyone has their rights. Even a perpetrator is having his own rights.*

*A: Do you think too much right?*

*FG2(1)(p.12) Yes!*

*FG2(3)(p.12) Too much rights!*

The issue of perpetrator rights was also discussed with intensity (N=6). Two of the educators in particular in group two seemed to think that perpetrators of sexual abuse had too many rights, and that these rights were inappropriate in terms of the crime they had committed.

The issue of punishment was generally agreed upon within the groups, however the severity of the punishment differed between the members of the groups. For example, in group two, two of the educators were emphatic regarding a severe punishment, with a preference for castration as appropriate for perpetrators. In other words, the opinions of these two educators polarised on the severe end of the continuum. However, the third member of the group disagreed and tended to polarise on the opposite end of the continuum by suggesting that perpetrators should be allowed to explain their behaviour and receive counselling.

There was also a shift in focus to the vulnerability of the perpetrator when an educator from focus group one suggested that removing a perpetrator from his/her home has a negative effect on the child, and that instead they should receive treatment in an environment that is close to the home:

*FG1(3)(p12) I've been attending psychological workshops where it was said if a child is taken away from home the child feels separated from the family and siblings and the problem might get worse ... although the child is receiving treatment they must be kept close to the environment he/she is used to. Because if they are taken away it is a problem.*

It is interesting to note that the well being of the perpetrator was emphasised, with no attention given to the vulnerability of the victim. In groups two and three the fact that the perpetrator and victim are generally known to each other, was raised eight times. In view of this it is surprising that in group one, greater concern was offered to the perpetrator.

#### **4.2.2 Child-on-child sexual offending conceptualised as a unacceptable**

The issue of child-on-child sexual offending was further normalised by the educators' viewing the behaviour as unacceptable rather than as criminal. The educators achieved this by shifting focus from the accountability of the child to finding ways in which to view it as unacceptable but at the same time to explain the child's behaviour.

One of the first ways in which the educators' normalised and rationalised this behaviour was by referring to it as attention seeking behaviour. According to them, parents do not have time for their children and as a result the children resort to behaviours such as sexual offending in order to get their parents attention (N=14). Focus group one raised this issue six times, focus group two, six times and focus group three, twice. From the number of times this issue was raised in the groups, it appears that this is central to their conceptualisation of child-on-child sexual offending.

The following quote sums up the issue of the lack of parental involvement echoed in all three focus groups:

*FG1(4)(p.13) ... some of the children just want attention so they do these things. Like if you are working and you come home very late and you don't have time to check homework and check this and check that. You come home and you cook supper and you don't even talk to them. And then your boys maybe they want attention and they actually abuse their sisters just because they want attention.*

The focus was shifted away from the child's accountability onto the parents, however the parents behaviour was justified in terms of work pressures and a "genuine" lack of time for



their children. Furthermore, by discussing the issue in this way, once again the educators were not talking about the issue of child-on-child sexual offending in a direct way.

Another issue that received a great deal of attention was the role of peer pressure in a child's life. Generally it was agreed that a child's peers had a stronger influence in their lives than parents did:

*FG2(2)(p.7) ... when parents start to intervene the children will say "wrong" because your friends have told you everything.*

*A: So children believe their peers more than their parents?*

*FG2(2)(p.7) Ja, but I don't blame our parents because it's the way they have been brought up.*

The study by the HRW (2001) found that gang rape, also known as "Jack Rolling" was widespread in South African society, and I asked the educators about this. Two of the focus groups, group one and three, discussed the issue in depth:

*A: We have spoken a lot about one child sexually abusing another, but how often do you think it happens that a couple of boys rape a girl together, like gang rape*

*FG3(3)(p.14) Jack Rolling*

*A: yes I have heard that is what it is called ... tell me about it*

*FG3(1)(p.14) It is a game of course ...*

*FG3(2)(p.14) It is popular in Johannesburg and Gauteng but not here*

The following extract is from focus group one and is particularly interesting in the way that sexual abuse is discussed in a matter of fact way. Furthermore they normalised it by referring to it as "naughty". In terms of this, the victim was dehumanised whilst the perpetrator "excused" for his behaviour:

*A: How often do you think it happens where more than one boy sexually abuses a girl at the same time? So it's kind of like gang rape.*

*FG1(3)(p.15) Sometimes if you are friends, you must do the same things, so let us take a piece of that girl.*

*A: ok*

*FG1(2)(p15) ... I'm saying it's being naughty*

The educators once again made the issue more tolerable for themselves through the strategy of shifting focus from criminal behaviour to unacceptable behaviour.

However, one educator in focus group one disagreed and did not believe that “sober boys” were capable of such behaviour unless under the influence of alcohol or drugs:

*FG1(1)(p.15) I think the gang rape should be under a certain influence like drugs, alcohol. I don't think sober boys can do that.*

*A: What does everyone else think?*

*FG1(4)(p.15) They can!*

*FG1(1)(p.15) They can? Under no influence?*

*FG1(4)(p.15) Under the influence of other peers*

*FG1(1)(p.15) Oh, under the influence of their peer?*

*FG1(4)(p.15) Yes, then it means they are sober. The peer can influence each other to do something. Take for instance ... if you used to be my girlfriend and now we've separated ... and then there's my peer and ... then she's passing by and then they'll say “she used to be your girlfriend, why did she drop you?” and then I'll say “no I don't know”, because I'm afraid of my peer, I can't tell them maybe I did something wrong. And then my peer will say, “what if we rape her?” and then, I don't know, maybe to gain friendship or to please them I'll say “ok let's rape her”. There's no alcoholic influence, only peer pressure...*

*...let's teach her a lesson so she will never do it again to others. Show her that we are boys. I don't know what it is, maybe it's pride.*

In the above extract the girl was portrayed as playing a role in the sexual abuse by possibly having done something wrong. As a result, she is perceived to bear some of the responsibility for having been raped. The boy on the other hand, is portrayed as having

very little choice in the rape but is driven by the perceived power of the peers. This is another example of the perpetrator being represented as vulnerable, with the victim receiving little attention. According to Conco (1996, cited in Shefer et. al, 2000) gang rape as punishment for girls who embarrass boys is a common phenomenon in the province of Mpumalanga in South Africa.

The issue of shifting responsibility off the perpetrator was taken a step further by focus group two (N=4), when the educators blamed the behaviour on jealousy by other girls:

*FG2(1)(p.13) ... sometimes it happens that maybe there is a pretty girl at school and she doesn't want to talk to them and she is high and mighty, that's how they see her – high and mighty. Maybe she doesn't want to have a boyfriend. Maybe she is saving herself for her husband. They say "she thinks she is clever, she is too pretty, we'll show her"*

*FG2(2)(p.13) Sometimes the other girls will make a set-up for this one. They will arrange the boys ... maybe she is beautiful and clean and the other girls will be jealous so they organise something. Hey the boys will do the job.*

In the above extract, the behaviour of sexually abusive boys was rationalised by the educators. The blame was again shifted to external causes – other girls who influence the boys to rape a girl. And, once again, the perpetrator is not held responsible for his behaviour.

In line with the educators' general strategy of shifting the blame onto negative external influences, the role of the media received a significant amount of attention from them (N=7; focus group one – N=5; focus group two – N=1; focus group three – N=1).

*FG1(5)(p.3) It's through the media, they look at TV's they see ... these things happening and they want to practice it ... they [media] encourage it.*

All three focus groups agreed that the media portrays very explicit sex (N=9; focus group one – N=3; focus group two – N=7; focus group three – N=1).

*FG3(2)(p.4) And some of the movies that shows the sexual intercourse ... at a very early hour like 9:00 [pm] so some of them they don't sleep early*

According to the educators, exposure to explicit sex on TV results in children imitating this behaviour.

In addition, the educators mentioned a number of television “soapies” broadcast during prime time that played a negative role in child-on-child sexual behaviour. The educators identified two popular American “soapies” as unsuitable viewing for children. All three groups mentioned “The Bold and the Beautiful”, as having a particularly negative influence on children (N=4; group one – N=1; group two – N=2; group three – N=1) and “Days of our Lives” were identified by two of the groups (N=2; group one – N=1; group two – N=1). Two South African television productions, “Isidingo” “Yizo Yizo” were also identified by focus group two as inappropriate for viewing by children.

*FG3(1)(p.11) He asks the teachers am I wrong in doing this? What is wrong with this? ... tell me what is wrong? I used to see this on TV and I am in love with this girl. And then what do you [a teacher] say [to him]?*

In addition to television, focus group one (N=1) and focus group two (N=1) suggested that children have access to pornographic literature such as magazines, and these too play a role in children acting out inappropriate sexual behaviour.

*FG1(5)(p.3) So they watch the media, they buy the newspapers, those magazines, they look at and they feel they can do these things. It's the way this is exposed to the whole world, it's the way sexuality is exposed now so that's why the children they abuse other children because they are practicing what they see and what they hear.*

Once again the educators used the strategy of shifting the responsibility for this behaviour onto an external force – the media. The result of this is that children imitate the behaviour they see and hear.

From the above discussion it is clear that on the whole, the educators found external factors to be responsible for child-on-child sexual behaviour. However, there was one partially internal factor that the educators did focus on that may contribute to a child acting out sexually, and that was the child's lack of understanding between right and wrong. This issue was raised by focus group one (N=2) and focus group three (N=3).

Focus group three discussed the issue of a child not understanding the difference between right and wrong, as well as a lack of understanding of the consequences of his behaviour:

*FG3(1)(p.11) ... this boy is doing the grade 11 and he is too full of himself. He asks the teacher "Am I wrong in doing this? What is wrong with this?"*

*A: So he does not see anything wrong in his [sexual] behaviour?*

*FG3(1)(p.11) No ... he says "I used to see this on TV and I am in love with this girl". And then what do you say?*

Although in this extract the boy is viewed as having been sexually inappropriate (wrong), the responsibility is still shifted to an external explanation – television.

In discussing child-on-child sexual offending as abnormal, the educators moved along an invisible continuum from discussing it as criminal, then as unacceptable, and finally as a consequence of victimisation.

### 4.2.3 Victimization

The role of victimisation as a driving force in explaining child-on-child sexual offending was interesting on a number of levels. It appeared that the educators polarised victimisation. On the one side they talked about the negative impact sexual abuse has on a victim. These included behaviours such as becoming fearful (N=2; focus group two - N=1; focus group three - N=1), and the fact that often the victim did not want to return to school after the abuse (N=3; focus group two - N=2; focus group three - N=1). On the other side, which received the greatest amount of attention from the educators, female child victims were seen to play a significant role in child-on-child sexual behaviour. In terms of this, it was suggested that once a girl has been sexually abused she becomes promiscuous because she enjoys sex (N=8; focus group two - N=6; focus group three - N=2).

*FG3(2)(p.9) ... if a girl has been sexually abused you will go for either two options, whether to hate men or to want more*

In the above extract, the educator in focus group three suggested that there are two potential outcomes resulting from a child being sexually abused. The sexually abused child will either hate men (N=1), or want more sex after the abuse (N=2).

*FG2(1)(p.1) ... the two children that were raped became a problem because they didn't want to come to school.*

*A: So they were afraid?*

*FG2(1)(p.1) No, it's not as if they were afraid. It's as if they wanted more of it.*

*A: What were they doing when they weren't going to school?*

*FG2(1)(p.2) I don't know but it seems as if they just went forever. They went [with] whoever called them.*

*A: And they had sex with other people, other boys?*

*FG2(1)(p.2) yes ...*

The above discussion revolved around the rape of two girls of approximately 6 years of age by a 14-year old boy. The educator in this focus group (two) was of the opinion that the girls did not come to school because they became promiscuous rather than because they were afraid. The abusive act is normalised by shifting the focus onto the girls becoming promiscuous rather than discussing the destructiveness of sexual abuse. Furthermore, the girls were labelled as becoming a 'problem' whereas the boy who had perpetrated the abuse was not discussed further. By normalising the behaviour in this way, the issue becomes more tolerable to talk about since the girls (victims) are portrayed in a negative light. By doing this, the educator avoids talking about the realities of sexual abuse.

*FG2(2)(p.2) You see the parents, they never take care of the child, so we started to notice now that she is staying inside the class during the break. So we started to ask. So the parent was told by us that the child has got a problem that she was raped several times by the same boy. I think the boy won the case?*

*A: oh really, did the case go to court?*

*FG2(2)(p.2) Yes, because he came back to school but the child is no longer there now.*

*A: Did she leave?*

*FG2(2)(p.2) Yes, I think she went to another school. Yes, because the parent was very embarrassed that the child has been raped several times but she hadn't noticed... but what I really noticed with the learner is that they just enjoy it.*

*A: Enjoy? The boys?*

*FG2(2)(p.2) Ja, with the boys and the girls*

*FG2(1)(p.2) After they have tasted it*

*A: So do you think it's not always abusive? Do you think sometimes they are having sexual intercourse because they enjoy it?*

*FG2(1)(p.3) No, it's rape but once they've had it they want more. They have feelings that are aroused.*

In this extract, the victim was again the focus of attention, whilst the educators only briefly discussed the perpetrator, in an almost "casual" kind of way. This extract is particularly

interesting because it seemed to contain some contradictions, and illustrates the issue of variability in discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In the first instance, the educator said that after the abuse, the girl left the school and attended another one whilst the boy came back to the school. Although this seems to imply that the girl was afraid to attend the same school as the person who had abused her, the reasons given for her leaving were her parent's embarrassment. However, the educator then goes on to say that she noticed that the girl began to enjoy sex after the abuse. Another educator in the group supported this statement. But, the educators did not clarify how they came to this conclusion based on the above evidence.

In attempting to understand how they reached this conclusion, it seems that once again the educators were attempting to normalise the issue of abuse in order to make it more tolerable to talk about. Furthermore, the rationalisation of this behaviour meant that the educators could discuss the victims of sexual abuse in a matter of fact way rather than engaging in discussing the trauma of the rape and the court case.

In a study focusing on female sexual perpetrators, Johnson (1989) found that all of the girls in her study had been sexually abused, and approximately 30% had also been physically abused. With the exception of one girl, all of them had been abused before the age of 5. This information is important in understanding the stance taken by the educators, and may be an indication of the extent of sexual abuse among young girls in South Africa.

It also seems that by shifting responsibility onto the girl, boys are in effect viewed as being "victims". Although this generally occurred in a more indirect way as seen in the above extracts, the educators also focused on girls abusing boys in a more direct way (N=7; focus group one – N=4; focus group two – N=3).

*FG2(1)(p.13) ... there was a crazy man. So these girls, I don't know how they got him but they took him somewhere and they raped him because he was crazy. I don't know what they want from him but they did rape him.*

*A: The girls raped him?*

*FG2(1)(p.13) I don't know if it's rape if it's girls*



### *Laughter*

*FG2(1)(p.13) .. but it does happen*

Although the behaviour was referred to as rape, the laughter from the group seemed to relieve the discussion from focusing on the seriousness of the abuse, and minimized the behaviour from being criminal to a misdemeanour. This may also suggest that there is a myth that crazy people (men) need to have their sexual urges met, and then they will be fine.

The fact that these educators referred to girls abusing boys is particularly interesting since the idea that girls engage in sexual abuse is not a common one (Johnson, 1989). There is very little literature addressing the issue of female child perpetrators, especially those in the age group 13 years and younger (Johnson, 1989). In the landmark study by Johnson (1989), 13 female child perpetrators were studied. The types of inappropriate sexual behaviour perpetrated by these girls differed from those suggested by the educators in this study. Johnson's (1989) findings suggested that verbal coercion (54%), excessive physical coercion (23%) and physical coercion (15%) were central to the abusive behaviour. The educators however, in this study conceptualised female child sexual offending in terms of female child promiscuity rather than physical coercion.

Another way in which girls were viewed as abusing boys was by prostituting themselves (N=2):

*FG1(3)(p.14) And if at home there is no-one working then the girls will go out abusing the boys. "You give me money and I'll have sexual intercourse with you". It's not only the boys who are abusing the girls. Also the girls are. The girls need money.*

*A: In other words they are prostituting themselves?*

*FG1(3)(p.14) Yes*

In addition to girls prostituting themselves, the educators suggested that girls may falsely accuse boys of rape if they are no longer a virgin and are afraid that their parents may find out as a result of virginity testing (N=1).

Furthermore, it was suggested that girls might in fact provoke the boys (N=1). This provocation leads boys to force themselves sexually onto the girl. This implies that boys can't help their behaviour and the responsibility is shifted away from them onto the victim (girl). This justification of sexual coercion and force results in victim blame based on rape myths (Moore & Rosenthal, 1993).

It seemed easier for the educators to speak more openly and directly about girls sexually abusing boys than the other way around. One possible explanation for this is that they may perceive this abuse as more tolerable since boys are generally viewed as being more able to protect themselves than girls. Thus, it may imply that the boys indirectly agreed to it.

The issue of financial difficulties and the link with sexual abuse was discussed by focus group three. In terms of this the educators suggested that a mother might allow her daughter to be abused in return for remuneration/financial support from the abuser who may be a stepparent or a youth:

*FG3(2)(p.13) ... in that community, they used to build outside rooms, outside bedrooms for young girls and boys at the age of 14 ...*

*FG3(3)(p.13) Some parents seem to enjoy this ... because there is money involved ... the guy paid ...*

*A: paid the parents?*

*FG3(3)(p.13) yes*

*A: so does that give him the right then ...*

*FG3(3)(p.14) yes, yes*

*A: and from what age are they allowed to do that?*

*FG3(2)(p.14) 14*

*A: So are you saying that sometimes parents contribute to girls being abused?*

*FG3(3)(p.14) yes*

The issue of parents' contributing to the abuse of their children was rationalised by the educators commenting that in a particular community it was acceptable practice for their children to have "outside bedrooms". In addition to parents facing the financial burden of having to provide for a family, and the fact that they often work long hours also seems to indicate a general lack of parental attention.

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

The educators in this study normalised and rationalised sexually abusive behaviour. This is counter to much of the research cited in the literature review chapter of this study, which pathologised the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. In order for the educators to do this, a great deal of the focus of the discussion was shifted away from the perpetrator onto the victim. In terms of this, the victim was made to shoulder a lot of the responsibility and blame whilst perpetrator responsibility was largely ignored. In this way, the educators conceptualised some child-on-child sexual behaviour in terms of criminal or unacceptable behaviour without actually engaging in the issue of sexual abuse. According to Moore and Rosenthal (1993), this view of reduced perpetrator responsibility is found across social and cultural levels.

Gergen (1985, p. 268) argues that people deal with their definitions of morality, in other words defining what behaviours are regarded as acceptable or unacceptable, through a "sea of social interchange". Concepts are actively constructed in a social context through the use of strategies such as normalising and rationalising the behaviour in addition to shifting the focus. For this reason it is vital that the moral understanding of a concept such as child-on-child sexual offending be carefully contextualised. Acknowledging the existence of alternative ways of viewing concepts opens up the possibility of increasing an understanding of complex issues such as child-on-child sexual offending. In addition to considering the socially constructed nature of concepts, it is also important to recognise that even within a socially accepted construction there exists some degree of variability

(Billig, 1989). In the case of child sexual offending being constructed as “abnormal”, criminal behaviour is polarised on the one side, with victimisation on the other side.

#### **4.3 Child-on-child sexual behaviour conceptualised as being “normal”**

There were three main elements to the conceptualisation of child-on-child sexual behaviour as “normal”. These included child-on-child sexual behaviour conceptualised as “experimental” and as a part of play; as an element of the developmental process and as being “interactional” or “love”.

##### **4.3.1 Child-on-child sexual behaviour conceptualised as experimental and developmental behaviour**

It has been argued that adolescents engage in experimental sexual activity in order to reach their own understanding of their and others’ sexuality (Barbaree, Marshall & McCormick, 1999; Burton et al., 1997; Harnett & Misch, 1993; Renshaw, 1994; Ryan, 1999). In terms of this, appropriate adolescent sexual behaviour is defined as including things such as “sexual innuendo”, intimate touching of peers, and boasting about real or imagined sexual conquests. Furthermore, that this behaviour is generally directed at similar aged peers.

According to the educators in this study, children imitate the behaviours that they are exposed to in their environments. Imitation of behaviour is viewed by the educators as experimentation, and falls within the “normal” category of child-on-child sexual offending. Imitation was distinguished from “abnormal” criminal behaviour.

Children are exposed to sexualised behaviour in a number of ways. Firstly via the media, and television in particular, secondly by seeing their parents engaging in sexual behaviour and finally from their peers.

The educators discussed the negative impact of television on children, and the fact that children are exposed to explicit sexual behaviour via this medium. However, at times they

attempted to downplay this by saying that sometimes children who have seen explicit sex on television engage in sexual intercourse through curiosity.

*FG1(3)(p.6) He is experimenting because maybe he has seen it on the media. TV movies. It's experimenting. Maybe he has seen adults doing it. Maybe the mother and father.*

*FG1(3)(p.6) The father is an alcoholic, then the child sees the father drinking beer. Maybe they see when the father is drunk and the father forces the mother, and the father does anyhow. Then the child imitates what he sees the father doing.*

In the above extract the educator normalised the issue of child-on-child sexual behaviour by referring to it as imitation of behaviour seen when the (drunk) parents openly engaged in sexual intercourse. This behaviour is relativised by comparing the child's sexual behaviour to that of a drunken parent. In other words, the behaviour of the parents is viewed as being "worse" than the behaviour of child imitating the behaviour. This strategy of relativising child-on-child sexual offending was also used in focus group three:

*FG3(1)(p.3) If the parents are drinking, you know they do it like anyhow and then the kids say, let's try this*

By making the comparison between a child imitating behaviour they have seen and their drunken parents behaviour, the child's behaviour is minimized and viewed as less serious. Thus the child's behaviour is excused and normalised.

Immediately after discussing the issue of children imitating drunken parents, both focus group one (N=4) and focus group three (N=1), linked this behaviour with sexualised games that children play. The games mentioned were "hide and seek" (focus group one – N=2) and playing "mother and father" (focus group one – N=4; focus group two – N=3). Furthermore, both of these groups suggested that these sexualised games included the children engaging in sexual intercourse (focus group one – N=2; focus group two – N=1). Since this occurred in two of the three groups, and was not prompted by me in any way

through any questioning, it is important to explore this link in more detail. This issue, however will first be contextualised by the following extracts:

*FG3(2)(p.3) yes they like to imitate*

*A: and I suppose if they see their parents doing it they do not understand that it is not appropriate*

*FG3(1)(p.3) Sometimes you find them say let us play mother and father ...*

*Laughter*

*FG3(1)(p.3) One time I [heard] some of the girls was saying it is so nice to play up and down, up and down*

A possible explanation for the strategy of shifting the focus from a negative incident, that is drunken parents openly having sexual intercourse, to a more positive image, that of children playing a “game” makes child-on-child sexual behaviour more tolerable to talk about.

*FG1(4)(p.7) There is something else that the black kids usually do. They play hide and seek. So when they are playing hide and seek then maybe if I'm a boy and I'm hiding with a girl ...*

*FG1(3)(p.7) ... the mother ...*

*FG1(4)(p.7) and then I'll be the father and she'll be the mother and then we'll play hide and seek and end up having sexual intercourse. I don't think that's abuse.*

*And [they] say they were playing father and mother ...*

*FG1(5)(p.7) ...with my dolls, my baby. This baby needs a father*

*FG1(4)(p.7) So she's the mother, I'm the father. So we've got to have sexual intercourse*

In the above extract the educators imply that the sexualised games that these children play are specific to the Zulu culture. The issue of sexualised children's games was an interesting concept that arose from this study, however I was unable to find any literature relating to this particular kind of behaviour as being specific among children in the Zulu culture.

The idea that some type of sexualised behaviour during play is a normal part of a child's psychosocial development during which sex-role identity is formed is widely accepted (Louw, 1991; Renshaw, 1994). According to Louw (1991), children begin to take on sex-role identities from approximately two and a half to three and a half years of age. During this developmental stage, interest and curiosity in the differences of the opposite sex may result in a child looking at another child's genitals and may include mutual touching, or playing games such as "doctor" or "kiss-and-touch" games (Barbaree et.al, 1998; Renshaw, 1994). At this age sexual touching with peers may emerge during interactive play or may be the result of vicarious exposure (Ryan, 1998). Vicarious exposure includes seeing other adults, for example parents, engaging in sexual intercourse, as well as the child's own sexual victimisation.

The educators of this study mentioned that children understand the concept of hugging and kissing from the age of three, and this correlates with developmental studies mentioned above. Thus, it is likely that the "hide and seek" and "mother-father" games mentioned by the educators in this study falls within the boundaries of normal developmental behaviour to some extent. What is however concerning is that according to the educators, children as young as three years of age are alleged to be engaging in sexual intercourse during this type of play:

*A: And how old are they when this happens?*

*FG1(4)(p.7) 3, 4, 5, 6*

*FG1(1)(p.7) They start from 3...*

*A: So do they actually have sexual intercourse?*

*FG1(1)(p.7) They do it.*

Thus, it seems that the games discussed by the educators of this study extended beyond the boundaries of curious experimental behaviour. One possible explanation for this may be the fact that many black South African families live in single room homes where children are directly exposed to the sexual behaviour of their parents, whereas this may not be as common in countries such as the US and the UK for example.

Another “game” referred to by the educators of focus group three is that of gang rape. The educators used trivialisation as a particular strategy of normalising the behaviour. They did this by referring to the behaviour as “mischief” and “naughty”. In this way, the seriousness of the behaviour was minimised and the behaviour was made to appear like a misdemeanour, something excusable and understandable from children. By using words such as these to describe sexual abuse between children, the educators avoid looking at the behaviour as being at one end of a continuum as criminal. Instead, they took the safer option by placing it in the middle of the “crime – normal” continuum. In terms of this then, the child’s behaviour was conceptualised as falling within the boundaries of “normal” but “naughty” behaviour as opposed to criminal and pathological behaviour. The function of this may be to avoid any discomfort that acknowledging the extent or existence of sexual abuse among children may bring. This strategy makes sense if one considers that society generally struggles to acknowledge sexual abuse, and even more so when it is perpetrated by children against children (Masson, 1995; Pettigrew, 1998).

#### **4.3.2 Child-on-child sexual behaviour viewed as interactional**

To a large extent, the educators in all three focus groups conceptualised child-on-child sexual behaviour as being interactional, and the outcome of love (N=10; focus group one – N=4; focus group two – N=4; focus group 3 – N=1). Thus it was viewed as being consensual (N=10; focus group one - N=4; focus group two – N=4; focus group three – N=2) and not abusive (N=3; focus group one – N=2; focus group two – N=1).

*FG1(5)(p.3) You can't stop a child or a girl if she is in love and you can't stop a boy to love the girls.*

*FG2(2)(p.3) But you see I don't agree with you, it's a crime. The thing is our children fall in love with the boys.*

*A: Even the little ones?*



*FG2(2)(p.4) Yes, in the junior-primary... You see they talk about this love thing and you see the girl say I love you. Then the boy will say if you love me then we need to go to bed. Sometimes they do these things ...*

In both of the above extracts, the educators view child-on-child sexual behaviour as being “love”. In addition, there was the implication that a natural part of children being in love is the fact that they engage in sexual intercourse. An interesting feature of the above extracts is the gender aspect, and the direction of the statement. The educators shift the responsibility and the focus onto the girls by suggesting that it is the girls who “make the first move”, and tell the boys that they love them. Girls were thus assumed to take an active role in the relationship, with boys being in a passive role. In this way, girls are left to shoulder the responsibility of the outcome of the sexual behaviour, whether it is consensual or not since they were the ones who had initiated the relationship.

The educators in focus group one also discussed the fact that many children are sexually mature and have a high “sex drive” which leads them to being sexually active. In addition to this, that this kind of behaviour is normal amongst mentally retarded children:

*FG1(3)(p.1) Although they've been told that sexual intercourse is not allowed at school but in their mind they don't want to take it as a wrong thing*

*FG1(3)(p.2) Because some of them are too old, some of them are 20 years old and they are at the maturity stage for sexual intercourse ... they are used to this actual sexual intercourse*

*FG1(5)(p.18) There are children who are matured, they need to do sex ... special children, they've got a very high feeling*

The shift of the focus from sexual behaviour between children to it occurring between mature “children” with a high sex drive normalised the issue for these educators. In this way, the educators could maintain a more neutral position. In addition to this, the educators in the above extract emphasise the fact that the “children” they teach are often older and sexually mature.

During this dialogue, I realised that my construction of a child was different to that of the educators, and I needed to clarify who a child was in terms of their definition. Gergen (1985) argues that a concept such as a “child” is a social artifact that results from interactions between people and is historically situated. This implies that definitions and socially shared understandings of such concepts may vary over time, between people and from context to context. Therefore, from a social constructionist perspective, conceptualisations are driven by active, cooperative interactions between people rather than by forces such as nature (Gergen, 1985). Thus, objective criteria for identifying concepts are highly constrained by the culture, history or social context in which the conceptualisation is occurring.

In applying this orientation to these educators, it was clear that our conceptualisation of what constitutes a child differed. Whereas my conceptualisation of a child was of an individual under the age of 21 this was not the case with these educators. According to them, a person is not defined as an adult unless they are married. Thus, marriage is the yardstick for determining the shift in status between being defined a child and an adult. This concept was further backed up in the literature by Bekker (1997) and Letuka (1998) as a cultural definition. There is thus a danger in assuming that concepts, in this case, a “child”, are universal. The issue of culturally defined concepts is an important one particularly in the South African context where a number of different cultures co-exist, each with their own social constructions. This implies variability in the definition of concepts within the historical and cultural context of contemporary South Africa.

Furthermore, it was apparent that the educators in particular in focus group one who teach at a school for mentally retarded children, based their definitions of a child on criteria that differed from the legal one. From their perspective, the fact that these individuals were mentally retarded meant that they were defined as children irrespective of their age.

In conceptualising a child’s behaviour as acceptable (normal) there were other reasons given by another educator in a different focus group for disagreeing that sexual behaviour between children was criminal. In focus group two, one of the three educators disagreed that behaviour was criminal:

*FG2(2)(p.3) ... but you see I don't agree with you, it's [not] a crime. The thing is our children fall in love with the boys.*

In terms of this, these educator normalised the abusive behaviour by redefining it as normal behaviour between children who are in love. The strategy used was a shift in focus from abuse to love, with love being an acceptable norm. Furthermore, they used a strategy of deflecting the “accusations” that it is criminal by disagreeing that the behaviour is a crime, and offering a solution – that being of love.

This led me to examine the term “crime”, and what I understood by it as opposed to how the educators conceptualised it. My conceptualisation of “crime” was based on a legal normative value system. This definition implies that an individual has the capacity to understand right from wrong based on society’s legal normative system. However, it seemed that this type of definition was in some ways problematic for some of the educators. On the one hand they were aware to some extent of the legal definition of issues such as statutory rape, and thus were able to discuss child-on-child sexual offending in terms of criminal behaviour. On the other hand, this conceptualisation was not as easily constructed for some of the educators, for example those from group one. These educators work with mentally retarded children, who cannot be held accountable or responsible for the wrongfulness of their actions because of their limited intellect. In this way, some forms of behaviour defined as criminal in the “normal” population, would not be defined as criminal when perpetrated by a mentally retarded individual. As a result, the educators offered seemingly contradictory conceptualisations of child-on-child sexual offending.

In terms of a mentally retarded child’s inability to distinguish between right and wrong the educators in focus group one said the following:

*FG1(5)(p.1) ...so the mentally retarded children, they don't know the difference of wrong and right. They always think that everything they are doing is right so they talk about loving each other, they don't take it as wrong ... it seems as if they don't understand what's going to happen afterwards so they do [it].*

This explanation from the educators seemed reasonable from the point of view that these children may not understand the consequences of their behaviour due to their mental retardation. Furthermore, since this group of educators (focus group one) teach at a school for mentally retarded children, the difficulties facing them and mentally retarded children is central to them.

Emerging from the discussions of child-on-child sexual behaviour as being interactional, the educators went on to talk about the issue of acculturation and the role it has to play in child-on-child sexual offending.

#### **4.4 The role of acculturation in child-on-child sexual offending**

According to the educators in this study, there has been a collapse in many of the traditions in the Zulu culture. Westernisation was viewed as having played a central role in this breakdown (N=4; focus group one – N=1; focus group two – N=2; focus group three – N=1). One of the issues that they felt had been most negatively affected and was a contributing factor in child-on-child sexual offending was that of traditional sex education. In traditional Zulu culture, an older girl, other older women and grandmothers were responsible for teaching girls about relationships and sex education (Binns, 1974).

*FG2(1)(p.6) There used to be ... a big girl ... she looks over all the girls growing. Then she tells them what to do, learn how to behave ...*

*FG2(2)(p.6) Ja, she would tell you exactly when was the time to have a boyfriend ... then when you get married ... so those things are no longer here, so the children want to experiment.*

In traditional African culture it was not the responsibility of parents to teach their children about sex education (S. Ntshangase, personal communication, October 17, 2001). Instead there were other social structures in place, such as the senior girls whose responsibility it was to teach younger people about issues such as sexuality (Binns, 1974). In terms of this

it may be argued that the social, political and cultural changes in South Africa have had a significant impact on traditional black culture. Traditional teachings and ways of life are no longer possible and thus it may be argued that as a result, black South African families are living between cultures. That is, the traditional black South African family is currently in a transitional phase – moving towards a more Western culture. In terms of the education of children around the issue of sex education it seems that black families still refer to traditional procedures that are no longer in place. However, there is as yet no replacement. It seems that the educators view this transition as culpable for the rise in child-on-child sexual offending (N=12; focus group one – N=5; focus group two – N=5; focus group three – N=2). In this way, the educators used the changes and transition in traditional black culture as a rationalisation for why parents do not educate their children about sex.

*FG1(5)(p.5) Another point, it's different culture. In our culture children think that they can't talk about sex with adults. Yes, this is our culture*

*FG1(1)(p.5) It's not acceptable*

*FG2(1)(p.6) No, it is a taboo thing, we don't talk about it*

*FG3(3)(p.5) Especially in our culture. And we are also afraid to talk about sex*

In the light of this, the educators seemed to be arguing that due to the influence of Westernisation, the traditional form of the extended family has disintegrated. Together with this, traditional ways of teaching sex education have collapsed.

Following on from this, the educators further shifted the responsibility for black children sexually abusing other children onto the fact that children from other cultures, through attending multi-racial schools, negatively influence black children:

*FG1(4)(p.5) And another thing is that with our culture, now we are mixed with all these different cultures. I think in your culture you are open to talk to your children about sex and everything... So in those schools where they are mixed,*

*when those white children and these other cultures talk about sex and everything, and these black children don't feel free to talk about these things because they can't talk freely about these things. So I think that's where this abuse thing comes from. And they hear things from these other children and then they want to experiment these things.*

*FG2(1)(p.6) Even the schools now that our children go to, because now they are exposed to another different culture, so these other kids talk about these things because their parents educate them*

*FG2(3)(p.7) We took those ideas and mixed them with ours and now there is confusion*

The above extracts illustrate the perceived negative impact that the educators have of black children attending multi-racial schools. In addition to this, the educators suggested that as a result of children being formally educated, there has been a power shift in terms of the parent-child relationship (focus group 3 – N=2). The following extract illustrates this:

*FG3(3)(p.11) they [parents] are not educated. Especially in our area many are illiterate and so they see their children go to school as **the** (their emphasis) people  
A: As having somewhat more of a status?*

*FG3(3)(p12) Yes, yes and even their children tell them, you cannot tell me anything because you are not educated, so they are afraid of them*

With regards to the sex education and the lack of parental involvement in sex education, the educators in this study indicated that this was an important issue that needed to be addressed at schools through the educational system. Although the child's peer group was generally perceived to be a negative force in a child's life, some of the educators felt that peer group supervision was an effective way to teach children sex education. This issue was discussed by focus group one (N=4) and focus group three (N=6).

The educators in the three focus groups agreed that a lack of sex education played a central role in children being abused as well as being abusers. They also highlighted the fact that

parents do not have time to give their children attention due to factors such as work and economic pressures. At the same time however, variability in their discourses became evident when they relativised the issue of sex education. The way in which this was done was by suggesting that although sex education was important there were other issues that were more important. These included factors such as poverty:

*FG2(1)(p.16) Because sometimes you ask the child have you eaten. No I haven't eaten since I ate here at school. So when you think there is no food at home who could be talking about sexual abuse?*

The above extract illustrates the relativisation of needs. That is, that there are more important issues regarding the child that need to be addressed than sex education.

According to Berry (1995) individuals experience a number of changes as a result of exposure, participation, and interactions with people of different cultures. The process of acculturation involves a number of elements. Firstly, contact or interaction between different cultures, secondly, changes as a result of these interactions and finally the dynamic nature of these changes. This framework is useful for understanding the acculturation process experienced by black South Africans, and the resulting breakdown in cultural traditions as outlined by the educators that have resulted from the radical socio-political changes in South Africa. Berry (1995) argues that acculturative stress occurs when old social and cultural norms are lost, and new ones are in the process of being developed. It may be argued that black South Africans are in the process of acculturation and thus adapting to the changes facing them in a changed socio-political society. This explanation seems reasonable in view of the emphasis the educators placed on the collapse of traditional norms guiding the psychosocial/psychosexual development of young black people.

#### 4.5 The role of educators in child-on-child sexual offending

The educators in this study all agreed that child-on-child sexual offending was an issue facing them and something they experienced dealing with as educators (N=3).

Furthermore, focus group one (N=1) and focus group three (N=2) emphasised the fact that they felt inadequately trained to deal with issues such as child-on-child sexual offending. Focus group two was the only group that had received informal training in dealing with child abuse. The other two groups stressed the fact that they wanted further training in dealing with issues such as this. According to the educators the reason for this need was primarily that they (educators) play a central role in a child's life and that it was their belief that a child will confide in them before confiding in their parents (focus group two – N=3; focus group three – N=1).

The school at which the educators in focus group one taught was the only school that had an official code of conduct for learners. The learners attending this school are mentally retarded, and the educators mentioned the fact that inappropriate sexual behaviour by these learners was problematic and for this reason they had an official code of conduct. This code of conduct was explicit in particular in its focus on sexual behaviour between learners. The other two schools represented by focus groups two and three did not have an official code of conduct for their learners. Focus group two mentioned that they had an informal agreement with learners regarding inappropriate sexual behaviour:

*FG2(1)(p.7) We haven't thought about it*

*A: So your school doesn't have any policies in place then?*

*FG2(1)(p.7) No*

*FG2(2)(p.7) Usually it is the child and someone who is not attending school. You see at the school there is an agreement because they just love us*

*FG3(3)(p.9) Schools usually don't have. There are no proper channels and if the case is not reported nobody is going to care*

*A: So the school does not have any policies from the education department, and the principals do not put policies in place?*



The fact that two of the three schools represented in the focus groups do not have formal codes of conduct, and in particular none regarding inappropriate or abusive sexual behaviour between learners, is very concerning. In view of the fact that sexual abuse is on the increase as reflected by official statistics and newspaper reports outlined in Chapter two of this study, it may be argued that this is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed by headmasters, the education department as well as at governmental level.

Another issue that I found concerning was around the reporting (or rather non-reporting) of child sexual abuse. The following extract from focus group three illustrates the attitude of the educators regarding the reporting of this type of abuse:

*A: ... when a child's been raped and the child tells you, and tells you by whom, do you report it or what do you do with that information?*

*FG3(2)(p.20) According to the law if you don't report the matter you are also a criminal*

*A: In reality how does it really work? How does it really work in the real world?*

*FG3(3)(p.20) You find out from a child first whether they want this case to be reported or not*

*FG3(1)(p.20) It is important if the child wants to go along with this*

*A: So it's important to do what the child wants you to do?*

*FG3(1)(p.20) yes*

*FG3(3)(p.21) And it's the child's right to say no, I don't want this thing to be reported. And you are invading the privacy if you report it.*

This attitude towards non-reporting was justified by the educators by their implications that headmasters of schools do not want to get involved in these type of issues (focus group one – N=1; focus group two – N=1). In addition to this the educators further justified not reporting the abuse due to the complex legal process of reporting child abuse. In view of this they felt it was easier not to report the abuse (focus group two – N=3; focus group three – N=3). Furthermore, they cited intimidation from family members of the

perpetrators as another reason to avoid involvement in reporting abuse and testifying in court cases. These views were rationalised by the educators with suggestions that the **child** has a right to privacy and thus it is the child's right to choose whether or not to formally report the abuse, irrespective of their age.

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has presented the data obtained from the focus discussion groups in two ways. Firstly it has outlined the data in terms of concepts identified from the literature. These concepts were quantified in terms of the number of times they occurred in each focus group. Thus, the focus in this part of the analysis was on the explicit data. Secondly, the data was discussed qualitatively. In terms of this, extracts were used to illustrate the concepts, and implicit meanings arising out of the focus group discussions were analysed in greater depth. During this phase of the analysis a number of strategies used by the educators in conceptualising child-on-child sexual offending were identified. These strategies served a number of functions, with the primary function being to normalise the issue of child-on-child sexual offending and thus make it more tolerable to talk about.

Why is it important to understand the conceptualisations of educators around the issue of child-on-child sexual offending?

Recent South African media reports suggest that child-on-child sexual offending is on the increase in South Africa. Not only is this the case in South Africa, but Wetzel and Brown (2000) also argue that sexual harassment is pervasive in the US. The significance of focusing on issues such as child-on-child sexual offending centres on the serious consequences this abuse has on an abused learner as well as on the abuser. These negative consequences include psychological, emotional, physical and academic factors. In addition to this is the basic human right that every child has the right to an equal and fair education in a safe environment (Wetzel & Brown, 2000).

According to Flanagan and Faison (2001), the values that are emphasised in the educational setting as well as in child rearing have an impact on the type of person the child will become. Furthermore, these values affect the type of society that these children create through their interactions in the social world. Since it is assumed that reality is constructed in interactions with others, and given that children spend a significant amount of time at school, interacting with educators as well as other children, it is clear that schools and educators can play a significant role in a child's life.

One way in which the conceptualisations of child-on-child sexual offenders may be understood from the perspective of educators is to analyse their discourses around this issue. Since this study was exploratory in nature, and the discourses of the educators were analysed in terms of concepts that had been identified from the literature, a formal in-depth discourse analysis was beyond the scope of this study. This however had limitations for this study. The use of language by the educators in the focus groups was interesting. For example one educator referred to perpetrators as "gentlemen", leaving one with the

dilemma of whether to view the use of this term as being sarcastic, or polite, or simply referring to men.

A further difficulty that I faced in the focus group discussions was the fact that at times the educators found it difficult to engage in discussion. Sometimes it seemed as if they were simply answering my questions without going into the issue in depth. Thus, it was difficult to get them to engage with the topic. The fact that sexual abuse in general is a sensitive issue to discuss may to some extent explain the difficulty. Another question I began to ask myself was whether some of the educators themselves had been sexually abused. This came about as a result of some of the educators “personalising” some of their responses when referring to the issue of victims not reporting their victimisation. They used words such as “we feel embarrassed”. These personalisations were used in some contexts but not others, and as such are possibly significant.

The choice of content analysis as a method of analysing the data in this study is debatable. It was useful in the sense that it gave me some indication of which concepts were relevant to these educators in a South African context in terms of the issues that were raised in the literature. This was particularly relevant since this study was based on findings in countries such as the US and UK. Additional data obtained by the content analysis was the frequency that a concept was discussed, the direction of the statement and the intensity of the statement. This afforded me some way of comparing this data across the three focus groups.

It may have been useful to construct a short questionnaire asking questions such as “how often have you had to deal with child-on-child sexual offenders in your school?” In this way additional quantitative data may have been obtained. Although, it may be argued that since there is little or no information available on the conceptualisations of educators around the issue of child-on-child sexual offending in the South African context, the findings of this study may in fact provide a framework for the construction of such a questionnaire for a broader survey study focusing on educators.

It has been argued that all research is to some extent political in nature and the values and belief systems that an individual holds about social issues shapes the position they take regarding an argument or issue. Furthermore, it has been suggested that individuals do not passively absorb societal ideologies but rather that there is an interplay of knowledge from society to the individual and researcher and vice versa. The implication of this is that social psychological research does not only involve the studying of social practices but also results in the creation of new realities.

In view of this, the way in which I defined terms becomes an important issue since the definitions and conceptualisations of terms such as a “child”, “child-on-child sexual offenders”, “crime” as well as normal versus abnormal and criminal behaviour are central to this study. The question that arises from this would be to what extent did my definitions of these terms contaminate the responses of the educators in the focus group discussions. In other words, did the way in which I framed my questions or guide the focus group discussions in any way result in the educators orienting themselves to my “line of thinking” in order to give what they thought were “correct” or “right” answers. This issue is an important one in terms of the vignette that I constructed in order to contextualise the focus groups discussions. The vignette was based on examples of child-on-child sexual offending from a study conducted by the Human Rights Watch (2001), on sexual violence in schools. In terms of this one would need to ask, to what extent did this “orienting” on the part of the educators, and my influence in contextualising the focus discussions, impact on my findings.

Another important aspect in terms of the definition and conceptualisation of the terms is the fact that I am of a different race to the educators interviewed in this study. Some of these cultural differences became apparent during the course of the interviews. One example of this was the difference in our definition of what constitutes a child. My understanding of a child is based on a Western-legal definition whereas the educators defined a child in terms of a Zulu cultural definition. In the light of this, it is possible that a number of other cultural definitional differences may have been over-looked by myself in the focus group discussions as well as the data analysis.

In terms of the analysis of the data, it is also important for me to reflect back on the emergent themes and in particular the sequence in which I discussed them. At the beginning of the analysis I started out by looking for themes that suggested that child-on-child sexual offending was indeed a crime. This in itself reflects my own values and normative positioning around the issue of sexual abuse. In addition to this, my own value system may also have had an influence on the way in which I understood and interpreted the data. The importance of this for me was that it challenged me to re-think my own (personal and academic) conceptual frameworks. The fact that there are a number of *different meaning systems in society (even societies we think we are familiar with)* became clearer to me during the process of this study. I became aware that in trying to understand an issue such as *child-on-child sexual offending from any aspect (academic, social, legal, etc)*, it is vital that one has a clear understanding of the concepts from the perspective of the people who will be most affected by the definitions and conceptualisations

### **5.1 Implications for further study**

Child-on-child sexual offending is pervasive in schools and society as a whole, and the findings of this study seemed to confirm this trend. This would suggest that much more research is needed in South Africa in particular due to the dearth of information in this field of study.

Recently schools are being held accountable for the abuse of one learner by another learner (Foxhall, 1999; Wetzel & Brown, 2000). Thus, it is clear that the educational system needs to have clear guidelines and codes of conduct in place in order to deal with issues such as this. In this study it was apparent that all of the educators had experience dealing with child-on-child sexual offending yet only one school (a school catering for mentally retarded children) had any formal code of conduct in place.

It may be argued that cultural understandings of psychological phenomena and in this instance, abuse, are vital in terms of guiding policy makers. Policy makers (and the legal system) need to align themselves with cultural issues, become aware of ideologies at

grassroots level and then build these into intervention programmes. This in turn facilitates the implementation of the programmes because the people at ground level will be able to identify with the policies.

According to Wetzel and Brown (2000), formal policies and codes of conduct are some of the tools that may function to prevent student-to-student sexual harassment and abuse. However, simply having policies are not sufficient to eliminate this type of behaviour. In addition to having policies they suggest that it is important that further studies are conducted focusing on issues such as: the locations in which the abusive behaviour takes place; the kinds of abusive behaviour that occur; the rates of sexual abuse for both boys and girls and the responses of school authorities to complaints.

The educators made a number of requests to myself for help and information on how to deal with the issue of child-on-child sexual offending since they felt that they were lacking in training and skills to deal with this type of behaviour at schools. In terms of the findings of this study, it was apparent that many of the educators lacked knowledge especially in terms of the legal aspect of sexual abuse. For example, not knowing the definition of statutory rape and possible psychosocial consequences of abuse on the victim. In addition to this, many of the educators did not know what formal procedures to follow in reporting this type of sexual abuse to authorities. It also became apparent in the focus group discussions that many of the educators subscribed to rape myths. This was illustrated on a number of occasions, and in particular by their strategy of shifting the responsibility of the sexual abuse onto girls.

Wetzel and Brown (2000), suggest that the usual response by educators to child-on-child sexual harassment is to minimize the offence, blame the victim, blame the parents or deny the existence of this type of abuse. The educators in this study put all of these responses forward. These findings suggest that these factors need to be targeted in terms of educating educators around the issue of child-on-child sexual offending. Many of the educators suggested that victims of this type of abuse may not report it for fear of not being believed. It is possible that by sensitising educators to the types of stereotypes that they hold about abuse, it may open the channel for improved communication with learners.

In this way learners may be more inclined to report their abuse to educators in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously.

All of these issues represent gaps in the South African research context as well as a dire need for training of individuals such as educators. It is through a study such as this one that these gaps become visible and further research focusing on training and intervention programmes may be conducted.



The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study, and to present a summary of the main findings.

The concept of adults sexually abusing children has been difficult for society to deal with, and the indications that children are also capable of committing such crimes have until recently, been denied or ignored (Pettigrew, 1998; Vizard, Monck & Misch, 1995). Although a number of studies focusing on child-on-child sexual offending have been conducted internationally, few have been conducted in South Africa. This is particularly concerning in view of the recent spate of South African media reports of children committing serious offences such as rape and murder. Approximately 40% of the perpetrators of sexual violence are under the age of 18, and the average age of sexual abuse victims has dropped to seven years of age (HRW, 2001; S.A.P.A., *The Natal Witness*, 28 March, 2001; S.A.P.A., *The Natal Witness*, 29 March, 2001). It has also become apparent that many of these crimes by children against children are taking place at schools (HRW, 2001).

Children are affected by what happens in the environment in which they find themselves. This includes not only the family but also the educational environment. Educators play a fundamental role in the lives of children by virtue of the amount of time they spend together interacting in the learning environment. Schools, being the meeting place of children and educators, thus seemed to be fertile ground to begin a study into child-on-child sexual offending.

A social constructionist theoretical orientation was adopted in this study since it emphasised the notion of social interaction between people and the environment in order to understand, explain and describe the world in which they live in (Gergen, 1985). In terms of this, the aim was to understand the conceptualisations of a group of isiZulu educators around the issue of child-on-child sexual offending.

For the purposes of this study, three focus groups were conducted with isiZulu mother-tongue female educators (N=11). These educators represented three educational environments, namely: educators teaching at a school for mentally retarded children, educators from a rural school and educators from a township school. Access to the educators was negotiated via the Child and Family Centre at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and Life Line/Rape Crisis (Pietermaritzburg), and was based on criterion and snowball sampling methods.

The focus groups were facilitated by myself and were videotaped and then transcribed. The transcribed text was analysed on two levels. Firstly, the data was analysed in terms of concepts that had previously been identified in the literature. These concepts were quantified by means of content analysis. This part of the analysis was useful in that it highlighted common themes among the three focus groups. In terms of this, four major conceptualisations emerged from the data. The first related to child-on-child sexual offending being conceptualised as “abnormal” behaviour. In terms of this there were three sub-categories, namely: i) “criminal” behaviour, ii) “unacceptable” behaviour and, iii) behaviour as a result of “victimisation”. The second major conceptualisation related to child-on-child sexual offending being viewed as “normal” behaviour. This conceptualisation was further sub-divided into: i) “experimental and developmental” behaviour and, ii) “interactional” behaviour. The third major conceptualisation related to the role of acculturation and in particular the impact of Westernisation on the Zulu culture. Finally, the role of educators in relation to child-on-child sexual offending was identified.

The data was then analysed qualitatively and implicit themes emerging from the data were further analysed. During this phase of the analysis it became clear that the educators were using a number of rhetorical strategies in order to help them make sense of the concept of child-on-child sexual offending. These strategies included normalisation, relativisation and justification of the behaviour of child-on-child sexual offenders. It seemed that the primary function of these strategies was as a defence strategy to make child-on-child sexual offending more tolerable. In this way, the issue became easier for the educators to talk about.

The small number of homogenous participants in the sample, as well as the nature of the sampling methods limits generalisability of the results of this study to larger populations. It may however be argued that this study highlighted issues important to isiZulu educators. In terms of this, all the educators who participated in this study had experience dealing with victims of sexual abuse by children as well as child perpetrators of sexual violence. Thus highlighting the seriousness and pervasiveness of this issue in the educational context. Furthermore, the educators emphasised a need for more training in dealing with issues such as this one, and on numerous occasions during the focus group discussions asked me for help and advice. In addition to this, the majority of the educators had very little knowledge regarding the legal steps that they are required to take they receive reports from a child of sexual abuse. All of these issues have important implications for policy makers in terms of formulating codes of conducts regarding this type of behaviour in schools as well as the importance of on-going educator training programmes.

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## **APPENDIX: A**

## **Vignette**

Thandi is 8 years old and in Grade 3. She is afraid to go to school and complains of stomach pains. 3 weeks ago she left the classroom to go to the toilet. When she got to the toilets 2 boys aged 10 and 11 assaulted her and had sexual intercourse with her. She was physically hurt and too afraid to go back to her classroom so she went straight home. She has not attended school since then. She has not told anyone about the incident because she is afraid that no-one will believe her because the same thing happened to another girl in the school a few months before, and no-one believed that girl. In that incident, the boys involved said that they were "just playing".

## **APPENDIX: B**



## **Questionnaire – Focus groups**

1. Have you had an incidence of sexual abuse perpetrated by a learner against another learner? E.g.: a boy in the school raped another girl/boy in the school.
2. I'd like to hear about your experiences as an educator – with child sexual offenders
3. Do you think this type of behaviour is crime or is it experimentation?
4. In your opinion, does this kind of behaviour happen often?
5. At what age does this kind of behaviour happen?
6. Are they just “experimenting” or do you think this type of behaviour is a crime?
7. What kind of treatment/punishment, if any, should the perpetrator receive?
8. How do schools deal with this kind of behaviour? What did the school officials (e.g. headmaster) do about it? Was the abuse reported ... and to whom was it reported?
9. What school policies do you have in place to deal with incidents like this? If none, then what policies do you think the school should have?
10. Have you received any training on how to deal with child sexual offenders?

## **APPENDIX: C**

## INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A REASEARCH PROJECT

I \_\_\_\_\_, voluntarily give my consent to serve as a participant in a discussion focus group conducted by Anita Julia Kriel . I have received a clear and complete explanation of the general nature and purpose(s) of the discussion and the specific reason(s) for the discussion. I have also been informed of how the results of the research will be used. The issue of confidentiality regarding the information I reveal has been explained to me. I understand that I may terminate my participation in the examination at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX D

