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A Systematic Review of Empirical Research on Child Sexual Abuse Myths and Stereotypes

(1992-2017)

by

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Available literature suggests that child sexual abuse (CSA) myths and stereotypes are both prevalent and varied in contemporary society. This systematic review aims to provide a critical summation of present findings regarding CSA myths and stereotypes.

Objectives: To provide a critical overview of the empirical literature on CSA from 1992-2017, highlighting the consistencies, contradictions, knowledge gaps, current theories, and limitations of available understandings.

Method: A systematic review of the extant literature on CSA myths and stereotypes (1992-2017) was conducted using the Cochrane Framework (Higgins & Green, 2011).

Findings: From an initial search of 323 articles, a total number of 73 full-texts were included for the review. The findings reflected a concentration of research in the United States with a comparative dearth of studies from developing countries. A general impression of bias among male respondents has been observed that supports CSA myths and stereotypes. Overall, the literature displayed a lack of knowledge of CSA risk factors among participants. However, evidence appears to support the idea that specific training in CSA is a key factor in countering CSA myth endorsement. In addition to the above, a significant discrepancy among construct comparability within CSA literature was identified and recommendations were put forth. Furthermore there appears to be a deficit in research concerning the female offender, her cognitive distortions and the theories that explain this behaviour.

Conclusions: It was concluded that more research on CSA is required in developing countries and among female perpetrators of CSA. Moreover clearer distinctions between CSA constructs need to be made, allowing for better construct comparability in future studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Steven Collings for sharing his area of interest on Child Sexual Abuse with me. I have greatly appreciated the support and patience provided during this process and have gained a tremendous amount from my experience. I would also like to thank my parents who have supported me throughout this year. You have been my rock in my time of need and I thank you for this. Finally, I would like to thank my partner and best friend for the emotional support and love that you have shown me, from near and afar.

DECLARATION – PLAGIARISM

I, **Leyya A Vaid**, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.

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Signed

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Leyya A Vaid Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are – by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim. (World Health Organization and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006, p. 10)

The sexual abuse of children or child sexual abuse (CSA) has been identified as a grave issue across many studies. The research has indicated that CSA is not an isolated occurrence but rather, a violent act that persistently occurs on a global scale (Stoltenborgh, Van Ijzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011; Pereda, Guilera, Forns & Gómez-Benito, 2009). According to Purvis and Joyce (2005) it is not only the prevalence of CSA that informs the gravity of the world's current situation but also the significant behavioural and psychological impact. The acts of CSA have been found to have significant negative impact on a child victim, which may persevere throughout life. According to Chen, Murad, Paras, Colbenson, Sattler, Goranson, Elamin and Zirakzadeh (2010), the occurrence of CSA has been correlated with anxiety disorders, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, and depression in later development. Feelings of helplessness have been reflected among various adults in protecting their children against CSA, with many parents, according to Collins (1996), perceiving CSA as difficult to control. According to research findings, adult respondents have found their current healthcare and legal systems unsupportive in their struggle to manage or prevent incidences of CSA, with factors such as societal myths and stereotypes perpetuating the prevalence of CSA (Kisanga, Nystrom, Hogan & Emmelin, 2011).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) myths, as stated by Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) consist of inaccurate beliefs or assumptions made about those involved in CSA and about the abuse itself.

Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) addressed several recurrent myths identified through a Google search, providing evidence of society's current attitudes towards CSA. Examples of CSA myths include the belief that CSA is neither harmful nor threatening to a child and that it may, in fact, be beneficial to a child's sexual education (Collings 1997; Cromer and Goldsmith, 2010). Other myths may include the belief that a child desires such sexual contact, especially if they do not act by disclosing the abuse (Collings, 1997). Apart from the myths, stereotypes of CSA are also upheld by many and are as harmful as the myths described above. Stereotypes of CSA may include the belief that most sexual offenders are strangers to the victim and that CSA mostly occurs in poor communities (Collings, 1997). These myths and stereotypes negatively influence the true perception and public awareness of CSA and have therefore developed into an area of interest among researchers.

The academic literature on CSA indicates that initial studies relied on measures constructed by rape researchers to assess for CSA (Collings, 1997). However, in 1997 Collings, identified the inaccuracies of using such measures and thereafter drew distinctions between CSA myths and rape myth. Collings (1997) distinguished the situational differences between the two constructs and went on to develop a scale that specifically and reliably measures the acceptance of CSA myths and stereotypes. Upon review of the literature, the CSA Myth Scale appears to be the only available measure in determining myth acceptance among participants. While previous research has supported the universalistic notion of attitudes towards CSA, further research is required to fully explore the range of CSA myths among diverse cultural groups (Collings, Lindblom, Madu, Park, 2009) and expand on the current CSA Myth Scale.

In his work, Collings (1997) identified three factor constructs associated with the social attitudes of CSA that provide a foundation from which CSA myths and stereotypes are created (Collings, 1997). The three factor constructs are namely, Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes. Further research has explored and expanded on these factors. Collings (2006), for example, posits that the attribution and diffusion of blame regarding CSA depends on factors such as the age and level of resistance of victims, as well as the sex of those attributing the blame. In addition, while Denial of Abusiveness was described as the minimizing of abuse by Collings (1997), Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) identified contrasting myths involving the exaggeration of abuse that is present among populations. Finally, an article written by Denov

(2003) also acknowledges society's sexist perceptions of women as passive, innocent and incapable of sexual aggression, which feed into the previous restricted stereotypes of perpetrators in CSA.

Present-day literature has progressed in providing evidence for the distinctions made between gendered perceptions of CSA myths, as well as the cognitive distortions of perpetrators that are linked to myth endorsement (Collings, 2003; Collings, 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Collings & McArthur, 2000). However the available research, demonstrated in Collings and McArthur (2000), has mainly focused on males as the perpetrators of CSA, ignoring the role played by female offenders. According to her research, Faller (1995) has indicated that more than 15% of sexual offenders in reported cases of CSA are in fact female. Therefore, based on the aforementioned research, it becomes statistically relevant to enquire into the nature of myths surrounding the female abuser and address research gaps.

Over the past twenty-five years, research on CSA myths has accumulated and various aspects of social attitudes towards CSA have been broached. While Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) have produced a review of CSA myths through a Google search, a complete systematic review of the empirical literature on CSA myths has not yet been conducted. Thus, a critical overview of current literature proves a valuable addition when future research on CSA myths is pursued. The systematic review evaluates the current empirical research on CSA myths, assisting in the identification of profitable research findings, study limitations, and future research implications. The review will highlight contradictions as well as knowledge gaps in current literature and as a result, will be able to provide a comprehensive summation for future research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS
Thus far, the key questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. What empirical research has been published in the last 25 years on CSA myths?

2. What are the limitations of research?

3. What knowledge gaps are evident?

4. What are the consistencies and contradictions in research findings?

5. Which theories have been associated with the literature on CSA myths?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of child sexual abuse, as referred to by the World Health Organization and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (2006), takes into consideration factors concerning both; the characteristics of the child as well as the social context in which the sexual incident occurred. These factors include; the child's level of cognizance, his/her ability to consent, his/her developmental stage of preparedness as well as the current societal norms and ruling that govern particular behaviour (World Health Organization and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006). In addition to this, the definition acknowledges the possibility of a perpetrator being either adult or child, with both perpetrators characterized by their ability to influence their victim. According to The United Nations (1989), a child, is considered any person under the age of eighteen years unless otherwise stipulated by another ruling applicable to the child. Although some countries consider a child to be anyone under the age of 18, the age of sexual consent has been lowered by many (such as South Africa) to the approximate age of sixteen (Criminal Law Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32, 2007). This particular age group (16 years old) is considered to have shifted away from their sexual naivety, progressed towards a more comprehensive understanding of sexual behaviours and the ability to consent (Klettke & Mellor, 2012). The reviewed literature indicates that the prevalence of CSA is exceedingly high, with data recording a rate of 118 CSA victims out of every 1000 children over a period of 26 years (Stoltenborgh, Van Ijzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). Although there has been an increase in the public's awareness of CSA (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Ige & Fawole, 2011), a large part of this perceived cognizance has been governed by myths and stereotypes. The following literature review therefore attempts to provide a brief overview of the current research on CSA, with emphasis on the factors that are influencing and perpetuating surrounding myths and stereotypes.

According to previous literature, the roles of culture, sexism, social scripts and personal trauma have played significant roles in the development and maintenance of CSA myths. Collings and McArthur (2000) provided support for the feminists' perspective that recognizes the

contributions of personal beliefs and culture as a combined influence on sexual offending. An explanation of the feminists' theory described the relationship between CSA and culture as mediated by patriarchy and the societal perception of masculinity (Seymour, 1998). In reference to this extended feminist theory, Seymour (1998) suggests that it is the male dominance that gives way to the possibility of committing CSA, the societal perceptions of masculinity as aggressive and violent, that encourages the act and the internalization of male sexuality that drives their offending behaviour. Consequently, research has recognized the impact of sexism in CSA myths, which has resulted in the condoning of sexual assault against women (Cromer & Freyd, 2007). In addition, studies have identified the vindication of women as potential sexual aggressors due to society's stereotypical perception of women as innocent nurturers (Denov, 2003; Kite & Tyson, 2004). Research conducted by Kite and Tyson (2004) identified that police officers perceptions towards sexual offenders appeared significantly in favour of female offenders in comparison to male offenders. These gendered preferences were found to reduce the officers' perceptions of abuse severity, the resultant effects on the victim and the degree of action needed to be taken by the officer (Kite & Tyson, 2004). While the perceptions of female sexual offenders have been viewed with a less punitive lens, it appears that the gender of participants also, in a similar regard, negotiates a different perspective on CSA. Several studies have identified female participants as retaining a more supportive stance towards CSA allegations and the victim of CSA (Bottoms, Peter-Hagene, Stevenson, Wiley, Mitchell, & Goodman, 2014; Spencer & Tan, 2000; Tennfjord, 2006; Wiley & Bottoms, 2009). Finally, a history of personal trauma, or lack thereof, has also been a contributing factor to the acceptance of CSA (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). According to Cromer and Freyd (2007), men who had never experienced significant trauma in their past were much less likely to believe any reports of abuse than both genders who had past histories of trauma.

Apart from the above, other circumstantial factors such as level of education, professional status and training have also been researched as areas of interest concerning the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes in CSA. According to the available studies, a background which included some form of training in CSA proved likely in reducing the level or CSA myth endorsement (Collings et al., 2009; Márquez-Flores, Márquez-Hernández & Granados-Gámez, 2016). This hypothesis was suggested in the article by Collings et al. (2009), as a way to explain the higher myth acceptance held by South African students in tertiary education in comparison to the children

attending secondary education. According to Collings et al. (2009), it is possible that the previous education syllabus was less inclusive in its training of CSA for the older students during their time at secondary school than the current secondary school syllabus provided for the younger students who are currently enrolled. Professional status also appeared to influence myth acceptance, with the review of the research indicating that those with a professional background in psychology endorsed the least myths, followed by social workers (Collings & Suliman, 2005). These results were compared to the medical practitioners who were found to endorse the most myths about CSA (Collings & Suliman, 2005). The above evidence, as stated by Collings and Suliman (2005), appears to reinforce the hypothesis involving the positive influence of training on the reduction of CSA myths. It has also been proposed that those working in the field of psychology and social work may be exposed to more training in CSA than medical practitioners and thus are more aware of myths surrounding it (Collings & Suliman, 2005).

As a result of the myriad of myths and stereotypes reflected in current literature on CSA, the categorization and detailed exploration of the myths were required. In 1997, Collings identified CSA attitudes as a multidimensional construct, attributing three psychologically meaningful factors to them, namely Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes. The first construct, Diffusion of Blame, has consistently featured throughout the literature. It involves the diffusion of perpetrator responsibility, the acceptance of victim accountability and the denial or justification of sexual exploitation of minors (Collings, 1997; Collings, 2006; Cromer & Goldsmith 2010). Research has identified certain characteristics within an abuse scenario that are contributing to this diffusion of blame. These have included characteristics such as victim age and victim response (Collings, 2006; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). According to the literature, older victims of CSA have been attributed more blame for their assault than victims who are younger in age (Collings, 2006; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). Similarly, victims who displayed a more passive response to their abuse were also deemed more blameworthy (Collings, 2006). Not only has a diffusion of blame been acknowledged, but the concepts of responsibility and culpability surrounding CSA also exist within the literature (Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Rogers, Josey & Davies, 2007). The second construct, the Denial of Abusiveness, acknowledges that existing myths include the polarity of both minimization and exaggeration of harm posed by CSA (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith 2010). As with the Diffusion of Blame, a person's Denial of Abusiveness also appears to be governed by the abovementioned victim

characteristics. Finally, Restrictive Stereotypes as the third construct of CSA myths, encompasses the denial of reality or existence of abuse and reflects misguided stereotypes of the perpetrators of CSA (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith 2010; Denov, 2003; Ige & Fawole, 2011). According to the studies reviewed, a substantial number of participants appear to hold misleading perceptions of CSA offenders (Calvert & Munsie-Benson, 1999; Ige & Fawole, 2011). While some limitations in gendered perceptions of offenders have previously been discussed, other perceptions include the belief that perpetrators of CSA are those unknown to the victim (Ige & Fawole, 2011). This belief in an unfamiliar offender echoes a perception of stranger danger across the literature on CSA (Calvert & Munsie-Benson 1999; Ige & Fawole, 2011). Such misguided beliefs thus cause negative implications for the individual's awareness of CSA as well as for the development of protective and prevention strategies concerning CSA. Expanding on these restrictive stereotypes, CSA research has also acknowledged the existing stereotypes of the abuse itself, examples include the assumption of clear physical evidence present post-abuse and the voluntary disclosure by victims of CSA (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). Little support thus far has been demonstrated for cross-cultural comparability of the above-mentioned constructs (Collings et al., 2009).

In addition to researchers defining the construct and identifying myths surrounding CSA, some have chosen to investigate the actual perpetrators of sexual abuse, in order to strengthen their understanding. In 2000, Collings and McArthur began the exploration of offender cognitions. This study in particular, was able to recognize the cognitions of perpetrators that distinguish them from control samples and established the high probability of perpetrators endorsing CSA myths (Collings & McArthur, 2000). While Collings and McArthur (2000) have made progress and extended previous literature, there is still a need for future research in understanding the motivational and disinhibitory role of these distorted cognitions and how moral judgments influence their myth acceptance (Collings, 1997; Collings & McArthur, 2000).

Evidence of perceptual differences of CSA based on gender has also made its mark in CSA myths literature. Studies have shown men demonstrating greater myth acceptance across factors, greater attribution of blame and less inclination to believing reports of abuse (Collings, 2003; Collings, 2006; Cromer & Freyd, 2007). Despite acknowledging the perceptual differences in genders towards CSA myths, researchers have steered clear of investigating the cognitions and

social attitudes of CSA held by female perpetrators, which could become a topic of interest for future researchers.

Overall, the literature on CSA myths is varied and expresses a need to extend its research. Apart from the abovementioned feminist perspective (Seymour, 1998), little has been documented on theoretical perspectives surrounding CSA myths. A systematic review of current findings will prove beneficial in providing a critical overview of the empirical literature available, highlighting concurrences and contradictions for future research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The Cochrane Framework (Higgins & Green, 2011) was used to guide the research methodology and assist in the minimization of bias.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection criteria for studies was established using the PICOS acronym (Participants, Interventions, Comparisons, Outcomes and Study) cited in The Cochrane Handbook (Higgins & Green, 2011), however due to the inclusive nature of the review, participant and outcome criteria have been removed. Thus the selection criteria of this systematic review includes; empirical, peer-reviewed literature (Study) addressing Child Sexual Abuse Myths and Stereotypes (Intervention) from 1992-2017 (Publication Dates Specification). In addition, all literature for this review had to be published in the English language.

SEARCH METHODS

This systematic review involved a three phase search strategy taken from the JBI Reviewers Manual (Aromataris & Munn, 2017). The strategy included:

Phase 1: Initial key terms to perform the first search were identified based on the researcher's knowledge of the field. Key terms located in the titles and abstracts of the first search were then listed.

Phase 2: The new key terms extracted in Phase 1 were then used in database-specific searches.

Phase 3: This phase required the assessing and reducing of search items based on their abstract and content applicability. Reference lists of full text studies, meeting the selection criteria were examined and used to search for additional studies.

ELECTRONIC SEARCHES

To minimize selection bias, multiple databases were used. The primary database was WorldCat Local, recognized as a single-search access and union catalogue. It itemizes the collection of multiple libraries to create an Online Computer Library Centre. Additional group databases categorized under the Social Sciences and Humanities subheading were also selected. These

databases included; JSTOR Life Sciences Collection, Philosopher's Index, Project Muse, ProQuest Psychology Journals, PsycINFO, SA ePublications Journal Selection, Taylor and Francis Journals and WorldCat.org. EBSCOhost Web was used as an additional online reference system and the Academic Search Complete Database was selected for search purposes.

SEARCH TERMS

Both key terms and controlled vocabulary were used in the search strategy.

SEARCH LIMITATIONS

The search was limited to literature produced from 1992 until the end of 2017. The described search was discontinued at the point at which a redundancy was met. That is, through the systematic exclusion of 10 consecutive articles.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

As the inclusion criteria were limited to peer-reviewed articles, the quality of this particular search remains assured.

DATA EXTRACTION

The inclusion and exclusion of literature were documented in detail at all stages to maintain accuracy in reporting and reproducibility of research. To illustrate the reduction strategies and results of the search, the Cochrane Handbook (Higgins & Green , 2011) suggests the use of a flow diagram, thus the PRISMA flow diagram (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009) has been implemented for these purposes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data extracted will be analyzed using a conventional content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a conventional content analysis focuses on extracting insights from the data, formulating labels and codes and sorting the findings into categories of thought. Concurrent and contradictory relationships between categories are identified and research findings are discussed (Morse & Field, 1995, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

PRISMA 2009 FLOW DIAGRAM (Moher, Liberati , Tetzlaff & Altman, 2009)

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┌─────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│  Records identified through │   │  Additional records identified│
│     database searching      │   │    through other sources    │
│        (n = 322  )          │   │        (n =  1 )            │
└──────────────┬──────────────┘   └──────────────┬──────────────┘
               │                                 │
               └────────────────┬────────────────┘
                                ▼
           ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
           │     Records after duplicates removed     │
           │              (n = 300  )                │
           └──────────────────┬──────────────────────┘
                              ▼
           ┌──────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
           │     Records screened     │─────▶│    Records excluded      │
           │        (n =300   )       │      │       (n = 191  )        │
           └──────────────┬───────────┘      └──────────────────────────┘
                          ▼
           ┌──────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
           │ Full-text articles assessed│     │ Full-text articles excluded,│
           │     for eligibility      │─────▶│        with reasons       │
           │        (n = 109  )       │      │     Repeats: (n =18)     │
           └──────────────┬───────────┘      │                          │
                          ▼                  │     Irrelevant (n=18)    │
           ┌──────────────────────────┐      └──────────────────────────┘
           │   Studies included in    │
           │   qualitative synthesis  │
           │        (n = 73  )        │
           └──────────────────────────┘
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CHAPTER 4

SEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

SEARCH RESULTS.

The data collection process for this particular systematic review began on the 23rd of April 2018. The process involved a four part search that yielded a total of 323 articles. Upon the removal of any duplicates, the articles available were then reduced to n= 300. The abstracts of each article were screened according to the abovementioned search criteria, following which n=191 texts were excluded. This left for a total of 109 potentially eligible full-texts to be assessed. A total of 36 articles were excluded from the reviewed full-texts due to the repetition of articles or article irrelevance. Thus the final number of full-text articles included in this review was n=73.

SETTING

Of the 76 research settings included in the studies, the United States of America (38.1%) (n=29) appeared to be the area most researched. The second most researched area in this review was South Africa (10.5%) (n=8), followed by Australia (9.2%) (n=7) and thereafter the United Kingdom (7.8%) (n=6). It is interesting to note the considerable gap between the percentage maintained by the United States and that of South Africa. It appears that the number of studies conducted in South Africa is less than a third of those conducted in the United States. Furthermore the data showed a meager scattering of studies among the other n=15 research settings, indicating a poor prevalence in CSA research among the majority of research settings. These findings point to a possible over-concentration of research in the United States when compared to the dearth of research directed towards other more collectivist countries where CSA is known to be less reported but still prevalent (Stoltenborgh, Van Ijzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). In addition to the above, only two articles (2.6%) (n=2) were found to have researched rural communities (Bubar & Bundy-Fazioli, 2011; Calvert & Munsie-Benson, 1999). A sum of two (2.6%) (n=2) papers were in the form of reviews and four articles were unspecified (5.2%) (n=4).

The Number of CSA Studies Conducted in Each Country between 1992-2017
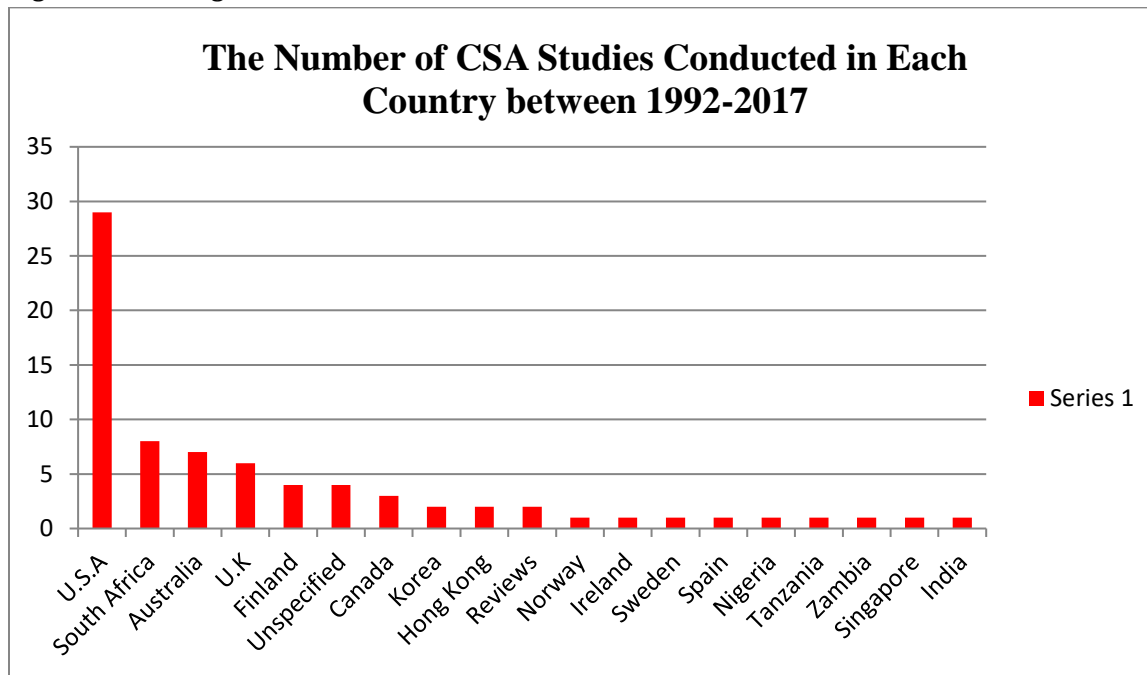
METHODOLOGY

In terms of research methodology, 58.9% of articles (n=46) used questionnaires as a method of inquiry. Of the 58.9%, a significant percentage was conducted with the additional use of detailed vignettes. While the reviewed research has indicated an appreciation for the level of detail provided by vignettes, allowing for a better understanding of CSA constructs and experiences (Hestick & Perrino, 2009), the limitations of this preference has also been highlighted. Such limitations include; the possibility of invalidated simulated findings when applied to reality (Ford, Schindler & Medway, 2001), the poor comparability between studies and the language bias that may unknowingly influence participant response (Hestick & Perrino, 2009). Apart from the popular use of questionnaires, interviews (11.5%) (n=9) and surveys (11.5%) (n=9) were the second most used methods of inquiry. Although second to questionnaires, there is a considerable difference in frequency of interview and survey use. A possible reason for the researchers' preference may involve the fact that questionnaires provide researchers with an opportunity to use validated scales in assessing for particular constructs, whereas interviews rely on more open-ended, subjective interpretations.

Figure 2: Methodology

Methodology : Frequency of Use
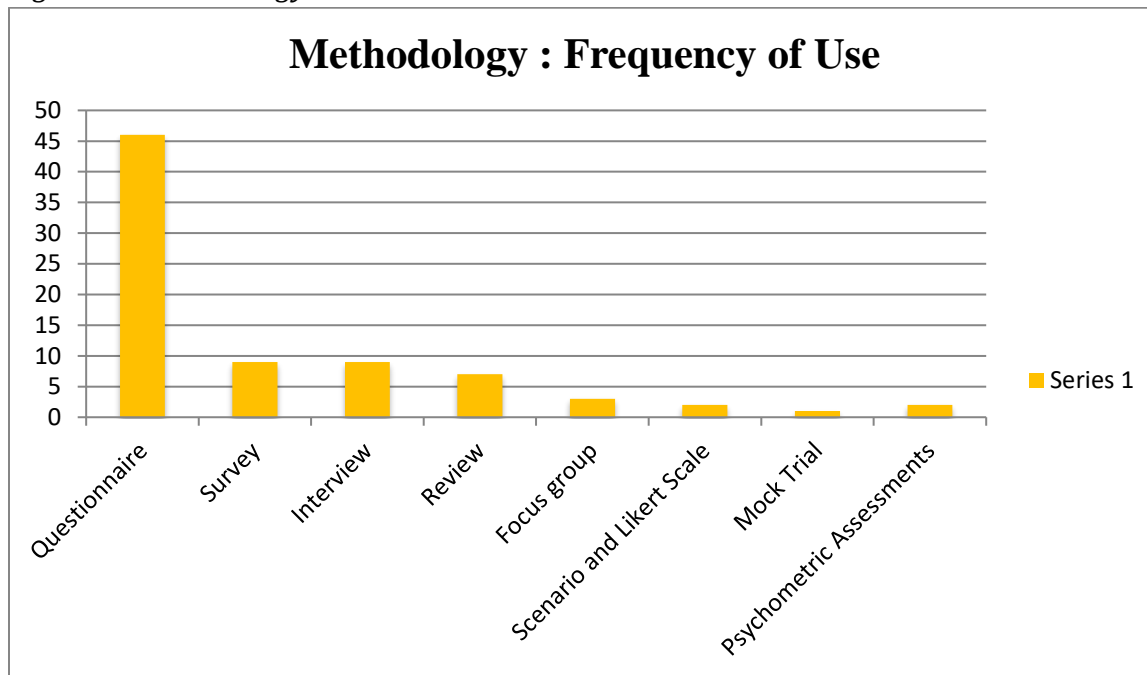
PARTICIPANTS

When assessing for the most commonly used participant group among the reviewed articles, the university student sample ranked at number one and was weighted at 25.8% (n= 23). The second most commonly used participant group was identified as a community sample (22.4%) (n=20) and those of a professional status were the third most common sample (21.3%) (n=19). At first glance, the findings may appear to dictate a slight sampling bias towards convenient sampling. This can prove problematic in the generalizability of results, as university students are not reflective of the general population. However on further scrutiny, just over a quarter (n=6) (26.0%) of the above mentioned 23 articles used their student samples in conjunction with another sample type for comparative purposes. Therefore, reducing the convenience sample number to seventeen (n=17) (19.1%). Interestingly, until 2017, only six (n=6) (6.7%) articles included offenders of CSA as participants and in that, only one study (n=1) (16.6%) included a single female offender. To provide more context to this slightly more inclusive study conducted by Tennfjord (2006), the study included thirty five prisoners, with only one (n=1) (2.8%) of whom was a female prisoner. However, from this review, an additional article by Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly (2017) appeared to break the mould and included a

review on female offenders (it is for this reason that female offenders have been displayed on their own). Despite the valued addition of Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly (2017), the percentage of female offenders to male is still abysmal. The findings show that very little consideration was given to the possibility of researching female offenders and this gender bias appears to mirror which is currently held in society.

Figure 3: Participant Sample
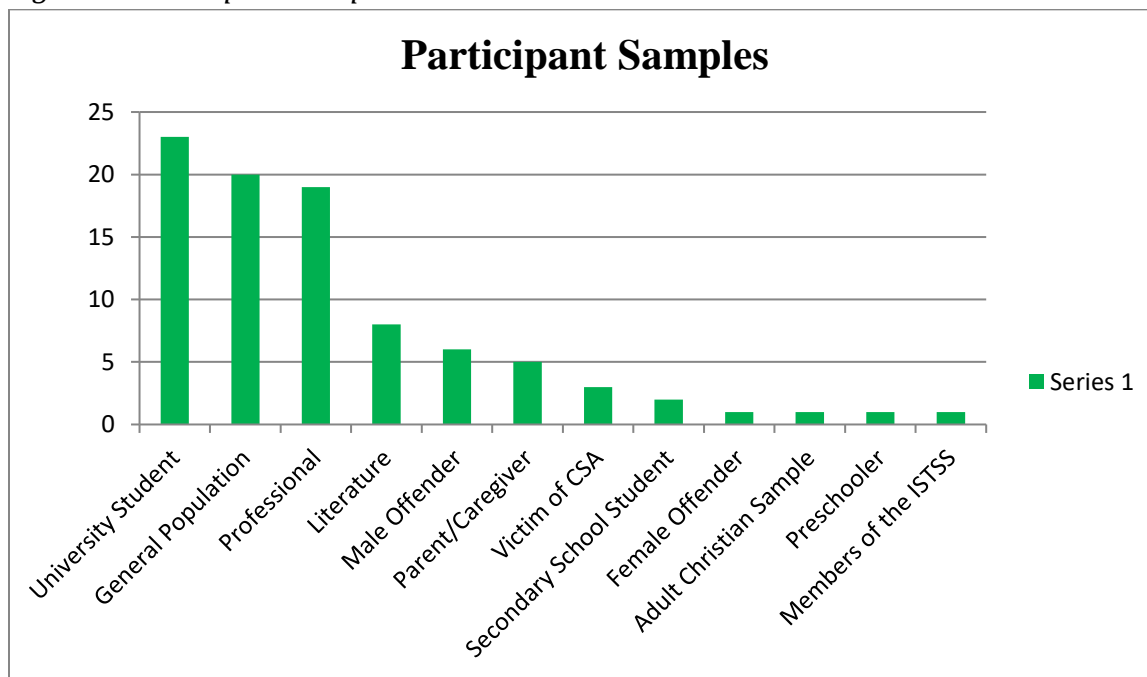
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The foundations of this systematic review were initially based on the three constructs proposed by Collings (1997) which describe the social attitudes towards CSA that perpetuate the existence of their myths and stereotypes. These include Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes (Collings, 1997). The reviewed research on CSA has been added to this foundation, enriching its theory as well as highlighting the similarities, contradictions and shortcomings identified. Its aim is to provide a succinct review in a structure that enhances later pursuits of comparability. In order to effectively compare the findings, distinctions between certain constructs needed to be brought to light and are therefore discussed below.

The Separation of Blame, Responsibility and Culpability

Previous research has identified blame as an influential factor in maintaining the myths and stereotypes of CSA (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Weatherred, 2018). While several papers (Collings, 2006; Graham, Rogers & Davies, 2007; Mellot, Wagner & Broussard, 1997) have used the terms blame and responsibility interchangeably when reporting their findings, Maynard and Wiederman (1997) has stressed that a distinction be made between these two- as separate constructs. In support of this distinction, Shaver and Drown (1986) highlighted the differences between blame and responsibility; in that responsibility is ascribed to the outcome of an event, whereas blame is assigned after evaluating and rejecting the individual's rationale or excuse for their actions. To further assist with this distinction, attributions of responsibility are made in the absence of affect, whereas attributions of blame reportedly carry negative affect (Weiner, 1995, as cited in Maynard & Wiederman, 1997).The distinction between constructs have to be first acknowledged as it carries important implications in CSA scale constructions as well as research comparability.

In addition to the need for distinctions in blame and responsibility, attributions of culpability also require some distinction. However, from this review, the definition is quite blurred. Some researchers have identified culpability as an umbrella term for both blame and responsibility

(Collings, 2006; Hatton & Duff, 2016), whereas others appear to have assigned additional items to this construct, including; sympathy, guilt, encouragement, naivety, trusting and judgment of character (Davies, Rogers & Hood, 2009; Rogers, Josey & Davies, 2007). As a result, the lack of distinction for attributions of culpability will be noted for future researchers and addressed in a separate category below. Finally, the assigning of guilt has remained a popular factor throughout the literature, however it has merely been associated with a lack of innocence and has not been provided with a distinction in relation to the aforementioned factors; blame, responsibility and culpability. As with the abovementioned constructs, this makes for a rather difficult review when attempting to identify consistencies across the literature and should be reflected upon in future studies. The lack of disparity between constructs has the potential to undermine certain research findings for lack of construct comparability. It is for this reason that each construct will be discussed separately with regard to our findings.

The findings within this literature review, regarding attributions of blame, responsibility, culpability and guilt were multifaceted. These factors were assigned to various individuals within the abuse context namely; the victim, perpetrator and non-offending parents. In addition to this, the items influencing attributions and the degree to which attributions were assigned, were also identified. Such items included: Respondent Characteristics, Victim Characteristics and Offender Characteristics. In order to accommodate for better structure within this review, the subsequent findings have been discussed according to sub-categories, namely; Sex and Gender, Age, The Denial of Reality, The Professional, The Process, The Perpetrator, The Influence of Culture, The Limitation of Research and The Recommendations for Future Research. Each item will be discussed with regard to their various interactions and influence on CSA myths and stereotypes.

BLAME

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS
The attribution of blame among respondents appeared quite frequently throughout the literature and was mediated by characteristics such as respondent gender and trauma history. When compared to female respondents, the literature concerning the relationship between respondent gender and attributions of blame, identified male respondents as generally more blaming of CSA victims than females (Collings, 2006; Hatton & Duff, 2016). In addition to the above finding and concurring with previous literature, male respondents were also found specifically more blaming

towards victims of incest (Collings, 2006). While males appeared to dominate in their attributions of victim blame, attributions were found to lessen for respondents (both male and female) who reported having a previous history of sexual abuse (Ford, Schindler & Medway, 2001).

In order to explain the male inclination in attributing blame towards victims of CSA, Shaver's theory of Defensive Attribution was used (Shaver, 1970 as cited in Ford et al., 2001). According to this theory, the similarity of a person to the perpetrator seems to negatively influence the degree of blame attributed towards the offender (Shaver, 1970). In addition, the impact of a recognized similarity also appeared to increase a person's drive to evade the potential blame rather than escape the occurrence of the event itself (Shaver, 1970). Therefore, the theory posits that male respondents were able to identify with the perpetrators of CSA to some degree and would then respond in a less persecutory manner, based on their perceived similarity.

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

While the age of respondents did not significantly feature as an influencer of blame, the age of CSA victims was highly influential. According to the literature, the older victims were perceived as more blameworthy when compared to victims of a younger age (Collings, 2006; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). As a result of the blame assigned to the older victim, perpetrators were in turn deemed less blameworthy for their actions (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). An interesting study conducted by Hunter, Goodwin and Wilson (1992) found evidence of high self-blame attributions among CSA victims who were abused at an older age in comparison to the majority of those abused at a younger age. According to Hunter et al. (1992), the younger victims reportedly experienced the opposite effect to those older, and were found to assign complete blame towards their oppressor, with their concept of self still intact.

The extent to which victims of CSA resisted the perpetrator, during the offence, also appeared to affect attributions of blame. According to the literature, significant levels of blameworthiness were attributed to victims; who showed little resistance to the assault (Collings, 2006), who appeared encouraging towards the sexual offense (Ford et al., 2001) and who dressed in a sexualized manner (Rogers, Lowe & Reddington, 2016). A particular theory was acknowledged by Ford et al. (2001) in their understanding of victim behaviour which seemed to deviate from the 'expected' understanding.

The above mentioned theory was originally proposed by Summit (1983) and is referred to as the Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome (CSAAS). According to Summit (1983) the social expectations of victim behaviour contradicts that which constitutes the reality of many victims and it fails to acknowledge the theory of accommodation as an explanation for victim behaviour that has been supported as theoretically sound. With reference to the literature, the CSAAS proposes a five part model, consisting of two descriptors relating victim vulnerability as well as three possibilities, concerning the victim response to CSA. They are presented as follows "(1) secrecy, (2) helplessness, (3) entrapment and accommodation, (4) delayed, unconvincing disclosure, and (5) retraction," (Summit, 1983, p. 177). The concept of secrecy within this model pertains to furtiveness of the perpetrator that is imposed on the victim and its resultant consequences. According to Summit (1983), the imposition of secrecy (Part one) is laced with threat and is therefore perceived by the victim as an inherent badness and danger if revealed. As a result, the victim becomes disabled at the thought of disclosure, fearing the myriad consequences that may have been both implicitly and explicitly suggested by their perpetrator. In part two of the descriptor of helplessness, the model proposes that the child adopts a helpless stance in the face of their authority figure - whom they have only known to trust and obey (Summit, 1983). Because their social script is so tightly bound by a relation of submissiveness, the child knows nothing else but to rather "play possum" to their figure of authority, or submit (Summit, 1983, p. 183). The entrapment and accommodation in Part three thereafter, makes reference to the limited period in which the victim is typically able to reach out, before succumbing to a reality of abuse. According to Summit (1983), the sense of entrapment is perpetuated by the perpetrator's threat, which forces the victim to then accommodate for the abuse out of fear. Part four of the model suggests that disclosure is actually atypical in CSA and such cases are usually instigated by external forces. According to this part of the model, disclosure may result in disbelief, discreditation and conflict within a family system, all of which leads to the probability of retraction. The final part to the CSAAS model refers to the conflictual feelings of anger and guilt that is experienced by the victim. According to Summit (1983), the resultant disclosure typically produces negative responses or interactions within a family unit which brings about feelings of guilt and self-sacrifice in the victim, ultimately resulting in their retraction of previous statements. Therefore a child reacting in a passive or inviting manner may

be understood as a child trying to survive their trauma by succumbing to their reality and making accommodations as a result of their fear and feelings of entrapment.

This understanding of the child's behaviour as the product of their trauma is unrecognized by many and is reflected in the evidence of victim blaming within the literature. Several articles have acknowledged the negative consequences of victim blaming as examples of what could lead to secondary victimization (Collings, 2006, Graham et al., 2007, Hatton & Duff, 2016, Rogers et al., 2016; Tang & Yan, 2004; Rogers et al., 2010). According to Williams (1984 as cited in Campbell & Raja, 1999), secondary victimization refers to the recurrent ramifications of assault which are instigated and perpetuated by the judgmental attitudes of others towards the assaulted. The negative attitudes and consequential behaviours of others is said to result in a non-supportive, exclusionary experience for the victim (Williams, 1984 as cited in Campbell & Raja, 1999). The creation of an almost persecutory experience for a victim post-abuse has been identified as contributing to a more stressful and traumatic situation (Campbell & Raja, 1999).

ITEMS INFLUENCING THE ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME TOWARDS NON-OFFENDING PARENTS

According to the literature, the attributions of blame towards non-offending parents are positively correlated with respondent gender and the sexualized dressing of CSA victims. In light of the research, it appears that men attribute higher levels of blame to non-offending parents than women and both parties assign further blame to the parents of victims who adorn more sexualized attire (Rogers et al., 2016; Wolfteich & Cline, 2013). An increased effect in blame was also noted when the victim's age was added to the abovementioned interaction (Rogers et al., 2016). According to the study conducted by Rogers et al. (2016), the parents of a younger victim (wearing sexualized attire) were assigned more blame than an older victim wearing sexualized attire. The study also highlighted a male's inclination to hold the parents of the older victim less accountable for incidences of CSA (Rogers et al., 2016).

The non-offending parents' attributions of blame towards CSA victims were also researched and evidence of blame was found in scenarios involving a younger (adolescent perpetrator) instead of an adult perpetrator and an older victim (Walsh, Cross & Jones, 2012).

When conducting research on perpetrators of sexual abuse, perpetrators were found in support of victim blaming and exceeding other respondent groups in this area when compared (Veach, 1999).

When comparing the responses of a professional to that of a layperson, in terms of blame, many similarities were shared. However the professionals who attributed more victim blame than others were identified by Ford et. al (2001) to be older and limited in their exposure to educative programs involving CSA.

RESPONSIBILITY

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Research articles demonstrated contrasting evidence for both male and female respondent attributions of responsibility. While two articles (Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Quas, Bottoms, Haegerich & Nysse-Carris, 2002) demonstrated a gender bias among male respondents, attributing more responsibility to male than female victims, an alternate study conducted by Geddes, Tyson and McGreal (2013) found no such bias. Similarly, although the article compiled in 2002 by Quas et al. who also observed a gender bias in female respondents assigning more responsibility to male victims, research conducted in 2009 did not support victim gender as an influencing factor for female respondents (Geddes et al., 2013; Hestick & Perrino, 2009). Therefore, in terms of respondent attributions of responsibility, findings are currently inconclusive and a recommendation for further exploration of this topic is proposed.

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

In terms of responsibility, several articles established that attributions of victim responsibility were based on particular victim characteristics and victim responses during the sexual abuse (Hestick & Perrino, 2009; Quas et al., 2002; Spencer & Tan, 2000). The literature concerning the influence of victim age on assigning responsibility was consistent throughout this review. Children who were younger in age were assigned less responsibility for their abuse than victims who were older (Bottoms et al., 2014; Hestick & Perrino, 2009). Thus it can be said that victim age was positively correlated with the degree of responsibility assigned, with the emphasis of greater responsibility placed on victims nearing adolescence (Rogers et al., 2016).

ITEMS INFLUENCING THE ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS NON-OFFENDING PARENTS

Interactions identified in the assignment of responsibility to non-offending parents included; victim age, as well as both victim and perpetrator gender. In an article written by Hestick and Perrino (2009) higher levels of responsibility were attributed to non-offending parents in cases where the victim was younger and when a female victim was being abused by a perpetrator of the opposite sex. According to Rogers, Davies, Cottam (2010), male respondents identified non-offending parents as needing to play a protective role in the children's lives and therefore assigned more responsibility to parents when CSA had occurred.

CULPABILITY

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Upon review of the literature all evidence dealing with victim culpability reported that male respondents were more prone to assigning higher levels of victim culpability than their female counterparts and by contrast, assigned less culpability to the sexual offender as well (Davies et al., 2009; Graham, Rogers & Davies 2007; Hatton & Duff, 2016; Rogers, Josey & Davies, 2007). In 2009, the results of Cossins et al.'s research pointed to higher levels of culpability being assigned to perpetrators of CSA by respondents who had children of their own, as opposed to those without. This finding perhaps points to the possible protective nature that may arise from parents who might identify their own child in the description provided of the child victim, resulting in a similar effect to the previously mentioned Defensive Attribution Theory by Shaver (1970). A defensive attribution by proxy, if you may.

Interesting evidence arose from a research article which investigated the influence of questioning styles and language use on respondents' attributions of culpability (Collings & Bodill, 2003). According to Collings and Bodill (2003) the use of closed-ended questioning, choice of lexicon and sample group were highly influential factors in attributions of culpability. In addition, the use of consensual language and student samples were found more damaging to the perceptions of the victim (Collings & Bodill, 2003).

VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

 According to one research article, perpetrators were held more culpable for their actions when the abuse involved a younger victim in comparison to a victim who was already in their adolescence (Rogers et al., 2007). In the same article, the perpetrator of sexual abuse was assigned higher levels of culpability if the victim was experiencing sexual abuse for the first time, rather than having a history of sexual abuse and re-experiencing it (Rogers et al., 2007). While the above results may reflect the participant's concern for the defiling a child's innocence, it seems to indicate a lack of participant's understanding in the traumatic effects suffered by those who experience chronic sexual trauma.

ITEMS INFLUENCING THE ATTRIBUTION OF CULPABILITY TOWARDS NON-OFFENDING PARENTS

Victim resistance and victim age, as with attributions of blame, were significant factors in the assignment of culpability to non-offending parents. Both male and female respondents appeared to rate families with higher levels of culpability when victims solely voiced their resistance to the abuse rather than resisting in a more physical manner (Rogers et al., 2010). The above findings appear to imply that participants perceive parenting (in terms of monitoring and modelling roles) as an influencing factor in the occurrence of CSA.

With regard to victim age, both respondent groups (male and female) appeared to assign more culpability to the non-offending parents of a younger victim as opposed to an adolescent victim of CSA (Rogers et al., 2007). Additionally, victim attractiveness was seen as another contributing factor in the study of Rogers et al., 2007, who found evidence of male respondents attributing higher levels of culpability to the non-offending mother, when the victim was perceived as more attractive. This particular finding seems to feed into the diffusion of blame that characterizes a substantial number of CSA myths.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PERCEIVED EXTENT OF ABUSE AND ATTRIBUTIONS OF CULPABILITY

Overall the assigning of culpability was the only factor discussed in relation to the extent or seriousness of the CSA. In a study conducted by Graham et al. (2007), it appeared that respondents shifted the culpability away from the victim's family and placed it on the perpetrator when the abuse was seen as more physically invasive, involving vaginal penetration. Victims who experienced what was perceived as a less invasive form of abuse were assigned more

culpability for their own abuse (Graham et al., 2007). Levels of culpability were also assigned to victims based on the type of coercion used by the perpetrator. The study conducted by Rogers et al. (2010), concluded that male (as opposed to female) respondents deemed victims more culpable for their own abuse when verbally rather than physically coerced.

SEX AND GENDER

Sexism and gender bias appear to have quite a staggering influence on CSA myths and stereotypes. According to research, respondents who maintain more sexist attitudes are more likely to endorse the myths and stereotypes identified in CSA (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer & Freyd, 2009). Furthermore, gender bias appears to affect the perceived legitimacy of sexual abuse in scenarios that involve a female (as opposed to male) perpetrator and male victim (Quas et al., 2002; Spencer & Tan, 2000). Although prejudices were also identified within some studies regarding homosexuality and same-sex encounters, not all articles found evidence of this (Spencer & Tan, 2000). Victims and perpetrators identified as homosexual in orientation were viewed in a more negative light by respondents, than their heterosexual counterparts (Hatton & Duff, 2016; Wiley & Bottoms, 2009).

In matters of abuse severity, same-sex CSA interactions of abuse were perceived as more severe and having a greater negative impact on respondent perceptions (Maynard & Wiederman,1997; Mellott, Wagner & Broussard, 1997). While sexism reportedly leads to more CSA myth endorsement, inclinations towards a more feminine orientation were identified by Tennfjord, (2006) as contributing to the discouragement of attitudes in support of CSA. The contribution of femininity is demonstrated in a substantial number of articles which have pointed towards the overall positive, pro-victim responses to CSA from female respondents (Bottoms et al., 2014; McAuliff, Lapin & Michel, 2015; Quas et al., 2002; Spencer & Tan, 2000; Tang & Yan, 2004; Tennfjord, 2006; Wiley & Bottoms, 2009).

While men have been identified as having a more negative stance (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Graham et al., 2007; Spencer & Tan, 2000) and endorsing more CSA myths in studies conducted in diverse countries of origin (Collings, 2003; Collings, et al., 2009; Cossins, Goodman-Delahunty & O'Brien, 2009), respondents' overall perceptions of CSA have reportedly leant in favour of the victim and against the actions of the perpetrator (Bottoms et al., 2014; Spencer & Tan, 2000). Although some articles have noted that female respondents attribute higher levels of

severity towards incidences of CSA, (in comparison to their male counterparts) perpetrator gender was found to have mediating effects. When an incident of CSA comprised of a male offender, female respondents appeared to endorse more CSA myths by labeling the male perpetrated act of CSA as more serious than acts committed by female offenders (Geddes et al., 2013; Spencer & Tan, 2000).

A study conducted in 2014 recognized empathy as a distinguishing factor between male and female respondents when assessing participant reactions to CSA (Bottoms et al., 2014). Although the article has not directly associated the capacity to empathize as a factor in the discouragement of supportive attitudes to CSA, it is related to the female respondent who, in most cases, has been identified as upholding fewer myths and stereotypes about CSA. Therefore further investigations of the direct link between empathy and CSA myths should be considered for future research.

AGE

Age made a significant and rather consistent impression on attitudes towards CSA. An older victim of CSA was considered in a more negative light than those who were younger at the time of the abuse (Collings, 2006; Rogers et al., 2016; Spencer & Tan, 2000). Specific interactions were observed in several studies between prepubescent and adolescent victims. According to the literature, victims who had already entered adolescence were perceived as more adult and their abuse was judged as less harmful than a similar incident experienced by their prepubescent counterpart (Kite & Tyson, 2004; Maynard & Wiederman, 1997; Rogers et al., 2016). Therefore, the relationship between unfavorable attitudes and older victims would be understood as positively correlated, with unfavorable attitudes increasing as the victim aged. Evidence collected in a study by Klettke and Mellor (2012) offered a slightly different view on respondents' perspectives of victim age and maturity. According to this article, while many adolescents are known to engage in sexual activities before the age of fourteen; respondents perceived children at this age as sexually naïve and thus not as similar to adults in their sexual competence as previous articles have suggested (Klettke & Mellor, 2012).

AN IDENTIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND CREDIBILITY

Out of the four articles that investigated the effects of age on victim credibility, three provided guidelines on how credibility was defined (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Rogers et al., 2007; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). It appears that Tabak & Klettke (2014) and Rogers et al. (2007) identified credibility as somewhat based on Bottoms and Goodman's construction of credibility which involves two factors, namely; competence and trustworthiness (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994). However, different items were used to measure credibility in each article, leading to slight discrepancies in interpretation. Tabak & Klettke (2014) used items such as the child's trustworthiness, cognitive development and sexual knowledge to rate their level of credibility, whereas Rogers et al. (2007) used items that included victim accuracy, naivety and competency in their evaluation. In identifying the factors influencing ratings of credibility, research articles have found victims of a younger age to be assigned more credibility in their disclosures of CSA than older victims (Gabora, Spanos & Joab, 1993; Rogers et al., 2007; Spencer & Tan, 2000; Tabak & Klettke, 2014). They are perceived, in reference to Bottoms and Goodman's (1994) construction, as having lower levels of sexual cognizance and higher levels of sincerity or innocence which makes for a more trustworthy disclosure. Recantations were also investigated in relation to age and credibility. Due to their association with a certain level of competency, recanted statements by older victims, in line with Bottoms and Goodman's (1994) theory, were considered more genuine than any performed by their younger counterparts (Molinaro & Malloy, 2016).

AN IDENTIFIED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND MASCULINITY

During the review, there was also evidence of interactions between victim age and negative respondent perceptions. According to two articles, sexual abuse concerning same-sex interactions with an adolescent male victim led to respondents endorsing more CSA myths and perceiving the adolescent male as less masculine for being abused (Quas et al. 2002; Spencer & Tan, 2000). From these articles, one could deduce that respondents in these particular cases viewed the incident of CSA as less abusive and the victim more to blame.

A LACK OF GENERAL KNOWLEDGE OF CSA

On extraction of the respondents' general perceptions of CSA victim characteristics, conflicting findings emerged which reflect a general lack of respondent knowledge about CSA. While the articles conducted by McGuire and London (2017) and Collins (1996) acknowledged that the

majority of their respondents correctly agreed to females being the most frequent victims of CSA, attention needs to be drawn to the perceptions of minority groups and respondent majorities in alternate papers. Two articles in this review provided evidence for the majority of respondents in one article (Hatton & Duff, 2016) and a considerable minority in the other (McGuire & London, 2017) in believing that both male and female children were at equal risk for being sexually abused. In addition, while males are considered at less risk to CSA, a substantial minority of interviewed adults believed the reality of male CSA victims to be rather improbable (Tang & Yan, 2004). The article written by McGuire and London (2017) also identified a considerable minority of their respondents were unaware of the age group that is considered most at risk for CSA. While these results are taken from respondent minorities, 40% of the sample is quite significant and therefore warrants acknowledgement.

EFFECTS OF ABUSE AND PERCEIVED SEVERITY

On reviewing the literature, common assumptions concerning abuse symptomology in CSA were identified. These assumptions consisted of both behavioural and physical symptoms being present in victims as apparent evidence of their abuse. Overall respondents were prone to associate the physical and more explicit behavioural symptoms as common and sure signs of CSA (Ige & Fawole, 2011; Kisanga et al., 2011; Tang & Yan, 2004). Endorsed by the majorities (Márquez-Flores, Márquez-Hernández & Granados-Gámez, 2016; Tang & Yan, 2004), this perception was pointed out by researchers as a rather limiting definition of what could constitute as an indicator of CSA (Tang & Yan, 2004). In articles written by Calvert and Munsie-Benson (1999) and McGuire and London (2017), more than 70% of respondents assumed that a victim of CSA would demonstrate behavioural changes as a result of their abuse. Additionally, in an article conducted by McAuliff et al. (2015) it appeared that respondents held expectations of 'victim appropriate' behaviours during testimony which indirectly affected their perceptions of victim credibility. Behaviours that did not meet respondent expectations were deemed, along with the victim of CSA, as less credible.

In terms of physical symptoms, several articles highlighted respondents' misguided assumptions that bodily injuries or violent acts were one of the surest and most common identifiers of CSA (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016; McGuire & London, 2017, Tang & Yan, 2004; Weatherred, 2018).

Apart from the above expectations associated with CSA, many articles conducted research on the factors considered in rating abuse severity among cases. According to the literature, the perpetrator relation (Kite & Tyson, 2004), type of coercion (Rogers et al., 2010), level of child resistance (Ko & Koh, 2007), degree of intrusion (Ko & Koh, 2007) as well as the age (Geddes et al., 2013; Hartman et al. 1994; Kite and Tyson, 2004; Rogers et al., 2007) and gender (Ko & Koh, 2007) of the victims were the identified factors among which respondents based their ratings of abuse severity. It appears that victims who were abused by a non-relative, were verbally coerced (rather than physically), who showed little resistance, were subjected to penetration, were older and were abused by a person of the opposite sex were all considered to have experienced a less severe trauma.

THE DENIAL OF REALITY

MINIMIZATION

Identified as a theme in several journal articles, minimization is highly prominent in literature concerning the beliefs about CSA (Collings, 1997; Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). After reviewing the literature, minimizing seems to include the denying of CSA realities in terms of prevalence as well as its harmful effects. Research has shown evidence of respondents believing CSA to be a rare occurrence and causing little to no damage to victims of CSA (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Du Toit & Pretorius, 1997; Márquez-Flores et al., 2016; Tennfjord, 2006). This denial of abuse among population groups is part of what contributes to the difficulties in preventative and supportive strategies of victims needed within society.

While this review has previously identified male respondents as the dominant contributor to CSA myths supporting the minimization of abuse, a study conducted by Calvert and Munsie-Benson (1999) identified a broader range of respondent characteristics of those considered more endorsing of myths or were limited in their knowledge of CSA. Such respondents reportedly included "men, unmarried respondents, respondents who had not had children, respondents in younger age groups, respondents of Latino descent, and respondents with low incomes or low education" (Calvert & Munsie-Benson, 1999, p.671). While the majority of these findings seem unmentioned elsewhere, evidence for respondents with lower incomes endorsing more myths also seem to concur with the findings established by Du Toit and Pretorius (1997).

CSA is rife, just not in my home –playing into an unconscious minimization CSA

Many articles appear to acknowledge the gravity of CSA in relation to perceptions of safety and prevention. Feelings of helplessness have been reflected among various adult respondents in protecting children against CSA, with many parents according to Collins (1996) perceiving CSA as difficult to control. According to research findings, adult respondents have found their environmental factors unsupportive in their struggle to manage or prevent incidences of CSA. These factors include poor healthcare and legal systems, poor socio-economic status and the perpetuating societal myths about CSA (Kisanga et al., 2011). In accordance with Kisanga et al. (2011) who identified the negative effects of a low-income on CSA management or prevention, an article by Du Toit and Pretorius (1997) reinforced the above evidence concerning one's income status by identifying respondents of high socio-economic statuses as more safeguarding of their children in relation to incidences of CSA. A reason for this relationship may be explained by the parents with higher earnings' having greater access to resources and academic knowledge made available by their financially superior situation groups (Du Toit & Pretorius, 1997).

While it appears that adults are greatly concerned by the prevalence of CSA, an interesting finding was noted across several papers which concerned respondents' impressions of their personal danger to CSA as opposed to that of the community. Four articles gave evidence in support of respondents maintaining lower levels of perceived personal or associated risk to CSA in comparison to the higher levels of risk attributed to the general public or those considered in less association. Thus the idea that 'CSA is rife, just not in my home' is reflected. This finding demonstrates the subtlety with which minimization in CSA may operate and illustrates a dangerous denial, unconsciously endorsed by many (Collins, 1996; Du Toit & Pretorius, 1997; Goldman & Padayachi, 2002; Ige & Fawole, 2011).   All of which could in fact, leave respondents more vulnerable to CSA and become a fertile breeding ground for incest denial.

SIBLING INCEST

An example of sexual abuse that may be perceived as less common and of little personal risk is sibling incest. The poor acknowledgement of sibling incest as a potential threat appears to reflect in the number of articles found in the review which address such an occurrence. In the review of literature, only one article (Carlson, Maciol & Schneider, 2006) was found that investigated the nature of sibling incest. Despite its scarce appearance among the literature, it is important to acknowledge the current findings and highlight the pattern of abuse found, which may ultimately be of use in detection and prevention processes. According Carlson et al. (2006), sibling incest was identified by previous victims as intrusive and violent experiences that persisted over a long period of time. Approximately 30% of respondents described the incest as being suggested by their sibling and starting off consensually, however it would later transpire into a more threatening and aggressive interaction (Carlson et al., 2006). During their research, Carlson et al. (2006) identified that most incidences went unreported and incestuous relations were more likely to cease later on due to external factors. Interestingly, when interviewed, 50% of participants reported being exposed to physical abuse during this time as well (Carlson et al., 2006). In response to this finding, (Carlson et al., 2006) proposed a possible causal relationship between sibling incest and other forms of abuse and encouraged further investigations.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

In order to account for the endorsement of such myths and stereotypes of CSA, studies were conducted to assess for the level of influence that education and experience may have on attitudes towards CSA. On review of the available articles, certain complications and contradictory evidence were found. While two articles found a person's educational background or training to have no significant influence (Collings, 2003; Kovera, Borgida, Gresham, Swim, & Gray, 1993), the educational background of a respondent in other articles appeared influential when a person has a substantial educational background (Cossins et al., 2009; Fuselier, Durham & Wurtele, 2002). More specifically, positive findings surfaced as a result of a person's educational background involving some form of training targeted at CSA (Collings, et al., 2009; Márquez-Flores et al., 2016). This theory was raised by Collings, et al. (2009), in their attempt to explain higher myth acceptance by South African students in tertiary as opposed to secondary education and by Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. (2008) where professionals endorsed more CSA myths than student samples. According to Collings, et al. (2009), it is possible that the education

syllabus for those at tertiary level were less inclusive of training in CSA than they were at the time that the high school students were enrolled. These deductions share similarities with Cossins et al. (2009) who found respondents between the ages of 25 and 55 years to support fewer myths about CSA due to their extensive life experience and development with a more abuse-conscious society. Interestingly, as opposed to educative training in CSA, experience in the field did not contribute to an expert's knowledge in CSA (Collings & Suliman, 2005; Korkman, Svanbäck, Finnilä & Santtila, 2014). According to Korkman et al. (2014) an expert's experience did, however, add to their unmerited confidence in the accuracy of beliefs and is commonly relied on (Finnilä-Tuohimaa, 2005). This finding is quite startling and raises alarms to the potential dangers of having ignorant professionals confidently practicing within their field and the unsupportive repercussions it may have on a victim of CSA.

THE PROFESSIONAL

KNOWLEDGE AMONG PROFESSIONALS

According to the findings, all professionals (to some degree) endorsed myths regarding CSA (Briggs & Potter, 2004; Collings & Suliman, 2005; Ma, Yau, Ng & Tong, 2004; Tabachnick & Pope, 1997). With respect to an article by (Collings & Suliman, 2005) it appeared that those within the profession of psychology endorsed the least myths, followed by those who held a position as a social worker. In comparison, medical practitioners were found to endorse the most myths about CSA (Collings & Suliman, 2005).Data collected by Tabachnick and Pope (1997) highlighted the cautious approach adopted by psychologists when assessing a case, which may explain the reason that psychologists show less support for myths and stereotypes of CSA. According to their research, psychologists were more inclined to assess possible incidences of CSA on a case-by-case basis and utilize more methods of assessment before coming to a conclusion. This approach could possibly suggest the psychologists' awareness of the symptom diversity in CSA and the implications of its lack of generalizability. Finally, research conducted on the knowledge held by educators in Singapore established that teachers in general were poorly educated around CSA and special needs educators were less knowledgeable than kindergarten teachers (Briggs & Potter, 2004). In this study, special needs teachers were shockingly unaware of the degree of risk their students were exposed to due to the special needs requirements. In response to the above and as supported in the article by Collings and Suliman (2005), the

differences in professional myth endorsement may be explained as a result of their divergent areas of training. That is, psychologists and social workers could be seen as more involved in cases of CSA in comparison to teachers and medical practitioners and therefore more likely to have received more in depth training for it.

SEX AS AN INFLUENCING FACTOR AMONG PROFESSIONALS

While myth acceptance was present across all studied professions, as with the general population, male professionals appeared to endorse more myths than female professionals (Collings, 2003; Collings & Suliman, 2005). Furthermore, as with the lay female respondent, female professionals seemed to support more pro-victim beliefs (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994; Finnilä-Tuohimaa, 2005; Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al., 2008; Gabora, Spanos & Joab, 1993; Tabachnick & Pope, 1997). The above findings however, were not consistent in a study conducted on police officers, where respondent gender was ineffectual (Kite & Tyson, 2004). Investigations for such a discrepancy would therefore be recommended for future researchers in hopes of identifying a) whether this finding is consistent among other police officers and b) what factors possessed by these officers may exclude them from entertaining the harmful biases found in CSA myth endorsement. That said, the article conducted by (Kite & Tyson, 2004) still identified prejudices among police officers in their leniency towards female perpetrators of CSA.

PROFESSIONALS PRO-VICTIM ATTITUDES AND PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS OF ABUSE

On reviewing the literature concerning the type of professional that endorses stronger pro-victim beliefs, an interesting finding was identified. When comparing all articles concerned it appeared that all professionals who worked closely with victims of CSA shared more pro-victim attitudes than those whose work was less involved with victims of CSA (Finnilä-Tuohimaa, 2005; Kovera et al, 1993). Additionally (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al.,2008) identified that clinicians who had children of their own held more pro-victim beliefs than those without. Therefore it could be deduced that professionals who are more affiliated with children in a personal or professional manner may possess a more pro-victim attitude and could hold potential biases as a result. This notion would be supported by the previous finding of parents within a general sample who also held more pro-victim beliefs as opposed to nonparents.

While the relation to children may affect a professional's attitude towards victims of CSA, according to a paper by Hartman, Karlson and Hibbard (1994), the same might be true for the

type of specialty held by an attorney. It appears that prosecuting attorneys made more pro-victim judgments when compared to defense attorneys, who were more pro-defendant. As the job of an attorney is to present their case against the accused, it may be possible that their sense of familiarity in prosecution may influence judgment in any case subsequent to their training (Hartman et al. 1994). In order to explain the less supportive stance by defense attorneys, Hartman et al. (1994) used the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. According to Festinger (1957, as cited in Hartman et al. 1994) cognitive dissonance is experienced when a person holds two contending beliefs or thoughts, in which one cannot logically exist with the other. Upon such an occurrence, significant psychological discomfort is experienced. The theory dictates that the individual is then forced to shift their cognitions, in favour of a particular perception (Festinger, 1957, as cited in Hartman et al. 1994). By so doing, one's cognition is slightly distorted in order to obtain the intended psychological relief. In the aforementioned article, the defense attorney may have experienced discomfort in the conflictual relationship between their moral and professional cognitions. In order to escape this discomfort, the defense attorneys may have altered their perceptions of the perpetrator to a less persecutory stance than that of the prosecutors.

On a final note and according to the research, when appraising the gravity of CSA, professionals held varied opinions. While the majority of school counselors (Goldman & Padayachi, 2002), police officers (Kite & Tyson, 2004) and educators (Briggs & Potter, 2004) viewed CSA as a serious issue, slightly less than a third of the educators thought otherwise. Although falling within the minority of a sample, a denial of the gravity concerning CSA in society is alarming and is thus noteworthy. In addition to the above, a study conducted by Ko and Koh (2007) identified that nurses who had minimal to no previous experiences with sexual abuse appeared to rate a proposed incident of CSA as much more serious than nurses who were previously exposed to more intrusive types of abuse. Such a finding perhaps points to a normalization or accommodation of trauma for previous victims of CSA and raises concerns to their perceptions of normalcy post-abuse.

THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWING
Apart from the necessity of professionals seeking training in CSA, education concerning the influential nature of interviewing is also important in lowering myth endorsement among

professionals. However, research has pointed to the lack of awareness among judges and clinicians, with respect to the use and subtle influences of interviewing on the decision making processes regarding CSA (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al., 2009; Korkman et al., 2014). While this finding is only true for the two articles identified in the literature review, additional research is recommended on the professional's awareness of interviewing suggestiveness to assist in illustrating the breadth and depth of this problem.

THE PROCESS

'The Process' as indicated above, pertains to the procedure and implications that usually follow after the disclosing or reporting of CSA

VICTIM DISCLOSURES & REPORTING

Disclosures of CSA are known to be commonly questioned. Research indicates that respondents are somewhat suspicious of CSA disclosures, questioning the legitimacy of victim memories, the intention of the disclosure and the possibility of children being manipulated into false disclosures (Cossins et al., 2009; McGee, O'Higgins, Garavan & Conroy, 2011; Tang & Yan, 2004).

According to the review, little evidence has been collected on the reporting of CSA. However victim and respondent characteristics have been found to influence the participants' perceptions of reporting and disclosure. An article written by Cromer and Freyd (2007) found evidence for the influence of participant gender and a history of trauma in the believing of CSA reporting. According to Cromer and Freyd (2007) women were found to be generally more believing of CSA reports than men. Furthermore, they found a history of trauma among male participants to be a significant factor in increasing their likelihood of believing such reports (Cromer & Freyd, 2007). This positive influence of previous trauma was also found in the research conducted by (Cromer & Freyd, 2009), and thus concurs with the above.

The age at which the incident of abuse occurred has also been identified as an influencer of beliefs in the memories or occurrence of CSA (Tabachnick & Pope, 1997). According to their study, Tabachnick and Pope (1997) provide evidence for a therapist's inclination towards believing that an incident of CSA took place when the victim was several years older as opposed to age two. The above finding implies that respondents tend to base their judgments on an age at which memories are more likely retrievable.

MEMORY

Repression

According to research findings, repressed memories of CSA have garnered much doubt among respondents (Cossins et al., 2009; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Tetford & Schuller, 1996). While one article has acknowledged the overall negative stance taken on by male respondents, female respondents have been more affected by the presence of a therapist in uncovering these repressed memories. The workings of a therapist in assisting to uncover a victim's repressed memories appear to negatively affect female respondents' beliefs in the authenticity of such memories, once again leading to feelings of disbelief and suspiciousness (Tetford & Schuller, 1996).

RESPONDENT REPORTS

In terms of report processes and among the general public, an article by Calvert and Munsie-Benson (1999) established that law enforcement officers and medical practitioners' were considered the respondents' first choice of contact when reporting incidences of CSA. In addition to this, other research brought forth findings that suggested the qualified educator decision to report abuse would be based on their perception of the report's benefit to the child, instead of strictly following legal obligations (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016).

THE LEGAL CONTEXT

As sexism and gender biases were previously noted as popular in CSA literature, it should be noted that an article written by Quas et al. (2002) found no significant relation to such attitudes in predicting court judgments. However, the authors of this research have cautioned the public on this information, which they have deemed possibly premature and thus in need of further research. When brought into the legal context, certain factors such as the presence of a support person and the consistency of a victim's statement have been shown to affect participant perceptions, highlighting their closely-held beliefs and stereotypes.

Support Persons

Like the negative perceptions gathered from participants who felt the collaboration of victim and a therapist to be too interfering, the close proximity of a support person's seating during the testimony of CSA victims was also negatively perceived by respondents (McAuliff et al., 2015). According to their research, a victim's credibility was reportedly questioned and their testimony

was assumed to have been manipulated by the support person when seated beside them. While it was recorded that participants were unknowing of the support person's influence on their perceptions, it was indeed significant. The negative influences of support persons according to McAuliff et al. (2015) were also found to lessen the assignment of offender-guilt (McAuliff et al., 2015)

Although the presence of a support person has been proven to negatively influence victim credibility (McAuliff et al., 2015), a study conducted by Bottoms and Goodman (1994), found that the supportive testimony of a second victim of CSA enhances the credibility ratings of the first victim.

Statement consistency

An additional influencing factor on victim testimony, namely statement consistency, was researched in 2016 by Molinaro and Malloy. Their findings suggested that when the initial statements of individuals were marked by apparent inconsistencies such as a pre-adolescent (positive indicator) who was the alleged offender (negative indicator), respondents tended to rely more on follow up-statements for consistency before passing judgment. Thus inconsistencies created uncertainty among respondents which resulted in a reliance on follow up statements for evaluative confirmation. The researchers of this article referred to this process as a cue-dissimilarity process (Molinaro & Malloy, 2016).

THE MALE PERPETRATOR

MYTH ENDORSEMENT ON PERPETRATOR PROFILES

On review of the literature, evidence of myth endorsement among respondents was prevalent and varied. While some respondents could correctly profile the typical offender of CSA, others could not. Consistent with prior research, most respondents perceived a typical perpetrator of CSA as male (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010; Fuselier, Durham, & Wurtele, 2002; Wiley & Bottoms, 2009). According to the research, respondents had conflicting perceptions of what the perpetrator's relation to a victim of CSA typically was. Albeit, the majority of respondents in some articles correctly believed a known adult, of no blood relation to be considered the most likely offender as stated in (Korkman et al., 2014), a considerable number were more inclined to perceive a blood relative as the more likely abuser. Specifically, 25% of participants were more

likely to perceive a biological parent as the usual offender in an article by Korkman et al. (2014) and respondents in an article conducted by McGuire and London (2017) believed the probability of a relative within the family committing such abuse was twofold. In contrast, just below 20% of respondents in an article conducted by Calvert and Munsie-Benson (1999) believed a stranger to be the more likely perpetrator. Additionally, in an article evaluating parental preventative behaviours concerning CSA, more than 90% of parents focused on warnings against stranger danger than the dangers in relation to known adults and CSA (Ige & Fawole, 2011). In accordance with these perceptions research conducted by Du Toit and Pretorius (1997) identified respondent's failure to acknowledge their home as a place in which CSA could occur, reinforcing both the ideas of stranger danger and the previously mentioned denial of personal or associated risks to CSA. In terms of perpetrator age, the majority of respondents perceived offenders of CSA to be adults, either denying (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016) or giving little consideration (Calvert & Munsie-Benson,1999) to the reality of some offenders of CSA being children themselves. One article however, provided evidence for their respondent's awareness of the common age at which perpetrators of CSA begin offending, which is at the beginning of adolescence (Fuselier et al., 2002). The various misperceptions held by respondents regarding offender profiles leaves people more vulnerable and poorly equipped to safeguard themselves and others for whom they may be responsible.

A valuable addition to current literature on CSA, are papers investigating the perceptions and cognitions of offenders themselves. This review has identified six articles that targeted sexual offenders as their sample group (Collings & McArthur, 2000, Hartley, 1998; Kamuwanga & Ngoma, 2015; Mann, Webster, Wakeling & Marshall, 2007; Tennfjord, 2006; Veach, 1999). As assumed, perpetrators of CSA were in more support of CSA myths when compared to other sample groups (Collings & McArthur, 2000; Tennfjord, 2006). Despite this perpetrator support of CSA myths, on assessing perpetrator knowledge on CSA, research by Kamuwanga and Ngoma (2015) suggests that sexual offenders possibly had a more realistic view of CSA. When determining their perceived profile of a CSA perpetrator, respondents provided an incredibly inclusive response, implying that any profile is potentially a perpetrator. When investigating further, offenders discussed that CSA involves engaging in sexual activities with a minor, that girls and those left unprotected are most at risk and that CSA potentially occurs in hidden settings (Kamuwanga & Ngoma, 2015). The later specification of respondents, that any man in

general may be a potential offender, completely excludes female as known offenders and perhaps points to the gender bias and sexism held by these offenders in CSA.

A number of the identified articles were aimed at investigating the presence and influence of distorted cognitions held by sexual offenders, which allowed them to offend.

In the work produced by Mann et al. (2007), researchers went even further in identifying and explaining offenders' beliefs as implicit theories from which these apparent cognitions are derived. The implicit theories discussed are drawn from Ward and Keenan's (1999, as cited in Mann et al. 2007) two theories that are based on the assumptions that children are viewed as sexual objects and that sexual abuse is without harm. These two assumptions can be associated back to the Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness constructs proposed by Collings in (1997). A child viewed as a sexual object implies a label of ownership or responsibility that is then attributed to the child, leading to a type of victim-blaming and thus Blame Diffusion. The assumption that sexual abuse is without harm needs little elaboration and refers to the Denial of Abusiveness, which is experienced by the individual.

THE FEMALE PERPETRATOR

The female perpetrator has been provided with it its own heading. This is perhaps partly to symbolically display its isolation from current research but also because the findings from the only article out of all seventy-three reviewed, identifies distinctions in a female perpetrator that might warrant a divergence in understanding. The research conducted by Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly (2017) identified similarities and differences among male and female offenders. According to their review, female offenders maintained a similarity in age to their counterparts and did not appear to differ in the degree of intrusiveness regarding the assault which seemed to remain severe (inflicting acts of full penetration) (Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong & Connolly, 2017).

However the divergence between male and female offender appeared to lie among the characteristics of their most commonly occurring victim, the length at which the abuse continued and the legal proceedings that followed. According to Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly (2017) the victims of a female offender tended to be younger when legal action

was sought and most frequently male. With reference to length of abuse, the offenses were considered shorter than those of male offenders (Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong & Connolly, 2017). Lastly, the legal proceedings of female offender cases were found to be more efficiently processed and assigned lesser sentences than their male counterparts (Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly, 2017).

The findings reflected in the study by Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong and Connolly (2017), display the potential for ingrained myths and stereotypes within the legal system. It also reveals many curiosities around the reasoning for a female offender's shorter duration of abuse. This study provides the perfect platform for future research of female offenders and is in line with this review's recommendations.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON CSA MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

The influence of culture on CSA myths and stereotypes seems to be quite blurred and indistinct. While some articles do mention particular cultural findings, there is much speculation around them and little commitment to any conclusions. In an attempt to find common factors between the various findings, three concepts were found. These included the concepts of hierarchy, power and socio-cultural contexts. From what was discussed in the literature, the belief in (religious) hierarchy was evidenced by some as a positive factor in which attitudes were steered in opposition to CSA and hierarchy was seen as a protective factor (Tennfjord, 2006). Alternate texts, on the other hand, discussed the concept of (familial) hierarchy within particular cultures as potentially oppressive, where a child is considered lesser to any adult and thus easily dismissed or subdued in cases of CSA (Bubar & Bundy-Fazioli, 2011; Mellott et al., 1997).

In addition to the power of hierarchy, the influence of particular racial powers in CSA was also discussed within texts. According to a qualitative study conducted in rural Alaska, evidence was provided for the participants' perceptions of a "white culture" that fed the underreporting and concealment of CSA within the society (Bubar & Bundy-Fazioli, 2011, p.10). With reference to the above, it appeared that both the social class and economic standing of a racial group were positively correlated in controlling the manner in which a society responded to CSA. This finding, therefore demonstrates the dangerous power that resides in the attitudes of a dominant group and its influence over a society. The above 'white culture' finding has also been identified as distinctly different to the findings of Sawrikar and Katz (2017) who found a lack of awareness

among ethnic groups who have assigned the issues of CSA to being a 'white problem'. The review by Sawrikar and Katz (2017) identified CSA myths and a system of patriarchy to be perpetuators of these grave beliefs. This myth of a 'white problem' also fosters denial of personal and associated risk.

Apart from the dominance and power within cultures, the socio-cultural context concerning the social norms and rules of a group, are also indicated as influential factors regarding CSA. The socio-cultural context of a group may dictate the perceptions of accountability in CSA (Collings, et al., 2009); it may also contribute to the perpetuation of myth acceptance. Furthermore, one's socio-cultural context may influence the definition of which a group attributes to CSA.

 In terms of accountability, a study conducted by Collings, et al. (2009) identified certain distinctions between the perceptions of CSA accountability in Swedish, South African and Korean participants. From their findings, it appeared that participants of a socio-cultural context governed by collectivism (Korea) appeared to attribute more responsibility to society for any acts of CSA, whereas those influenced by or originating from an individualist (South African or Swedish) culture attributed more accountability to the individual themselves.

Amidst the literature, it appears that the perpetuation of CSA and its myth acceptance is also maintained by the social rules and norms within groups that govern; stigma, traditional beliefs and cultures of violence. A study identifying the reasons for a lack of transparency in cases of CSA found cultural stigma as a hindrance to CSA disclosure (Kisanga et al., 2011). The study brought evidence for a society in support of nondisclosures due to their desire to protect the victims of CSA from the predicted, negative experiences spawned from such stigma. In addition to the common difficulties experienced by cultural stigma, the more culture specific, traditional beliefs have also been reported as contributing factors to the perpetuation of CSA. According to (Kamuwanga & Ngoma, 2015) committing CSA is perceived by some as part of a traditional curative process for those infected with HIV/AIDS. The belief in such acts creates a strong drive within those desperate to rid themselves of this chronic illness and thus support the cognitive distortions held by potential perpetrators in inflicting such violence through 'justified' reasoning. In addition to the above, the research has also commented on a culture of violence that appears embedded in some societies, particularly South Africa (Magojo & Collings, 2003), and their influences on perceptions of CSA. In light of their findings, Magojo and Collings (2003) have

provided support for positive correlations between an individual's immersion into a culture of violence and their increased likelihood towards sexual aggression. According to the literature, it seems that a culture of contextual violence may lead to the internalization of violence within its people and as a result, lead to an increase in pro-violent behaviours (Magojo & Collings, 2003).

While the literature points to the occurrence of CSA as worldwide, it appears that there is no universally accepted legal or social definition of CSA. Across the literature, it seems that the definition of CSA is influenced by both cultural perceptions as well as the biographical details of victim and perpetrator. An example in a study conducted by Ko and Koh (2007), indicated an increase in Korean participants labeling incidences involving frottage as CSA in comparison to earlier studies using U.S participants. Furthermore, it was established that participants originating from India in a study conducted by Mellott et al. (1997), appeared to identify an incident of assault with a passive victim, to be as much an incident of CSA as those involving victims who were perceived as more resistant during the attack. The perceptions identified by Mellott et al. (1997) were in contrast to perceptions of a U.S sample used within the study. Thus as identified by Collings, et al. (2009), there appears to be poor construct comparability between cultures in terms of the definition of CSA. This finding highlights an important inconsistency that will remain in the literature until such time that it is addressed. It is important to note that very few of the articles in this review provided a clear definition of what they perceived and referred to as CSA. By omitting such information, the literature is left vulnerable to incorrect interpretations and poor construct validity. The above findings point to the layered and complex nature of culture which provides substantial opportunities for later research that will be addressed below.

Limitations of Reviewed Literature

A common limitation throughout the reviewed literature appeared to be the small sample size or choice of convenience sampling used by researchers. Such limitations in sampling create a sampling bias within the study, leading to a decrease in the generalizability of one's findings. Similarly, limitations of generalizability were found in studies that used vignettes, due to its unique depictions that are considered scenario-specific and may not reflect the reality of another situation (Collings, 2006; Ford et al., 2001; Hestick & Perrino, 2009). Another limitation explicitly noted by some researchers pertained to the poor operationalization of definitions and

constructs within the literature (Collings, et al., 2009; Goldman & Padayachi, 2002; Tang & Yan, 2004). The lack of operationalization in research, according to Goldman and Padayachi (2002) may result in misinterpretations by the participant, not to mention later readers of their work, which could ultimately affect the validity of the results.

Recommendations

In terms of the suggested areas for future research in CSA, a variety of recommendations were put forth. In order to address the limitations in generalizability, many articles suggested the replication of their specific findings in a population deemed more representative (Collings, 2006; Collings, et al., 2009; Collings & Suliman, 2005; Wiley & Bottoms, 2009). Additionally researchers have also cautioned against the methods of data collection and the suggestive nature of vignettes for example that need to be explicitly addressed in future (Collings, 2006; Collings & Bodill, 2003; McGuire & London, 2017). In line with the replication of previous findings, several papers have also indicated the need for cross-culturally reproduction of results. A cross-cultural comparison of findings, according to McGehee, (1984 as cited in Collings, et al., 2009) may further assist in one's understanding of the cultural variations in CSA perceptions. Other research has indicated an inclination towards the need for further understanding of the cause, predictability and accompanying psychological shift involved in committing CSA (Collings, 1997; Collings & McArthur, 2000; Magojo & Collings, 2003). Further work has also been suggested on the updating of the 1997 CSA myth scale (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010) and the exploration into the attributional thinking of parents, both non-complicit as well as those complicit in CSA (Wolfteich & Cline, 2013). Finally, due to the social implications of CSA, researchers have also advocated for more educative and training programs to be developed and utilize their findings to assist in CSA prevention. A more specific suggestion by Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) was for researchers to review the current literature on preventative measures of CSA, providing a foundation for the development and implementation of programmes.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

CONSISTENCIES AND CONTRADICTIONS

The systematic review of child sexual abuse myths and stereotypes highlights the consistencies and contradictions found within current literature. A general impression of bias in support of CSA myths and stereotypes has been observed among male respondents. Although this bias can be mediated by certain factors such as a respondent's history of trauma, it does not detract from the clear differences in gendered responses. According to the literature, those with more sexist attitudes are increasingly inclined to uphold attitudes in support of CSA (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Cromer & Freyd, 2009). Therefore, a feminist perspective (Seymour, 1998) has been used within the literature to makes sense of the male overindulgence in CSA myths and stereotypes. The males' supportive attitudes towards CSA, have thus contributed to the perpetuation of the social constructs underpinning CSA myths and stereotypes. These constructs have been described by Collings (1997) as the Diffusion of Blame, the Denial of Abusiveness and Restricted Stereotypes. In addition to the above, attributions of blame, responsibility and culpability towards the victim of CSA have been acknowledged and identified as creating additional stress and trauma to the victim which may potentially precipitate an experience of secondary victimization.

Victim characteristics, including gender and age have been found to sway respondents' attitudes towards CSA. In terms of gender, female victims are viewed as the more vulnerable population and are thus perceived as more severely affected by CSA than male victims. Furthermore, male perpetrated crimes were perceived as more severe than those committed by a female offender, as were crimes involving same-sex encounters of abuse. Consistencies within the literature reflect an overall positive perception towards a younger victim when compared to victims who are older (including adolescence and post-adolescence). Younger victims are seen as more trustworthy and incapable of detailed sexual falsification. As a result, they are deemed more credible.

Overall the literature displayed a general lack of knowledge among participants in terms of CSA risk factors. Studies indicated that respondents believe both male and female children are at equal risk for CSA (Hatton & Duff, 2016; McGuire & London, 2017) or that there is a high

improbability of male children falling victim to CSA (Tang & Yan, 2004). Each of the above findings provides an example of CSA myth exaggeration or minimization. In addition to the perceived risk concerning victim gender, the respondents' perceived personal risk of CSA has been identified as considerably lower than the level of risk that they attribute to the general public. The above finding was apparent across multiple papers and highlights respondents' unconscious workings of CSA minimization that increases their vulnerability to incidences of CSA.

Apart from the Denial of Abusiveness, evidence was also found for the endorsement of restricted stereotypes by respondents, when attempting to identify CSA. Several articles highlighted respondents' misguided assumptions that bodily injuries or violent acts were one of the surest and most common identifiers of CSA (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016; McGuire & London, 2017, Tang & Yan, 2004; Weatherred, 2018). Interestingly, of all the factors considered in evaluating the severity of abuse, the victim's age appeared to be the factor most commonly referenced.

In terms of education and experience, evidence appears to support the idea that specific training in CSA is a key factor in countering CSA myth endorsement. The above statement could in addition be indirectly supported by the evidence found for a recurrent positive correlation between socio-economic status and informed knowledge of CSA. It could be suggested that a higher income, leads to better educational access, which may include training in CSA and thus lead to the increase in informed knowledge of CSA. The positive effects of CSA training are also reiterated in the evidence provided on professionals' myth endorsement. The literature appeared to identify professionals (psychologists and social workers) who would typically be trained in some form of CSA during their coursework, as less supportive of CSA myths and stereotypes (Collings & Suliman, 2005).

Research on 'The Professional' tended to provide less concrete evidence on gendered perceptions of male respondents but provided sufficient evidence on the pro-victim beliefs supported by female professionals (Bottoms & Goodman, 1993; Finnilä-Tuohimaa, 2005; Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al., 2008; Gabora, Spanos & Joab, 1993; Tabachnick & Pope, 1997). While some articles identified males as more endorsing of CSA myths, contradictory evidence was found in police officers (Kite & Tyson, 2004). This perhaps might be due to a police officer's exposure to CSA training prior to his qualification. Research also showed that professionals who

interacted with children on a personal or professional basis were more inclined to have pro-victim attitudes as opposed to professionals who had limited interactions with children (Finnilä-Tuohimaa, 2005; Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al.,2008; Kovera et al, 1993).

In terms of 'The Process,' the research provided evidence for respondents' negative attitudes towards victim disclosure. These negative attitudes were characterized by disbelief and suspicion (Cossins et al., 2009; McGee et al., 2011; Tang & Yan, 2004). According to the literature, participant gender, their history of trauma and the victim's age on incident were found to mediate the respondents' belief in CSA disclosure and reporting (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Tabachnick & Pope, 1997). With reference to a child's memory of abuse, considerable apprehension by both genders was reported, however more doubt was raised by male participants (Tetford & Schuller, 1996). According to the literature, law enforcement officers and medical practitioners were considered the respondent's first choice of contact when reporting incidences of CSA (Calvert & Munsie-Benson 1999) and reports made via educators were found contingent upon the effect that reporting would have on the child's wellbeing (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016). With reference to the legal context, the close proximity of a support person's seating during victim testimony, has been shown to lead to the discreditation of the prosecution (McAuliff et al., 2015).

Pertaining to the available literature on 'The Male Perpetrator', evidence of myth endorsement was prevalent and varied. Respondents reflected variations in perpetrator stereotypes, with their beliefs ranging from a perpetrator as a blood relative to a perpetrator as complete stranger (Calvert & Munsie-Benson, 1999; Ige & Fawole, 2011; Korkman et al., 2014; McGuire & London, 2017). In relation to age, the majority of respondents perceived offenders of CSA to be adults, either denying (Márquez-Flores et al., 2016) or giving little consideration (Calvert & Munsie-Benson, 1999) to the reality of some offenders of CSA being children themselves. Valued research has been provided through investigations of CSA offenders themselves. Current research has led to the identification and differentiation of the offenders' distorted cognitions (Collings & McArthur, 2000; Tennfjord, 2006). The research also reflects that offenders appear more realistic in their understanding of CSA, related to prevalence and risk, making such investigations valuable for future research in attempt to find both realistic and in-depth insights.

In reference to 'The Female Perpetrator', evidence of a single review points to both similarities and differences in male and female offending. While female offenders do not appear to differ on

degree of intrusiveness and age of offending, the victim characteristics and legal proceedings differ (Weinsheimer, Woiwod, Coburn, Chong & Connolly 2017). Theories of female offending are lacking among the literature and gendered stereotypes appear to prevail.

The findings for 'The influence of Culture on CSA Myths and Stereotypes' have proven both layered and complex. While factors such as hierarchy, power and socio-cultural contexts have been identified as influential in the attributions of CSA myths and stereotypes, the results are limited. Despite the limited results, the literature was able to demonstrate the current cross-cultural dilemma in the comparability of CSA and its associated constructs (Collings et al., 2009). As a result, recommendations for future studies in cross cultural comparability of CSA myths and stereotypes are proposed.

KNOWLEDGE GAPS

On the topic of comparability, a significant discrepancy among construct comparability within CSA literature was identified. While some researchers have used constructs like blame and responsibility interchangeably (Collings, 2006; Graham et al., 2007; Mellot, Wagner & Broussard, 1997), others have intentionally drawn a distinction between the two (Maynard & Wiederman, 1997). The lack of distinction between significant constructs within the literature poses both a threat to construct comparability and the validity of researcher findings on the particular construct. It is therefore greatly stressed for future research to rather adhere to the distinctions of constructs if available and provide item descriptions for each construct as an alternative. A greater elaboration of this finding can be found in chapter five of this review.

The additional knowledge gap identified within the literature pertains to research on the female offender. While males may be considered the dominant perpetrator of CSA, females still make up a significant percentage of the offending population. This should be reason alone to include more female offenders in future research. However, an additional reason to consider research on the female offender is based on the current theory used to explicate the reasoning behind CSA offending, namely the feminist's theory (Seymour, 1998). As described earlier, the feminist's theory proposes that CSA offending is culturally mediated by patriarchy and the societal perception of masculinity. If such is true, it then becomes curious as to how female offenders are accommodated by this theory of masculinity and patriarchy. Therefore future recommendations

are made towards the exploration of a female's distorted cognitions and the complementary theory behind it.

THEORIES WITHIN THE LITERATURE

With regard to the theories used to explain certain associations within the literature of CSA, four distinct theories were identified. While all theories have been discussed in Chapter 5, a list has been constructed for the reader's convenience and in response to the review's fifth objective. The theories include:

1. The Feminist Theory proposed by Seymour (1998)
2. The Defensive Attributions Theory by Shaver (1970)
3. The Theory of Victim Credibility by Bottoms and Goodman's (1994)
4. The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance by Festinger (1957, as cited in Hartman et al. 1994)

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This systematic review was limited in its selection of databases and its restriction to English publications. Although an extensive review was covered, not all the literature on CSA was obtained through the two databases used. This resulted in a smaller sample size and may not be representative of all the available research between 1992 and 2017. In addition to the above, limitations that restricted the review to English publications only, may have set the review back in terms of possibilities for more cross-cultural findings.

Recommendations for future research include:

1. An increase in studies conducted outside of the United States in order to create a more balanced representation of current findings.
2. Creating distinctions between constructs pertaining to CSA that allow for better construct comparability.
3. An increase in studies conducted on female offenders, specifically addressing distorted cognitions and theories that support their offending behaviour.
4. Further pursuits made in identifying the cultural influence of CSA.

APPENDICES

ETHICAL CLEARANCE FORM

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YAKWAZULU-NATALI

20 June 2018

Ms Leyya Vaid (211521168)
Scool cf Applied Human Sciences – Psychology
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Vaid,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0628/018M
Project Title: A review of empirical research on Chidl Sexual Abuse Myths and Stereotypes (1992 – 2017)

Approval Notification – No Risk / Exempt Application
In response to your application received 08 June 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Steve Collings
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Maud Mthembu
Cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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