

**PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN COMBATING SEXUAL ABUSE AMONGST
HEARING IMPAIRED LEARNERS: THE CASE OF HEARING IMPAIRED
LEARNERS AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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RACHEL PHILANDER

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Supervisor: Prof. R. F. Zimba

Co-Supervisor: Dr. M. L. Mostert

Abstract

Sexual abuse amongst learners with hearing impairment should be a matter of great concern to all those who are involved in working with the hearing impaired. This study aimed at finding preventive strategies to protect learners with hearing impairments from sexual abuse. The results showed that such strategies were lacking at home, at school, at the hostel as well as in the larger society. Data collected through questionnaires showed that parents were unable to discuss sexual matters with their hearing impaired children because of a variety of reasons, like the low academic qualifications of these parents, their standard of living and their emotional well-being. Interviews revealed that matrons who were responsible for taking care of the hearing impaired learners were not fully equipped with the knowledge as to what exactly sexual abuse entailed and how to protect the learners from it. The teachers at the Institute for Special Education indicated through questionnaires, that they mainly focussed on the older learners with respect to the raising of awareness about sexual abuse and the prevention thereof. The younger learners, who were equally vulnerable to sexual abuse, were regarded as not being able to handle the information about it. Data obtained from interviews revealed that both boys and girls had difficulty in applying the information taught in school about sexual abuse in their everyday life. Consequently they were unable to protect themselves from sexual abuse. More girls than boys seemed to have difficulty as to how to handle possible abusive situations. This situation occurred despite the girls' knowledge about child sexual abuse. The prevention of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired

learners seemed to be obstructed by myths held by society about people with disabilities in general. These and other findings are discussed in the thesis with the intention of making recommendations on the prevention of sexual abuse amongst learners with hearing impairment.

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I would like to dedicate this study to my late father, Petrus Benz and my mother, Hendriena Benz, for raising me to value the importance of a good education. Their achievements in life inspired me to strive to reach my fullest potential at all times. I am very grateful for such parents.

Declarations

I, Rachel Philander, declare that this is a true reflection of my own research, and has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

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Rachel Philander

Date

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

“Maltreatment of individuals with disabilities may be committed by only a few, but the responsibility to protect them belongs to us all” (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000).

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to all forms of abuse. In fact, research has found that children with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse than children without disabilities (Crosse, Kaye & Ratnofsky, 1993). Researchers have identified a number of factors related to parents, children, families, service systems, and society at large that increase the potential for abuse of children with disabilities (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000; Sobsey, 1994; Steinberg & Hylton, 1998). Factors that contribute towards abuse of children with disabilities are substance abuse amongst parents (Sobsey, 1994). Ammerman & Baladerian (1993, as cited by Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000) furthermore identified poor coping skills amongst parents as contributing towards the abuse of children with disabilities. Steinberg & Hylton (1998) concluded that some institutionalized beliefs, practices and policies “devalue” children with disabilities. Consequently these children may internalize these beliefs and feel ashamed or less worthy of being treated respectfully.

Experts hold the opinion that our child-rearing practices play a major part in children blindly accepting authority and obeying without questioning. We enforce the power men are entrusted with over women and children by teaching children to “Listen to your father” and “Obey your elders”. In some

patriarchal family structures the fathers can even extend their prerogatives to include the sexual initiation of their children (Marshall & Herman, 1998).

Misconceptions about sexual abuse do contribute towards the abuse of children, too. Adults, in their capacities as parents and authority figures unconsciously enhance abuse by warning children against 'stranger danger' – when in most cases the abuser is someone within the family circle, or a trusted adult. It is a myth that sexual offenders are poor, disabled and easily recognized because of their minority status. Another important factor is that the child should have an adult whom he/she could confide in when abuse happens. They should also be taught not to feel guilty if being abused because those feelings keep them from disclosure. If children were aware and informed about sexual abuse they would be able to report it when it happens. Society at large should become more informed about sexual abuse and get rid of certain myths that foster abuse.

Research done abroad reveals that the real extent of child sexual abuse amongst the disabled remains unknown. Sullivan, Vernon and Scanlan (1987, as cited by Duvall, 1994) in a study of 482 children with documented maltreatment reveal that 53.4 percent of the hearing impaired children in the United States were reported to have been sexually abused.

These findings do correspond with the statistics of sexual and other offences reported at the Women and Child Protection Units in Namibia. Although the statistics below are old, the situation may not have changed a lot. Although there is no clear differentiation between sexual abuse of children with

disabilities and children without disabilities in Namibia the statistics below are significant in providing evidence of the disturbing incidences of child sexual abuse in the country.

Table 1: Sexual and Other Offences Reported at the Women and Child Protection Units in 1995.

Offence	Child Under 18	Adults	Total
Rape	77	83	160
Incest	0	0	0
Indecent Assault	13	9	22
Sodomy	0	6	6
Assault	2	7	9
Serious Assault	12	11	23
Child Neglect	8	0	8
Kidnapping, attempted murder	7	0	7
Total	119	116	235

Adapted from Legal Assistance Centre (no date), Namibia's Women and Child Protection Units: The Way Forward (UNESCO, 2001)

It is significant that out of the 235 offences more than half of them involved children under the age of 18. Another disturbing occurrence is that rape has the highest number of incidences. Nearly 50% of these incidences of rape involved children below 18 years of age.

In June 1997 a group of learners with hearing impairments were sexually abused by the male matron who was responsible for taking care of them in the residential school setting in Windhoek. The sexual abuse of children (under 18 years of age) by persons working with them – institutional abuse – has been one of the most challenging issues to confront social work in the past decade (Gallagher, Hughes & Parker, 1996).

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Given the above brief background, the aim of this study was to investigate possible preventative strategies to protect children with hearing impairments from sexual abuse.

1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

No studies concerning sexual abuse on children with hearing impairments have been done in Namibia. The researcher intended to make people who were involved with children with hearing impairments aware of the dangers of sexual abuse. The findings could be useful to those who either work in a professional capacity with these children or who work as caregivers. It is of vital importance that parents should know that their hearing impaired children are at risk of being sexually abused, as well as the impact the abuse could have on the children concerned. Matrons, as substitute parents should be informed about the risks, too. Teachers should be alerted to teach learners about sexual abuse and the prevention thereof. The people concerned with legislation in the safeguarding of the hearing impaired child should be informed about the possible occurrence of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the conduct of this study:

- 1.3.1 What were parents' views with respect to factors that made hearing impaired children vulnerable to sexual abuse?
- 1.3.2 What methods did the school use to teach learners with hearing impairment about sexual abuse?

- 1.3.3 What safety measures did the principal regard as important with respect to the employment of suitable caregivers for the hearing impaired learners at the school hostel?
- 1.3.4 What were the views of the matrons concerning support structures in place at the hostel for the prevention of sexual abuse of hearing impaired learners?
- 1.3.5 To what extent were learners with hearing impairment aware of sexual abuse and how to protect themselves from it?

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of a child for the gratification of an adult or older child. This can include rape, sodomy, inappropriate sexual touching, exposure to indecent acts or pornography, prostitution, or forcing the child to perform any sexual act (Page and Page, 1992).

Incest consists of unlawful and intentional sexual intercourse between two persons who on account of blood relations, affinity or adoptive relationships may not marry one another (Marshall and Herman, 1998).

Sodomy consists of unlawful and intentional sexual intercourse through penetration of the anus (Marshall and Herman, 1998).

Rape is the unlawful and intentional sexual intercourse with a girl, woman or a boy, man without her or his consent.

The definition of rape previously only included sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent. This definition had various limitations. For example, it only referred to physical force, and not to verbal threats. Furthermore, it didn't make provision for physical disability or helplessness. Due to the previous limitations and to reduce the gaps thereof, the Namibian Government Gazette (2003, No. 266) defines sexual intercourse as follows:

- (a) the insertion (to even the slightest degree) of the penis of a person into the vagina or anus or mouth of another person; or
- (b) the insertion of any other part of the body of a person or of any part of the body of an animal or of any object into the vagina or anus of another person, except when such insertion of any part of the body (other than the penis) of a person or of any object into the vagina or anus of another person is, consistent with sound medical practices, carried out for proper medical purposes; or
- (c) sexual stimulation of the female genitals by the lips and tongue or any other form of genital stimulation;

“vagina” includes any part of the female genital organ.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The intention of this study was not to generalize the findings, but to provide the different policy makers with relevant information concerning the prevention of sexual abuse, specifically of children with hearing impairment.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on factors that may contribute towards the vulnerability of the hearing impaired child to sexual abuse in Namibia and other countries. It furthermore looks into the reasons why the hearing impaired child fails to report sexual abuse. Part of the chapter furthermore deals with the prevention of sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired children.

2.1 Contributing factors to child sexual abuse

Research has revealed that although all children are vulnerable to abuse, children with disabilities are even more vulnerable. There is general acceptance that no single factor places any child at risk for abuse, it is rather an interaction of factors that contribute towards it (Mitchell and Buchele-Ash, 2000).

The situation in Namibia with respect to the non-availability of special schools forces parents to put their children in hostel care. Consequently hostel matrons have to act as substitute parents. Parents only see their children once a month for a weekend, or some only at the end of the school term. In the light of this, reporting abuse to a parent is not always prompt. To further complicate the situation, many parents of hearing impaired children at the institute under study do not understand their children fully as they do not use sign language proficiently.

Children with communication difficulties may be at a higher risk for abuse because potential perpetrators may believe they can 'get away with it', thinking that the children will not be able to report the abuse (Mitchelle & Buchele-Ash, 2000). Elder (1993) explains communication barriers as increasing a deaf child's vulnerability to sexual abuse, especially deaf children who are born to hearing parents. Once there is a problem in understanding one another between parent and child, the emotional needs of that child will normally not be met. Consequently, the child may seek for emotional closeness elsewhere. This may put him or her at risk of being taken advantage of by sexual molesters.

The high unemployment rate which is accompanied by impoverished communities creates opportunities for child sexual abuse. The parents and caretakers of children struggle to make a living. (Sobsey, 1994; Mitchelle & Buchele-Ash, 2000). Many parents living in stressful conditions resent their children and the extra burden and increased demands that caring for children with disabilities may bring (Mitchelle & Buchele-Ash, 2000; Rogow & Hass, 1999). This causes a lack of parental love, especially if they 'mourn' the loss of a 'normal' child. They may become angry at their child which may lead to abuse (Rycus & Hughes, 1998).

2.2 Group versus individual abuse

Rowlands (1995, as cited by Gallagher et al., 1996) suggests there is a tendency for the perpetrators to abuse boys in groups, whereas advances towards girls are individualised. Although the explanations for these findings

are unknown, it corresponds with the sexual abuse case involving the hearing impaired boys in Namibia. The perpetrator in this case was a male hostel matron. Based on his job description he had access to the boys he wanted to abuse (Inambao, 1997). Gallagher et al. (1996) suggests that the perpetrators target particular institutions in the knowledge that this would give them access to the children of the specific gender they wish to abuse.

2.3 Causes of failure to report sexual abuse amongst the Deaf

Elder (1993) identified a variety of challenges deaf survivors of sexual abuse have to face in the aftermath of their abuse. Both hearing and deaf children often do not report abuse for a variety of reasons. However, when deaf victims of sexual abuse want to disclose cases of abuse they might have trouble finding an adult who is fluent in their mode of communication.

The shortage of sign language interpreters is also a problem many deaf Namibians face (Mvula, 2004). According to the article, "The Deaf call for services" (Mvula, 2004) the Deaf complained about the services in hospitals, especially with respect to counselling for HIV & AIDS and instructions on how to use prescriptions.

Like hearing children, deaf children have been sexually abused at home by relatives, parents, or siblings. Moreover, recently attention has been focused on alleged abuse in some residential schools for the Deaf, (Duvall, 1994). Despite this, there is still a tendency not to report sexual abuse in residential schools for the Deaf. The reason for this can be attributed to the possibility

that repercussions from scandals of sexual abuse might threaten the existence of the schools.

Another reason for not reporting abuse is the children's fear for not being believed or being blamed for the abuse, as well as the anxiety as to the consequences of making a disclosure. The victim realizes that once it is disclosed, the private is changed to the public. Nayak and Kehily (1997, as cited by Steinberg, Epstein & Johnson, 1997) stress the use of the word 'queer' and particularly the powerful impact it has in the context of adolescent peer group relations. The use of this word can cause the sexual abused victim to feel significantly less powerful and it can contribute to social misconceptions about the nature and impact of child sexual abuse. Gallagher (1998) describes these factors as the exploitation of the 'natural vulnerability' of children.

2.4 Prevention of sexual abuse of persons with disabilities

Ammerman and Baladerian (1993, as cited by Mitchelle & Buchele-Ash, 2000) state that due to the costs involved in abuse, prevention thereof should be the number one priority. Primary prevention should be aimed at the general public. Research has indicated that there is a lack of awareness and a great deal of ignorance concerning child sexual abuse of the disabled and more specifically about the hearing impaired (Elder, 1993). Stress caused by the increased demands of caring for children with disabilities does contribute to abuse within the family circle, (Mitchelle & Buchele-Ash, 2000; Rogow & Hass, 1999). In order to stop sexual abuse within the family circle,

the main focus should be on reducing this stress. Although the Namibian Government does support the disabled financially, the emotional support is not sufficient. Professionals could help in the form of home-visits to teach these parents how to handle their children (Jones, Peterson, Goldberg, Goldberg & Smith, 1995; Miller, 2002). Furthermore, parents, guardians and care givers should take an active part in the prevention of child sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners through taking their complaints and views seriously (Barter, 2003).

Legislation that supports the prevention and protection of children with disabilities should be implemented (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000). The National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (NFPDN) is advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. With specific reference to the Deaf, there is the Namibia National Association for the Deaf (NNAD). These organizations aim at raising awareness of disability amongst the Namibian public and at the same time they are striving to change negative societal attitudes people have about people with disabilities. The NNAD also offers Namibian Sign Language classes to the public at a minimum fee. Parents were granted the opportunity to either attend these lessons at the NNAD or at the Institute to enable them to communicate with their hearing impaired children. However, the lessons at the Institute were cancelled due to a lack of interest and low turn-up of the parents.

2.5 The extent of awareness about sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners

Child-focused Prevention Efforts advocate for the availability and accessibility of prevention programme to children with disabilities, (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000). Ammerman and Baladerian (1993, as cited by Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000) say that child-focused prevention programme for children with disabilities should include sharing information about abuse (how to identify it, how to respond to it, how to tell others) and talking about feelings that may occur if abuse is attempted. In addition to education, teaching assertiveness skills is often mentioned as a component of prevention efforts, (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000; Sobsey, 1994). Most important out of all these efforts is the teaching of children's rights. Children should understand that they have the right to say "no", even to adults. They should be able to identify improper sexual behaviour and how to protect themselves against it. Their understanding of "good and bad (or secret) touch" should be taught and practiced regularly. However, Baladerian (1994, as cited by Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000) cautions against simply telling the child with disability to say "no" to an adult because of the extreme power inequities that exist between the perpetrator and the child at risk.

2.6 Methods used at school in teaching hearing impaired learners about sexual abuse

The school should implement a much broader programme. Sex education and safety awareness programmes with specific relevance to disabled

children should be developed and made available (Miller, 2002). The main concern here is again the focus on the child's rights. With respect to the hearing impaired child, communication barriers should be removed. Marshall and Herman (1998) and also Siedman (1998, as cited by Duval, 1994), stress the paramount importance that children should be taught the correct signs for their body parts. This can help them to disclose in the event of sexual abuse and to avoid misunderstandings.

With respect to the Namibian Government schools the curriculum is more focused towards learner-centered education and it includes cross-curricular issues like HIV & AIDS education, human rights and democracy education (National Institute for Educational Development, 2003) – to mention only the ones relevant to this research. Through this new change in curriculum the learners are empowered not only to protect themselves against any form of abuse but they also are being taught about their rights.

Lifeline/Childline Namibia is a community based organization that is rendering services on a voluntary basis. They offer face to face as well as telephonic counselling on issues such as HIV & AIDS, domestic violence and sexual abuse. These services include visits to schools in the prevention of violence and abuse, aimed at children. Their 'Feeling Yes, Feeling No' drama program aims at raising awareness toward abuse amongst primary school children throughout Namibia. This group of young drama students visited the Institute about two years ago. Their efforts in raising awareness on abuse to the hearing impaired learners made an impact because they used role play

and drama as a way of conveying the information. This made it interesting and easy to follow for the learners at the Institute. At present there are teachers who do use the methods of role play and drama in their teaching. However, these methods can't be used on a daily basis and it is furthermore not applicable to all teaching-learning situations.

In order to prevent institutional child sexual abuse the focus should be on policies and procedures of agencies providing services to children with disabilities. These can include different criteria like the following:

The careful screening of job applicants is an important factor in the combating of child sexual abuse. Rosenthal, Motz, Edmonson and Groze (1991, as cited by Barter, 2003) highlights the presence of repeat perpetrators, especially in relation to sexual abuse. In response to this some safeguards like police checks for criminal records and detailed references on all new staff have been adopted in the United Kingdom (Gallagher et al., 1996). However, these safety measures are obviously reliant on abuse being reported. With respect to the Namibian situation, prospective applicants are being interviewed, after being short listed, based on their references. It is still a difficult task to spot whether the applicant might pose a danger to the children in his/her care. Although psychological testing might be more effective in identifying abnormal behaviour, this can be very costly.

The training of staff in working with hearing impaired learners is of vital importance. Due to the demands involved in taking care of these special needs children, all new applicants should be trained on what to expect from

these learners (Miller, 2002). Knowing their capabilities as well as vulnerabilities will help the staff on setting realistic expectations and it will help in the prevention of abuse of these learners. Levy and Kahan, (1991) have identified the link between lack of appropriate training and the occurrence of abuse. With respect to caring for hearing impaired learners in a residential setting, the ability to communicate in Namibian Sign Language would avoid any misunderstandings which might cause frustration on the side of the care giver – leading to the abuse of the children (Miller, 2002). The School for the Hearing Impaired in Windhoek does offer Sign Language classes to parents, hostel workers and teachers to improve communication with deaf family members. Staff should be aware of child protection issues, as well as causes relating to the abuse of children.

The lack of effective and frequent supervision of childcare workers has been widely viewed as a significant contributing factor in abuse, (Barter, 2003). In addition to this, Reycome (1990, as cited by Barter, 2003), has found that the provision of regular and supportive supervision of residential care staff is a main factor in the prevention of child abuse. Supervisors should, however, also be trained in how to provide effective supervision of the staff. With the required knowledge and training they would be able to mediate the stress the child care workers are experiencing. Furthermore, they should be able to provide clear guidance of how children in care should be treated (Barter, 2003).

The set up in Namibian Government school hostels is different. In most cases the school principal also acts as the superintendent of the hostel. The additional staff would include child care matrons for both boys and girls, assisted by the supervisory teachers. They all report to the inspector who is stationed at the Ministry of Education's Head Office in Windhoek and who visits the school often – in most cases unannounced.

Workshops, aiming at training on how to work with the hearing impaired child do take place at the Institute. Most of these are normally funded by Non-Governmental Organizations, but sometimes the Ministry of Basic Education does budget for them.

With respect to policies which protect children from abuse, Barter, (2003) upon reviewing institutional abuse in England and Wales, reported inadequate or no complaints procedures in most residential institutions. Miller (2002), however stresses the importance of policies and guidance for all professionals working with disabled children to ensure care is provided in a sensitive, respectful and safe way. The rights of children should be clearly recognized. It seems as if such complaint procedures and policies are also non-existent in the Namibian Government schools. However, there is some documentation with respect to the illegality of corporal punishment in schools. This is one known document that does make provision for the protection of learners against abuse in Namibian Government schools, (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993).

2.7 Conceptual framework

Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, the child is closely involved in different activities, roles and relationships. For the purpose of this study the focus is on systems such as the family (home environment), the school and the hostel. These systems are part of the local community level of the hearing impaired child under study. Because of the close interaction amongst these systems, a change in one can influence the others. However, the child forms part of the society level, too. Although the child is not directly involved in the society level, this level does influence the other levels of the school, hostel and family.

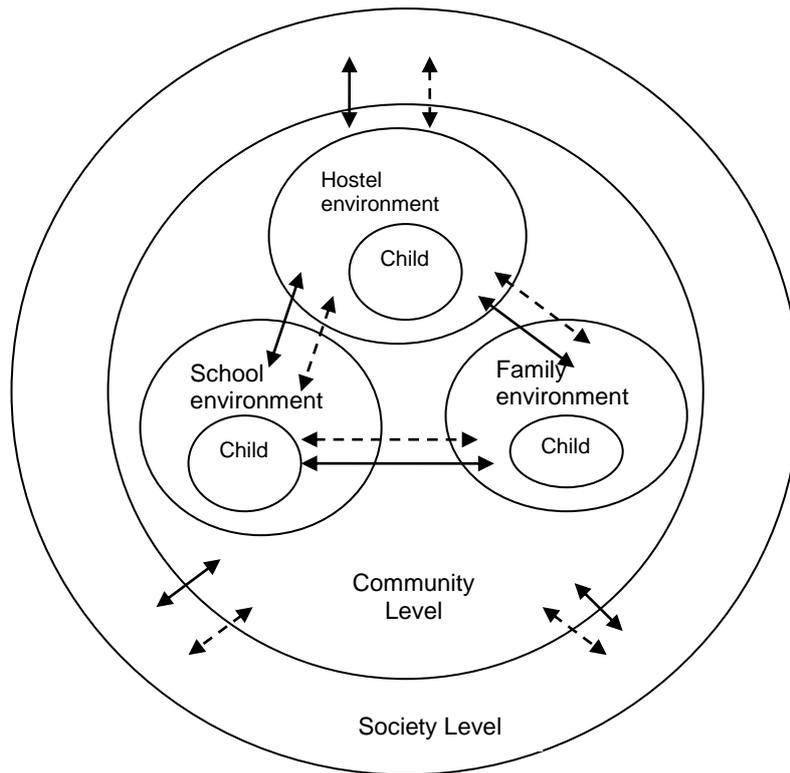


Figure 1: The ecological systems involved in the process of child development

Notes:

- (i) *Figure 1 was adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1986, as cited by Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997).*

(ii) *The feinted lines in figure 1 indicate a weak link where as the solid lines show a strong link between the different systems*

Both weak and strong links can occur in these three environments of the hostel, the school and the family, caused by different factors. For instance, caring parents who are genuinely concerned about the well-being of their children will have strong links with the hostel and the school environments. This way the risk of children coming from caring family environments to be abused is highly unlikely. But, on the other hand you get parents who perceive their hearing impaired children as either burdens or a disgrace. They would rather neglect their children's educational needs. Such parents would see institutionalization as a way of avoiding their responsibilities towards their children. Their links with the school and hostel would be very weak. Children who are being raised under such circumstances could easily be abused. They can become easy targets for abusers who wish to exploit their basic human needs for love and care.

The figure above illustrates the degree of interaction with the hearing impaired child within the different environments of development. It furthermore explains how such interaction, together with other factors, might contribute towards making a hearing impaired child vulnerable to sexual abuse. Stress and problems in communication are major common factors which affect all levels and which are to a large extent contributing towards child sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired.

Interaction starts at home within the family circle. Like in the case of the normal hearing child, regular communication at home not only improves the child's language development but it also fosters socialisation. If the family members were capable of using Sign Language the hearing impaired child would benefit from it. However, the reverse could result in a child feeling neglected and not being understood by the people closest to him or her. Such a child might feel emotionally neglected and might start to look for closeness and acceptance elsewhere – resulting in the child becoming an easy prey for sexual molesters. Such a situation could furthermore lead to the development of a low self-concept in the hearing impaired child. As a result such a child would not be comfortable in speaking up when the situation called for it.

The family of the hearing impaired child might also be affected by the process of interaction. Effective communication between family members and the hearing impaired child would lead to strong ties and a healthy relationship. However, a breakdown in communication with the hearing impaired child might lead to frustration on both the sides of the parents as well as the child. Parents furthermore experience problems to cope with children with hearing impairment because of the extra care and support they need. Other factors like a lack of financial resources and social support could contribute towards parents' stress levels, too. Parents who have to face such obstacles might feel unable to care for their children, resulting in low self-esteem. In some cases parents' lack of knowledge about the needs of their children could result in unrealistic expectations for these children

which in return could facilitate abuse. The characteristics of parents who are likely to abuse their children are those with poor coping skills, parents who abuse substances, as well as those with tendencies towards violence (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000). In summary to the above it could be said that the degree of interaction and the safeguarding of the hearing impaired child within the family vary significantly due to the educational background, emotional well-being and the income of the family concerned.

Communication at the hostel would be expected to be effective. Here the hearing impaired child has the opportunity to communicate with peers with hearing impairment, teachers and other supporting staff. The ideal would be that no communication barrier exists here. However, this is not always the case. Some supporting staff members might be unable to communicate in Sign Language. This could result in misunderstandings and frustrations on both the side of the caregivers as well as the hearing impaired child. The possibility of abuse could be enhanced due to the occurrences of misunderstandings. Care givers lack training in how to handle these learners. Thus, they have unrealistic expectations from the learners, increasing the risk for sexual abuse. Constant supervision in the hostel environment and support from seniors given to the care givers would avoid the abuse of learners. Lastly, the maintaining of effective ratios between learners and care givers may reduce work related stress, minimizing the risk of sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired learners.

It is expected from all teachers to be fluent in Sign Language in order for teaching of the hearing impaired learners to be effective. However, other factors could contribute towards abuse. Over crowded classes could lead to unmotivated teachers with no desire to learn Sign Language. Misunderstandings because of language barriers in the classroom could raise teacher's stress levels. Abuse of learners could be the result.

Society at large contributed to the sexual abuse of the hearing impaired children due to the fostering of myths about sexual abuse. For instance, the child-rearing practices of teaching children to blindly accept authority without questioning make children vulnerable to abuse. The hearing impaired child gets sexually exploited because society believes that they could do it without being reported due to the communication barrier between the hearing and the hearing impaired (Duval, 1994). The efforts of the Namibia National Association for the Deaf and other organizations who strive towards equal rights for the hearing impaired would be in vain unless society gets rid of negative attitudes and misconceptions about the hearing impaired. Government bodies, functioning on the society level in the role of either making or implementing policies should put structures in place to safeguard all vulnerable children against sexual abuse (Inambao, 1997).

In concluding this section it could be said that the communication barrier that starts at home between the family and the hearing impaired child makes the prevention of sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired difficult to achieve. The hearing impaired child is part of a particular family, school (in which the

peer group plays a major role), local community and a broader society. If there is a barrier in communication within the family environment, this would automatically influence communication within the remaining environments.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and sample

The school for the hearing impaired is situated in Windhoek, and this institution was the focus of this study. There were 110 learners enrolled at the time of the research. Seventy one of them stayed in the hostel and the rest of them were day scholars. Four matrons were responsible for looking after these learners in the hostel – two for the boys and two for the girls. Three teachers who resided on the premises were in a supervisory capacity at the hostel. The school principal was also the superintendent at the hostel. All these people had to report to the hostel inspector who was working at the Ministry of Education's Head Office.

There were thirteen teachers, the principal, the secretary and a volunteer teacher at the school. The school accommodated learners from Orientation to Grade 8. The learners in Orientation included those who were not ready for Grade 1 yet, but who had reached the prescribed age to qualify to attend formal school. The ages of learners at the Institute were in the range of 6 to 19 years.

With respect to the parents involved, the researcher sampled only 32 out of the 120. These were the parents who resided in Windhoek and whose children were aged between 13 to 19 years. Most of the other parents stayed far from Windhoek and were difficult to get hold of. A list of all parents

who resided in Windhoek was compiled and from this list the 32 parents were randomly selected.

In light of the absence of any other school for the hearing impaired in Windhoek, the principal of this Institute was the only informant in his category.

Out of the 110 learners at school, only 32 between the ages of 13-19 years were sampled. The age group was important with respect to the type of information expected from these learners. Because they were not able to answer questions about sexual abuse the younger learners were left out of the sample. Moreover, the younger learners were not sexually mature enough to answer the research questions. The researcher acknowledged the fact that all hearing impaired learners were equally vulnerable to sexual abuse, but she focused on those who were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse because of their sexuality and the need for close friendships. These were the learners in their adolescence who started showing interest in the opposite sex. These learners were selected out of a total of 55 older learners. Firstly, all older learners were listed alphabetically according to their different grades. From this only one list was compiled. Every second learner from the list was then included in the sample. At this point the systematic sampling procedure was applied (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

All four matrons were interviewed to obtain the required information.

Only ten of the thirteen teachers were included in the sample. The other three were not included since they had not taught at the school long enough to respond informatively to research questions.

3.2 Research instruments

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in collecting the data for this study. The Quantitative research method consists of a research approach in which the data collected is analyzed in terms of numbers, whereas the Qualitative research method focuses on the reality of events and describes these events, cases, and situations without the use of numerical data (Best & Kahn, 1989). The advantage of quantitative analysis is that there is little room for human bias to create problems with the data (Best & Kahn, 1989). This study uses the unstructured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. This approach enabled the researcher to carefully and logically analyze the responses of the informants and report those responses that are consistent as well as areas of disagreement. Catela (1990:5) commented on the use of the two methods in a complementary way in that they enrich the information collected. Catela noted that: "The integration lies in the fact that the qualitative account of reality, besides standing by itself in the analysis, is also being used as a framework for the quantitative data and as a source of explanatory premises. There is thus a dynamic feedback relation between the two, and one explanation of reality is not complete without the other".

Quantitative Instruments

A questionnaire was developed for the parents. The purpose of this instrument was to measure the extent of agreement with the factors identified as contributing to the vulnerability of children with disabilities to sexual abuse.

A questionnaire for the principal of the school for hearing impaired children in Windhoek was developed. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out the extent to which he regarded certain factors as safety measures important in the selection of a suitable caregiver for the hearing impaired children at the school hostel.

Qualitative Instruments

An interview was conducted with the principal of the school for the hearing impaired. The aim of the interview was to gather more information on the questions asked in the questionnaire. The principal's responses on factors that might contribute to putting hearing impaired learners at risk of sexual abuse in the school hostel were recorded on tape.

Questionnaires were administered for the teachers at the school for the hearing impaired. The aim of this instrument was to find out about the structures that were in place at the school for teaching learners about sexual abuse.

Interviews were held with the matrons responsible for taking care of the learners at the hostel. The aim of this instrument was to find out how support structures in place at the hostel could help in the combating of child abuse amongst the hearing impaired.

Interviews were held with the hearing impaired learners. This instrument aimed at finding out whether these learners were aware of sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it.

Before starting the formal collection of data, a pilot study was conducted. Only one learner from the school who met the requirements, a teacher who was not part of the research study and a parent were included in this pilot study. The aim was to rectify any uncertainties and other mistakes that were still present in the research instruments. The other purpose was to ensure that the instruments were reliable and valid. The researcher had to adapt a few questions posed to the learners, because many learners experienced difficulty in answering why-questions. With respect to the rest of the questions, no obstacles occurred.

3.3 Procedures

The researcher informed the Ministry of Basic Education about the aim of the study and got permission to carry out the research. In view of contacting the different respondents, the researcher did not experience any problems in getting hold of the principal, teachers, matrons and learners once an appointment was made with each group. The fact that the teachers were

accessible made follow-ups in cases of low return rates of the questionnaires possible. In light of the matrons involved, the researcher made appointments at times convenient to each of them, seeing that they all resided at the hostel. With respect to the learners, the researcher got permission from the parents to interview them. The day scholars were interviewed at home. However, with regard to the parents, the researcher first contacted them either telephonically or in writing asking whether they would be willing to take part in the study. The researcher stressed the fact that the findings of the study would be used to the benefit of the hearing impaired learners. After permission was obtained the researcher arranged to meet the parents at their respective homes. Questionnaires were translated into Afrikaans in order to accommodate all parents. In some cases, where the parents of the learners concerned could neither speak nor understand English or Afrikaans, a volunteer at home helped in translating where language was an obstacle.

3.4 Analysis of Data

Analysis of Quantitative Data

The analysis of the different questionnaire data obtained from the parents and the principal were checked for the occurrence of the most important to the least important items valued on the Likert scales. The researcher used the numbers 1-5 with 1 as indicating strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. This was carried out by using frequencies. In analysing results obtained from the parents, the Microsoft Excel Program was used to convert findings into percentages.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The data concerning open-ended questions and interviews that were collected from the principal, the teachers, the matrons and the learners were content analyzed. Responses from the teachers were categorized into male versus female; and lower primary teaching versus upper primary teaching. The aim was to see if significant similarities as well as differences could be found between the responses of these two categories. With respect to the learners' responses, boys and girls were also compared to point out the differences and similarities. The responses of the boys and the girls on each item of the questionnaire were compared to find out whether the two groups were aware of sexual abuse and how to protect themselves from it. Some of these responses were either added up or converted into percentages or ratios, whereas others were grouped according to similar meaning. Afterwards a comparison was made to find out where differences or similarities occurred. The researcher furthermore quoted prominent responses made by the different groups.

3.5 Issues concerning Validity and Reliability

In measuring validity, a definition of the concept would be appropriate. Gronlund (1971, p.75, as cited by Njabili, 1993), refers to validity as 'the extent to which the results of an examination procedure serve the particular uses for which they are intended'. On the other hand, reliability refers to the repeatability of the findings, meaning that if the same study is conducted at a different situation, it will yield the same results.

In this study, data was collected from the different parties involved in working with children with hearing impairments. The instruments designed to obtain this data focused on the prevention of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired children. These instruments were compiled after reviewing the literature of the study. This study does not aim at generalising the findings. Given the systematic method used in collecting the information and the methods used to control and reduce errors during the data collection and analysis process the validity and reliability of the findings were strengthened. Furthermore, these findings are valid to the settings that are similar to the one conducted in this study, especially when considering the needs of these children and the communication barrier that they face in the different settings where they live or being educated. In many cases the economic, social and educational circumstances of the parents jeopardise the safety of these learners.

The question of how reliable these findings are will be influence by the language barrier that existed between the researcher and the parents who served as informants. This obstacle was not detected during the pilot study, though. Consequently, there was the possibility of misunderstandings between the two parties, due to the involvement of a translator.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data from parents

32 Parents were asked to rate factors that could contribute towards the vulnerability of their hearing impaired children to sexual abuse. These were the parents or guardians of those learners between the ages of 13 to 19 years. All of them were residing in Windhoek. The researcher visited them at home in order to collect the required information. The interviewees consisted of single parents and either a mother or father was interviewed. Three questionnaires were completed by both parents, while the remaining questionnaires were completed by an aunt, uncle or sister who served as guardians for these learners. The researcher did not experience any problems in interviewing these parents. All of them were very helpful. The process of questioning was a little bit cumbersome because of the multilingual nature of the country. The help of a translator was called in where needed. These translators were either relatives or neighbours of the family member who was interviewed. Although this helped, the low level of education of most parents still hampered the process. This questionnaire required parents to rate twelve items on the Likert-scale with the value of 1 indicating strongly disagree and the value of 5 indicating strongly agree. The responses on the different items of the questionnaire were calculated and converted into percentages to find out to what degree these parents agree or disagree on a particular item.

Based on the results derived from table 2, the majority of the parents (71.9%) strongly agreed that the inability to discuss sexual matters with their hearing impaired children was an important factor towards making these children vulnerable to sexual abuse. The reason for this inability could not only be attributed to a difficulty in communication in Sign Language on the side of these caregivers, since only 50% strongly agreed that Sign Language was an obstacle in communicating effectively with the hearing impaired child. Data obtained also showed that 59.4% of the parents agreed that ignorance regarding the impact of sexual abuse on the child might contribute to the sexual abuse of the hearing impaired children. According to the findings it seemed that parents were aware of the 'external' dangers that could make their hearing impaired children vulnerable to sexual abuse. These dangers included a lack of after-care services (59.4%); children being institutionalized (56.3%); viewing people as potentially dangerous in abusing children, for instance drunk and idle men in the neighbourhood (53.1%) and people in authority positions who may misuse their power by abusing children (53.1%). 50% or less of the parents strongly agreed that factors related to the feelings of the hearing impaired learner can contribute towards their vulnerability to sexual abuse. These factors included the underestimation of the intellectual abilities and feelings of special needs children (50.0%); children previously abused (46.9%); children with low self-esteem (43.8%); socially isolated children due to either communication difficulties or as a result of being 'different' (43.8%); and lastly children whose physical and emotional needs were neglected (31.3%). The fact that so many parents admitted their inability to discuss sexual matters with their hearing impaired children put

them at risk of being sexually abused. This means that these children are left without being warned against the dangers of sexual abuse in their immediate environment. Parents' inability to understand the impact of the abuse on the child furthermore implies they might not ensure proper after-care treatment if abuse does occur.

Table 2: Parents' ratings of factors they thought would make hearing impaired children vulnerable to sexual abuse

Factors	5		4		3		2		1		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Children with low self-esteem who are more likely to be abused	14	43.8	8	25.0	6	18.8	1	3.1	3	9.4	32
Socially-isolated children, due to either communication difficulties or as a result of being 'different'.	14	43.8	10	31.3	4	12.5	2	6.3	2	6.3	32
Children who are separated from their parents by being institutionalized (put in the hostel).	18	56.3	3	9.4	10	31.3	0	0.0	1	3.1	32
Children whose physical and emotional needs are being neglected.	10	31.3	15	46.9	4	12.5	2	6.3	1	3.1	32
Children previously abused	15	46.9	9	28.1	4	12.5	2	6.3	2	6.3	32
Drunk and idle men in the neighborhood or at home	17	53.1	4	12.5	6	18.8	0	0.0	5	15.6	32
Ignorance regarding sexual abuse and its consequences on the side of adults and caregivers.	19	59.4	9	28.1	2	6.3	1	3.1	1	3.1	32
Underestimation of the intellectual abilities and feelings of special needs children	16	50.0	8	25.0	6	18.8	2	6.3	0	0.0	32
Adults and caregivers who are unable to discuss sexual matters with their children.	23	71.9	6	18.8	1	3.1	2	6.3	0	0.0	32
Lack of availability of after-care services for children	19	59.4	7	21.9	5	15.6	1	3.1	0	0.0	32
Parents who experience difficulty in communicating and understanding sign language may hinder disclosure.	16	50.0	8	25.0	5	15.6	1	3.1	2	6.3	32
People in authority positions misuse their power by sexually abusing vulnerable and minor victims.	17	53.1	7	21.9	4	12.5	2	6.3	2	6.3	32

Note: 5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=average agree; 2-disagree; 1=strongly disagree

Data from teachers

The researcher wished to find out whether structures were in place at the school in teaching learners about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it. Ten teachers were interviewed – seven females and three males. These teachers were teaching different grades from Orientation (Grade 0) up to Grade 8. Some teachers were confined to their classrooms (Grades 0-4 were taught by only one teacher) while those who were teaching Grades 5-8 were involved in subject teaching. All male teachers were involved in subject teaching. All teachers had more than three years teaching experience in Deaf Education. The responses from the teachers were divided into male versus female. These responses were then converted into percentages and later compared to see whether there were similarities and differences in responses amongst the two sexes.

According to the data in table 3, 66.7% of the male teachers felt that the curriculum did make provision for sex education in comparison to the 28.6% of the females who agreed on this issue. This difference might be because all male teachers were teaching the upper primary and junior secondary phases. This implied that they were working with the older learners only. The teachers who agreed on this explained that the teaching of sex education was entirely the responsibility of the teacher. On the other hand, the teachers who were teaching the lower primary phase felt that teaching the smaller ones about sex would not be appropriate for their level. Another concern raised here was the parents' reaction about teaching these small ones about sexual abuse. About the question of whether there was provision made on the school timetable for the teaching of sex education, all female

teachers denied this whereas 66.7% of the males responded that sex education was taught at school – only on Monday mornings after assembly. Looking at the issue of the teaching of the rights of the learners it was clear that most of them agreed that learners were taught about their rights. Only one male teacher and one female teacher responded negatively to this question. Further explanations pointed out that apart from the teaching of these rights in different subjects, the school celebrated the Day of the African Child as well as the Day of the Namibian Child as a way of making learners aware of their rights. Two out of the 3 male teachers felt that their learners were capable of recognizing improper sexual behaviour. Five out of 7 female teachers agreed with this. Those female teachers, who disagreed with this, explained that the teaching of improper sexual behaviour would be too advanced for the level of understanding of the younger ones. In contrast to the 57% female teachers who disagreed with the issue of whether communication in conveying information regarding sex was a problem, all male teachers responded that it was not a problem. This discrepancy can again be attributed to the differences in age between the learners being taught by the female and male teachers.

With respect to the accessibility of HIV & AIDS awareness programmes to the hearing impaired 100% of the teachers agreed that this was the case. It was clear that all teachers were aware of the necessity of having an HIV & AIDS awareness corner in each class where learners could have access to relevant literature at anytime. Teachers also reported that they attended workshops and training courses on HIV & AIDS. However, the relevant training material was not hearing impaired friendly – there were no captions

available on the videos for the hearing impaired to read. It was the responsibility of the individual teacher to overcome this obstacle by interpreting the information to his or her class.

Table 3: Structures in place at school for the combating of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners

Structures	Responses by sex							
	Male				Female			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Whether the Namibian curriculum made provision for sex education	2	66.7	1	33.3	2	28.6	5	71.4
Whether the school timetable made provision for sex education	2	66.7	1	33.3	0	0.0	7	100.0
Whether learners were taught about their rights	2	66.7	1	33.3	6	85.7	1	14.3
Whether learners were capable of recognizing improper sexual behaviour	2	66.7	1	33.3	5	71.4	2	28.6
Whether communication in conveying information regarding sex was a problem	0	0.0	3	100.0	4	57.1	3	42.9
Whether there were HIV & AIDS awareness program accessible to hearing impaired learners	3	100.0	0	0.0	7	100.0	0	0.0

Note: N of male teachers = 3; N of female teachers = 7

The conveying of important information between home and school regarding learners

The researcher wished to find out whether teachers were aware of how information with respect to the learners was conveyed between the school and the home. Table 4 below gives information regarding this issue. The data revealed that 2 male teachers and 2 female teachers misunderstood this question. The third male teacher wasn't aware of such procedures. The reason for this could be because of the system at school whereby the class teachers were responsible for distributing letters and relevant information to the learners. Those teachers who didn't have register classes might have difficulty in recalling this because they were not always involved in such activities. However, the remaining female teachers were aware of a system at school whereby information was conveyed between the school and the home by either calling in the parents, writing letters to them or making a call when they were urgently needed.

Table 4: The conveying of important information between school and home regarding learners

Issue	Males	Females
Misunderstood the question	2	2
Not aware of this system	1	0
Telephone calls, letters or call in parents	0	5
Total	3	7

Data from the Principal

An interview was conducted with the principal of the Institute after the completion of a questionnaire. The aim of this was to get the opinion of the principal regarding safety measures needed in the employment of a suitable caregiver for the hearing impaired learners at his school. He had 24 years of experience in teaching hearing impaired learners. The principal indicated his point of view on the importance of the factors in the questionnaire by circling each item with an appropriate number. Number 5 indicated most importance while number 1 showed no importance.

Data presented in table 5 showed that the principal ranked the following factors as “most important” in the selection of suitable care givers for the hearing impaired learners in the hostel: the ability to communicate with the learners; previous employment as care givers; the “employment history” of the prospective care giver; the training of hostel staff members in working with these learners and lastly the regular inspection of the hostel to ensure the safety of the learners. The availability of prescribed procedures to follow in the case of complaints with respect to child sexual abuse was ranked number 4, an indication that he considered this as “important”. However, he regarded the gender of the person and the availability of policies for the protection of the learners against abuse, as of “average importance”.

Table 5: Factors considered important by the principal in the employment of caregivers at the hostel

Factors	Degree of importance
Gender of the person	3
Ability to communicate with learners	5
Previous employment as caregivers as pre-requisite	5
The “employment history” of the prospective caregiver	5
The availability of prescribed procedures to follow in case of complaints with respect to child sexual abuse	4
The availability of policies implemented for the protection of learners against abuse	3
Training of hostel staff members in working with hearing impaired learners	5
Regular inspection of hostels to ensure the safety of the learners	5

Note: (i) 5 = most important; 4 = important; 3 = average importance;

2 = little importance; 1 = no importance”

During his interview the principal highlighted the following as important factors that might contribute to putting hearing impaired learners in the hostel at risk for sexual abuse: He had no gender preference regarding a hostel caregiver. However, the needs of the specific group whom the employment was sought for should be taken into account. For example all girls, no matter their age, would be better catered for by a female matron. The same would apply for the smaller boys. These groups of learners needed the ‘motherly love’ whereas the big boys needed a man who could teach them about life. This was the current situation at the hostel for the hearing impaired learners. The three female matrons were responsible for taking care of the girls and the smaller boys, while a deaf male matron cared for the bigger boys. With

reference to the abuse of the boys concerned by a male matron in 1997, the principal stressed that this could be attributed to society at large who wanted to take advantage of learners with disabilities. He indicated that society regarded these learners as incapable of reporting abuse due to their inability to use spoken language. Consequently, these learners were regarded as easy targets for abuse.

The principal explained that in the selection of a prospective caregiver for the hearing impaired learners the post would first be advertised. The applications would then be forwarded to the Personnel Office at the Ministry of Education's Head Office to be short listed. Interviews would then be conducted by the School Board – a procedure that was a requirement from the new Education Act. The candidate who met the requirements would then be recommended. In case the applicant who was recommended by the School Board did not suit the needs of the learners at the hostel, despite meeting the requirements, motivations and or recommendations in that respect should be carefully stated by the principal. Under no circumstances should there be a specific gender preference mentioned in advertising the post or in selecting a caregiver.

Upon receiving a complaint about abuse the principal as the superintendent would first investigate the case to look for evidence. The facts concerning the case would then be documented before sending them to the Head Office. From there the case would be referred, either to the Women and Child Protection Unit or be dealt with within the Ministry of Education as a disciplinary matter.

In ensuring the safety of the hostel boarders the principal commented on the following:

He regarded the training of the matrons as very important in order for them to understand the needs of the learners. Training of the matrons was available through the Head Office although information on training programmes did not normally reach the Institute in time. Despite this, there was training offered at school on how to handle the hearing impaired learners. However, there was no specific reference to the prevention of sexual abuse.

The principal indicated that the matrons were supposed to be on duty for 24 hours a day and learner supervision should therefore be a continuous process. However, he thought that was impossible. Abuse could still take place whenever there was no supervision – either during the day or at night. Through supervision the superintendent tried to alert matrons to possible dangers that might lead to abuse. He also ensured that the daily programmes concerning the matrons' duties were followed. However, abuse could not always be prevented. It could happen that those the Principal trusted might be the abusers.

The Principal was of the view that effective communication could minimize the problems between the matrons and the hostel boarders. This was why he encouraged all those who worked with the learners to learn Sign Language. When employing a matron to take care of the learners, Sign Language fluency was always a requirement. But not many people in Namibia met this requirement. On the other hand communication in Sign Language did not mean the person would be good in taking care of the

learners. Notwithstanding this, the Principal still insisted: “But whatever the case, communication is extremely important.”

Data from matrons

The researcher interviewed the four matrons who all resided at the hostel. The aim was to get their views concerning support structures in place at the hostel for the prevention of sexual abuse of hearing impaired learners. Their responses were recorded and analysed. Table 6 contains data from the matrons. As can be noticed from table 6, there was disagreement concerning the re-occurrence of sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired learners. Whereas two matrons felt that this would take place, two did not think so. The two matrons who answered ‘yes’ explained that this could occur because of the following reasons: the gates at the hostel were not secure enough; the fact that the school premises served as a short cut to Katutura township and the hospital close by and the fact that learners communicate with strangers who were passing by all the time. In addition, learners could walk all over the unprotected premises during their free time. The other two matrons who denied the possibility of the re-occurrence of sexual abuse based their views on the fact that there were more female matrons employed in taking care of the learners at the time in question than before. All four matrons agreed that they could manage their workload well with the help of the learners as they put in place a system of having tasks performed by bigger learners who were willing to help. As far as problems in communication with the learners were concerned all four matrons said that this was not a problem. If communication problems occurred, the matrons called in the help of other learners to explain whatever was not clear. The

system of rewards and incentives also did wonders for co-operation and communication. All four matrons responded with 'yes' on the issue of whether they felt equipped to do their work. Although neither one of them got training for the work they were doing then, two matrons worked with disabled learners before – neither of them were hearing impaired, though. Such a situation could not be beneficial to either the matrons or the learners because a lack of understanding in how to work with the hearing impaired could lead to misunderstandings and unrealistic staff expectations making child abuse easier.

Table 6: The views of the matrons concerning support structures in place at the hostel for the prevention of sexual abuse of hearing impaired learners

Issues in the combating of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners at the hostel	Yes	No	Total
Whether learners were at risk of being sexually abused again	2	2	4
Whether matrons could manage their workload	4	0	4
Whether they had problems in communicating with learners	0	4	4
Whether matrons felt equipped to do their work	4	0	4
Whether they got any training in their present jobs	0	4	4

Note: N of matrons = 4

On the question of how they felt about supervision and support from their seniors, the four matrons' responses were as follows: 3 out of the 4 experienced problems in getting support from their seniors. The main obstacle here involved the following of prescribed channels in the reporting of

a problem or a concern. The 3 matrons explained that whenever a problem was reported, they did not always get feedback from their seniors. They further complained that the inspector only visited the hostel when there was a problem. He never visited the hostel to give advice or support. One matron was concerned about the fact that there had not been an official introduction between the matrons and the inspector. Two of the matrons however, felt that they always got the support they needed from the hostel superintendent

With respect to their daily responsibilities the matrons explained the following:

After waking up the learners at 05h00 in the morning they supervised them in the bathrooms to make sure the smaller ones washed themselves properly. Supervision in the bedrooms was also important to ensure that everything was tidy. Afterwards they accompanied the learners to the kitchen for breakfast. Before learners left for school, the matrons inspected the bedrooms to ensure neatness. Matrons were also responsible for making sure that learners were presentable and neat before going to school. During school time matrons were free. After school they made sure that the learners got out of school uniforms. In the afternoon matrons kept learners occupied with homework and other chores. Evening time started with supervision in the kitchen, followed by bath time supervision. Matrons went to bed after the learners went to bed. This was at 20h00 for the young learners and 21h00 for the older learners. According to the schedule of the matrons it seems as if these learners are supervised properly while in the hostel. However, they are not confined to the hostel premises only. They do wander around outside

where they can be abused, or this can even happen inside the hostel by people known to them whom they trust. This has happened before.

Data from learners

32 Learners of whom 15 were boys and 17 were girls were interviewed to find out the extent to which they were aware of the dangers of child sexual abuse. The nine items used aimed at finding out whether the learners knew how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. The researcher compared the responses of boys and girls.

Table 7 presents the results on the extent of sexual abuse awareness amongst hearing impaired boys and girls. The results show that 100% of the learners knew the difference between good and bad touching. Boys in general pointed out the private parts and the buttocks as a way of bad touching. Girls indicated that touching private parts, buttocks and breasts was bad. Good touching was explained in general by both sexes as holding hands, embracing and kissing. On the issue of whether to take a lift from a stranger to school, more boys than girls would be willing to accept it (26.7 % of boys compared to the 11.8 % of girls). The boys who would accept the lift explained that they would do so if a woman driver was alone in the car. It is possible that they felt they were physically stronger than a woman and as such the possibility of being overpowered would be nil. The data showed that more boys (46.7 %) than girls (35.3%) were willing to talk to their friends about sex. It was interesting to note that 6 out of the 7 boys who indicated 'yes' explained that the friends whom they would talk to would include boys and girls. In comparison with this, all 6 girls indicated that they would be

willing to discuss sexual issues with both male and female friends. Based on the responses it seems as if boys are unaware of the possibility of being sexually abused by a woman. They need to be taught the difference between sexual abuse and sex. Boys are more open about sex than girls, probably because of their upbringing. Many adolescent boys, as well as some men, regard sexual experiences as some kind of “victory”, meaning it is something they can boast about. Contrary to this is that women are emotionally more involved when it comes to sexual intercourse and would consequently not talk about it as much as men.

Table 7: The extent of awareness towards sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired boys and girls

Issues	Responses by sex							
	Boys				Girls			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Whether learners knew the difference between good and bad touching	15	100.0	0	0.0	17	100.0	0	0.0
Whether learners would take a lift from a stranger	4	26.7	11	73.3	2	11.8	15	88.2
Whether learners talked to their friends about sex	7	46.7	8	53.3	6	35.3	11	64.7

Note: N of boys = 15; N of girls = 17

Responses by sex on bad touching (see table 8) indicated that more than 50% of the boys would protect themselves, compared to the almost 30% of the girls who opted for the same. 4 Boys and 6 girls would tell adults in

authority in case they experienced bad touching. The people they would report to included parents, teachers, the police and the social workers. Two learners from both sexes responded with "I'll do nothing" on the question of what to do in case of bad touching. Whereas 4 girls admitted that they would not know what to do, only 1 boy had the same response. The results from table 8 revealed that 6 girls in total responded with "I'll do nothing" or "I don't know" on the question of how to respond to touching the learners didn't like. These girls could be referred to as being unable to protect themselves from sexual abuse. Three boys could be put in the same category of not knowing how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. However, on the next question of who they would tell suppose they got touched in a bad way, only 2 girls responded with "I don't know" and "I'll keep quiet", compared to the 1 boy who responded with "I don't know". The remaining boys and girls indicated that they would tell either the police, people in authority, family or friends. My opinion is that girls and boys need to learn assertive skills. It seems as if they lack the courage to act when confronted with a possible situation of being sexually abused. Although some indicated that they would tell, this might not stop the abuse to take place at that moment.

Table 8: Responses by sex on touching that the learners did not like

Options	Responses by sex	
	Boys	Girls
Protect myself (Fight back, run away)	8	5
Tell other people	4	6
Do nothing	2	2
Don't know	1	4
Total	15	17

On the question of how the learners would feel if they were touched in a bad way by someone they liked or trusted, the majority of learners reported that they would experience feelings of unhappiness, sadness, anger and being worried. Only one boy indicated that he would feel fine if he was touched in a bad way by a trusted person.

From the data on how to respond if touched by a trusted person in an abusive way (see table 9) it was obvious that the girls lacked assertive skills. In comparison to the 1 boy who responded with "I'll do nothing", 9 girls responded by saying either "I don't know", "I'll do nothing" or "cry". This meant that more than 50% of the girls would not be able to protect themselves in case of abuse. Twelve out of the 15 boys seemed that they would be able to protect themselves. Two boys were very firm in their responses by saying "It's my body" and "I don't like it". Compared to the 12 boys only 7 girls seemed to know how to protect themselves in such a situation. This figure referred to those boys and girls who responded with "I'll

defend myself”, “I’ll say no” or “I’ll tell someone”. In my opinion the girls at the Institute were aware of dangerous situations in which they could possibly be abused (see responses in table 7). The data showed that 88.2% of the girls and 73.3% of the boys would refuse a lift from a stranger. The problem the girls had was the inability to handle a possible abusive situation. Their responses in tables 8 and 9 clearly indicate this. This can again be attributed to the child-rearing practices in our cultures. Children are taught to “Listen to your father”, and “Obey your elders” (Marshall & Herman, 1998). On top of this, women are raised to be subordinate to their men, making them vulnerable to accept an abusive situation.

Table 9: Responses by sex on what to do if touched in a bad way by a trusted person

Responses	Responses by sex	
	Boys	Girls
Don't know	0	5
Do the same	2	1
Defend myself	4	2
Do nothing	1	3
Say 'no'	4	4
Tell someone	4	1
Cry	0	1
Total	15	17

In analysing the data with respect to where the learners learnt about sex, the printed media were the most popular source. These sources would include

science books, magazines and booklets (see table 10). Friends and family were ranked next – with 5 learners from both sexes who responded to this source. Three boys out of the 15 indicated that they learnt about sex from TV and videos. Two girls out of the 17 girls learnt in this way, too. Two girls were unable to tell where they got their information from. This did not correspond to what they had been taught in school. In my opinion all learners from this particular age group should have been taught about sex in school by this time because this information forms part of the Science and Health Education Syllabus. This could either mean that these two girls did not pay attention in class or they were unable to apply information learnt in school in their everyday life situation. The latter seemed more acceptable because I had learnt through experience that the deaf learner experienced problems using classroom situations or experiences in understanding real life situations.

Table 10: Sources from where learners learnt about sex

Sources	Responses by sex	
	Boys	Girls
Science books, magazines, booklets	7	8
TV and videos	3	2
Friends and family	5	5
Unable to tell/Don't know	0	2
Total	15	17

Analysing data on possible sexual abusers (see table 11) revealed that more girls than boys had trouble in identifying sexual molesters. Out of the 17 girls, almost half indicated that only unknown men could be possible molesters whereas 4 could not identify possible molesters at all. The fact that so many girls identified only unknown men as possible sexual abusers again stressed the child-raising traditions in our country. Parents raised their children to be afraid of strangers for sexually molesting them, though more sexual offenders came from people close to the children – either family or friends. 2 Boys reported women only as possible abusers, and no men. Contrary to this 6 boys indicated men only as possible abusers and not women or boys. The girls' responses on both these issues were nil. My opinion was that the 2 boys could have difficulty in differentiating between sexual abuse and sex. Based on their understanding sex could only happen between a woman and a man. The 6 boys who indicated men only as possible sexual abusers could be of those boys who had been subjected to the sexual abuse in 1997 – as except for one, all of them were part of the sample. The other possibility was that these boys might associate sexual abuse with physical strength. Based on this they might have difficulty in conceptualising a woman as being able to force them to have sex. This finding corresponded with the 4 boys who felt that nobody would be able to sexually molest them. The fact that only 3 boys and 1 girl could identify both women and men as possible sexual abusers highlighted once again that the learners at the Institute lack more information on the topic of sexual abuse. Furthermore, they needed to learn more assertive skills in how to prevent sexual abuse. The situation at the Institute does correspond to the literature

in the sense of advocating for the availability and accessibility of a prevention programme to children with disabilities, (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000). It should be stressed, however, that the criteria for such a programme to be successful are not just information sharing, but should focus more on teaching and practice (Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000; Sobsey, 1994). No where in the literature do they differentiate between boys and girls with respect to assertiveness towards sexual abuse, though.

Table 11: Possible sexual abusers

Possible sexual abusers	Responses by sex	
	Boys	Girls
Women only, no men	2	0
Both women and men	3	1
Men only, no women or boys	6	0
Nobody	4	3
Unknown men only	0	8
Don't know	0	4
Boys only	0	1
Total	15	17

CHAPTER FIVE

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate possible preventative strategies to protect learners with hearing impairments from sexual abuse. Data were collected from different groups of informants, including the learners, the parents of these learners, the matrons responsible for taking care of these learners, the teachers and lastly the principal of the Institute for Special Education. Questionnaires and interviews were used to obtain data. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used.

The findings suggested that sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners should be seen as a matter of concern. There were a few alarming responses from all informants that needed to be addressed. Derived from the findings of this study, the parents indicated that they were unable to discuss sexual matters with their hearing impaired children. Although the inability to communicate in Sign Language was not pointed out as an obstacle my view was that many parents with children at the Institute did have problems in communicating with their children and as such put them at risk of being sexually abused (Elder, 1993). Other factors could include the poor social circumstances of these parents. Many of them struggled to make a living (Sobsey, 1994; Mitchelle & Buchele- Ash, 2000). Due to this they might not regard the protection of their children against abuse as one of their priorities. Poverty was also linked with low academic qualifications. Many parents of

the learners at the Institute were incapable of understanding the impact of sexual abuse on their children because of their low education or they might underestimate the effects thereof. Although the researcher did not compare the responses of parents according to different educational backgrounds, it became obvious during the data collection procedure that parents with low academic qualifications had trouble in conceptualizing the impact of sexual abuse on their children. Parents left young children in the care of older siblings because they could not afford a babysitter when they had to go to work. These unattended young children could become easy preys to idle men in the neighbourhood who wanted to sexually abuse them. The safer option for them would be to put the child in the hostel, not knowing that he or she could be at risk in there, too.

The findings pertaining to the safety measures at school in the combating of sexual abuse amongst the learners stressed the importance of the teaching of sex education at the Institute (Ammerman & Baladerian 1993, as cited by Mitchell & Buchele-Ash, 2000). It was clear that the teachers had the skills, as well as the materials and equipment to successfully implement this. However, this knowledge was restricted to certain subjects and grades only, at the time in question. There were furthermore differences in opinions regarding the male and female teacher's responses. These could be attributed to the fact that all male teachers were teaching the upper primary and junior secondary classes. Thus, they were unaware of certain issues concerning the lower primary and orientation classes.

The principal highlighted the following safety measures as important in protecting learners from sexual abuse: Regular support for the matrons in

how to handle the hearing impaired learners could reduce stress. Reycome (1990, as cited by Barter, 2003), has found that the provision of regular and supportive supervision of residential care staff is a main factor in the prevention of child abuse. Thus, the possibility of abuse would be minimized. The matrons should be carefully selected to suit the needs of the learners under their care. Effective communication between the matrons and learners would be an advantage. Although the Principal rated the availability of policies that should be implemented for the safeguarding of the hearing impaired learners of average importance, I was of the opinion that it was most important. By doing so, any misconceptions or misunderstandings with respect to child abuse would then be clarified.

In analysing the responses from the matrons it became clear that the safety of the hostel boarders was a concern. The school and hostel premises were not secure enough. Another concern was the lack of training and workshops for the matrons on how to take care of the hearing impaired learners. Supervision and support from seniors could mediate the stress and pressure that these matrons experienced through their work because this was a complaint from most of the matrons. Another concern was that not all the matrons were clear as to who could pose a danger to sexually abuse the learners under their care. This implied that they would experience difficulty in identifying abuse should it happen.

Despite the teaching of sex education in the Natural Science and Health Education syllabus, many learners were unable to apply that knowledge in responding to the questions. They were not clear about the people who might be a danger to them. Some girls, for instance, only regarded men

unknown to them as dangerous. This was again an indication of a situation where only strangers were thought responsible for abusing children. Both boys and girls did not regard women as dangerous in sexually abusing them. More girls than boys were unlikely to talk about sex. This could be due to their need for privacy or due to their upbringing in different cultures where sex as a topic of discussion was taboo. It was interesting to note the responses of the girls on what to do if someone they liked and whom they trusted abused them. Many of them were not sure how to handle such a situation while others responded by saying they would do nothing. This response could be linked to the way in which women were brought up in our society. Women accepted the men as being powerful – people who made decisions. As a result they easily conformed to degrading roles.

Conclusion

In conclusion I found that the hearing impaired learners at the Institute were at risk of being sexually abused. Although most stakeholders involved with these learners were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to protect them, this was not always the case. Besides the problem in communication which put these learners at risk of being sexually abused, other factors did contribute too. In order to overcome these obstacles, parents and other care givers, such as the hostel matrons, should become more informed about sexual abuse and its consequences. The learners themselves should be taught on how to make the information about abuse being taught in school applicable to real life situations. Society should become involved in the protection of these learners. Lastly, legislation

regarding the protection of these learners should be designed and implemented (Miller, 2002).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data obtained from the different respondents the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents and matrons should be alerted about sexual abuse amongst the hearing impaired learners. Issues on sexual abuse could be discussed at school and hostel meetings on a regular basis, ensuring an open communication system between the school, the hostel and the home.
2. Proficiency in Sign Language should be encouraged amongst all those who were working with the hearing impaired learner. This could be made possible through learning from video cassettes rather than attending classes, since it became clear that parents, specifically either do not have the time to attend sign language classes or they are simply not interested. These classes will have to continue for some time in order to acquire the basic signs for effective communication.
3. A closer network should be established between the hostel staff members and the school inspector to ensure support in cases of difficulties and problems the matrons might face in the execution of their duties.

4. The teaching of sex education at the Institute of Special Education should be adapted to the needs of all the hearing impaired learners – no matter the age or grade of the learners concerned. Younger and older learners are equally vulnerable to sexual abuse. In teaching the different age groups, the teachers should just adapt the teaching material to be suitable for the needs of all learners.
5. Role play activities with respect to the prevention of sexual abuse should be introduced in the classroom, instead of rote learning about abuse. This will help learners to internalize information and to apply it in every day situations.
6. A closer cooperation between the Ministry of Education's Head Office and the Principal's office should be established to notify the latter about any upcoming workshops and relevant information on sexual abuse.
7. In order for girls to be more assertive towards sexual abuse and how to protect themselves, school programmes should focus more on gender equality training. Although this section is part of many subjects presently, the hearing impaired girl will only benefit if it is taught through more practice rather than pure teaching.
8. The Window of Hope is a program that was introduced at the Institute last year. This program suits the needs of the hearing impaired child

with respect to the prevention of sexual abuse because of its practical nature. Learners practice the skills of saying no whenever faced with an abusive or dangerous situation. The program is furthermore offered after school which makes it fun for the learners, since it is not in a classroom setting. Unfortunately it is only offered to learners in grades 4 and 5. However the intension is to gradually include the other learners in the program. This will only materialize after the teachers had undergone an intensive week long training about the program. It is recommended that this training should be provided to all new teachers. Moreover, the Window of Hope programme's impact on the prevention of sexual abuse amongst hearing impaired learners should be evaluated periodically.

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APPENDIX A: PARENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of this questionnaire is to get the parents' views with respect to factors that may contribute to the vulnerability of hearing impaired children to sexual abuse. This information may help to protect children with hearing impairment against sexual abuse. Be assured that whatever will be discussed or revealed here, will be handled with the utmost confidentiality.

Please complete these items as honestly as possible. How do you as a parent regard these factors as contributing to the vulnerability of children with hearing impairment to sexual abuse? Please circle the number that is the most appropriate to your opinion (5 will indicate strongly agree while 1 will be strongly disagree).

Children with low self-esteem	5	4	3	2	1
Socially-isolated children, due to either communication difficulties or as a result of being 'different'.	5	4	3	2	1
Children who were separated from their parents by being institutionalized (put in the hostel).	5	4	3	2	1
Children whose physical and emotional needs were being neglected.	5	4	3	2	1
Children previously abused	5	4	3	2	1
Drunk and idle men in the neighbourhood or at home	5	4	3	2	1
Ignorance regarding sexual abuse and its consequences on the side of adults and caregivers.	5	4	3	2	1
Underestimation of the intellectual abilities and feelings of special needs children	5	4	3	2	1
Adults and caregivers who were unable to discuss sexual matters with their children.	5	4	3	2	1
Lack of availability of after-care services for children	5	4	3	2	1
Parents who experienced difficulty in communicating and understanding sign language may hinder disclosure.	5	4	3	2	1
People in authoritarian positions misused their power by sexually abusing vulnerable and minor victims.	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX B: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of this instrument is to find out what structures are in place at school for teaching hearing impaired learners about sexual abuse.

Please complete these questions as honestly as possible. Be assured that all information will be handled with strict confidentiality. Should you need more space, feel free to use a separate piece of paper for your answer.

1. Gender: M ----- F-----
2. Teaching experience with respect to deaf education:

One to three years	-----
Four to six years	-----
More than 6 years	-----
3. Grade(s) teaching: -----

The following questions concern the structures in place at school for teaching hearing impaired learners about sexual abuse and the prevention thereof.

4. Does the Namibian curriculum make provision for sex education, with child abuse as a topic?

5. Does the school timetable make provision for sex education?

6. If yes, to what extent?

7. Are learners being taught about their rights?

8. Do you think learners are capable of recognizing improper sexual behaviour? Explain

9. Is communication in conveying information regarding sex a problem at school? Elaborate.

10. Are there any HIV & AIDS awareness programs accessible to hearing impaired learners?

11. How is important information regarding the learners being conveyed between the school and home?

APPENDIX C: PRINCIPAL'S QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of this questionnaire is to get your opinion regarding safety measures needed in the employment of a suitable caregiver for the hearing impaired learners at your school. Be assured that whatever information is revealed here, will be treated strictly confidential.

1. Gender: M ----- F-----

2. Teaching experience with respect to deaf education: ----- years

3. The items below concern safety measures that could be considered in selecting a suitable care giver at your school. Please indicate your view on the importance of each of these factors by circling each item as honestly as possible. The number 5 will indicate the most important while 1 will be of no importance.

Gender of the person	5	4	3	2	1
Ability to communicate with learners	5	4	3	2	1
Previous employment as caregivers as pre-requisite	5	4	3	2	1
The “employment history” of the prospective caregiver	5	4	3	2	1
The availability of prescribed procedures to follow in case of complaints with respect to child sexual abuse	5	4	3	2	1
The availability of policies implemented for the protection of learners against abuse	5	4	3	2	1
Training of hostel staff members in working with hearing impaired learners	5	4	3	2	1
Regular inspection of hostels to ensure the safety of the learners	5	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE MATRONS

This instrument aims at finding out what support structures are at the hostel in the combating of child abuse amongst the hearing impaired. Be assured that all information will be handled with strict confidentiality.

- Based on the sexual abuse that took place before, do you think the learners are at risk of being sexually abused again?
- Can you manage your workload? How?
- Do you experience any problems in communicating with the learners? How do you handle this?
- Do you feel equipped to do your work?
- Did you get any training for the work you're doing now?
- What are your feelings about supervision and support from your seniors?
- What do your daily responsibilities entail?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE HEARING IMPAIRED LEARNERS

The aim of this instrument is to find out the extent of awareness amongst hearing impaired learners towards the dangers of sexual abuse. It furthermore aims at finding out whether these learners know how to protect themselves from it? Be assured that the information that is shared here will be treated with confidentiality.

- Do you know when touching is good or bad? Explain.
- Will you take a lift to school offered by a stranger (man or woman)?
Explain
- Do you talk to your friends about sex?
- How would you respond to touching you don't like?
- Who would you tell suppose you got touched in a bad way?
- How will you feel if someone you like and trust (like a teacher or family member) touches you in a bad way?
- What will you do in such a situation?
- Where did you learn about sex?
- Mention a few possible people who could sexually abuse you.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE WITH THE PRINCIPAL

The aim of this interview is to get more information on questions asked during the questionnaire. The respondent will now have the opportunity to elaborate on factors he feels may contribute to putting hearing impaired children at risk for sexual abuse in the school hostel. Be assured that all information will be treated with confidentiality.

- Elaborate on the gender preference for the caregivers working with the hearing impaired learners at your hostel.
- Elaborate on the procedures followed in the selecting of a prospective caregiver at the hostel.
- How are complaints with respect to abuse being handled?
- How do you ensure the safety of the hearing impaired learners at the hostel with respect to:
 - a) Training
 - b) Inspection or supervision
 - c) Communication