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Exploring intervention experiences of social workers working with child sex offenders

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ABSTRACT

The cases of children involved in criminal activities are on the increase all over the world, including in South Africa. Offering services to all children and youth, whilst upholding the rights of children, is one of the fields of practice in social work. South Africa has adopted a restorative approach that aims to rehabilitate and return children in conflict with the law back into their communities. At the heart of applying restorative approaches as intervention with children in conflict with the law are social workers. The study attempts to explore the experiences of social workers regarding their intervention strategies with young sexual offenders.

The study applied a qualitative approach and narrative research design. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select 12 research participants from organisations that facilitate diversion programmes for child sex offenders. To ensure trustworthiness of the research, three prosecutors were also interviewed. Semi-structured interview schedules were utilised to conduct in-depth telephonic interviews with the participants. The data was transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. The main finding which emerged from the study was that social workers' challenges with diversion are mainly associated with external factors such as poor parental co-operation. The study concludes that diversion contributes to reducing the level of recidivism with child sex offenders and is a necessary form of intervention for children in conflict with the law.

Key words: Children in conflict with the law, Diversion, Rehabilitation, Sexual offences, Child sex offenders, Social workers.