



**Children placed in alternative care: experiences of primary caregivers pending
finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.**

A report on a research study presented to the Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Social Work

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DECLARATION

I, Busisiwe Mdluli, declare that this research work on Experiences of primary caregivers in Johannesburg whose children have been placed in alternative temporary safe care pending finalisation of a Children's Court Inquiry is my own original work. Any other work done by other people quoted herein has been properly acknowledged in the report.

The report is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work, with the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in the institution or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the child welfare system in South Africa is to create preventative and early intervention programmes. However, statutory intervention becomes necessary when a child needs emergency protection. The removal of a child from their primary caregiver and placing the child in alternative care can be traumatic for both child and primary caregiver. However, most research studies have focused on children's experiences of removal to alternative care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of primary caregivers whose child had been removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care. To explore their experiences a qualitative approach, specifically a case study research design. The theoretical framework underpinning the study was ecosystems perspective related to the person-in-environment social work concept, and *Kübler-Ross* model of grief. The study was undertaken in Johannesburg and the sample consisted of 12 purposively selected adult primary caregivers. To gather data, face-to-face interviews were conducted. An interview guide comprising of open-ended questions, was utilised as a research tool. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The main findings of the study were that regardless of socio-economic status, age and reasons for the removal, most primary caregiver usually feel devastated when their child is removed. The sometimes develop a lack of trust in the justice system and the social work profession. Recommendations are made, based on research findings, of how social workers can improve the quality of services rendered to primary caregivers when statutory intervention is necessary and the child is placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.

Keywords: Children; alternative care; temporary safe care; primary caregivers, Children' Court Inquiry.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1. Introduction

In 1994 South Africa became a democratic country and entered a new dispensation. The dispensation brought about the country's need to enact key international and national laws for the care and protection of children. In this regard on 16th June 1995 South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention of the Child (Sloth-Nielson, 1995) and on 7th January 2000, the country ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Viviers, 2014). To effectively address the best interests of the child and to give effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution; the government assented to the Children's Act, No. 38 of 2005 (hereafter referred to as the Children's Act) in June 2006. The said Children's Act sets out principles relating to the care and protection of children; and to define parental responsibilities and rights.

The Children's Act highlights that prevention and early intervention services should be prioritised. Sections 143 and 144 of the Children's Act describe prevention and early intervention programmes. In summary, these programmes focus on preserving a child's family structure, developing appropriate parenting skills and the capacity of parents and caregivers to safeguard the well-being and best interests of their children, preventing the neglect, exploitation, or inadequate supervision of children, and avoiding the removal of a child from the family environment.

Unfortunately, in South Africa the number of children being legally removed from dysfunctional family systems and placed in alternative care, such as foster care or a Child and Youth Care Centre, is

ever increasing. In the Department of Social Development's (hereafter referred to as DSD) Annual Report 2019, the following statistics are recorded: 2610 children were removed nationally in the year 2005. This number increased to 19 035 by the year 2019. This significant increase in statistics is also apparent at provincial level. For example, in Gauteng, the number of children removed from their primary caregivers and placed in alternative care between year 2016 and 2017 was 2115 and this number increased between the year 2018 and 2019 to 2870. In the Johannesburg Metro Region between years 2016 and 2017, the number of children removed to alternative care was 76, and between the year 2018 and 2019 the number increased to 109 (Social Development's Annual Report, 2019).

Section 150 of the Children's Act sets out the grounds for finding a child in need of care and protection. These grounds include child abuse, deliberate neglect, child exploitation, child labour and if a child manifests uncontrollable behaviour. In Gauteng, as in other provinces in South Africa, the main reasons for the removal of children from their primary caregivers' care includes sexual abuse; emotional abuse; poverty; deliberate neglect and exploitation; children with behavioural problems; domestic violence and custody battles between parents or family; drug abuse; mental challenges; high rate of poor parenting skills and unemployment (Social Development Annual Report, 2019).

The removal of a child into temporary safe care pending opening and subsequent finalisation of a Children Court Inquiry is prescribed in Sections 151 and 152 of the Children's Act. The Act states that a designated social worker or a police official may remove a child and place the child in temporary safe care with, or without, a court order if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the child is in need of care and protection or needs immediate emergency protection. This type of intervention is conducted if it is considered the best way to ensure the safety of the child.

A Children's Court Inquiry is subsequently opened at the Children's Court if the magistrate (referred to the Commissioner of Child Welfare) is satisfied that the child is at risk and statutory intervention is warranted. The magistrate may issue a court order stating that the child concerned remains in temporary safe care, pending a thorough assessment by a social worker. Based on a thorough assessment of the family system from which the child was removed, the social worker compiles a final court report and makes a recommendation regarding placement of the child. The social worker can recommend that the child be placed in alternative care, such as foster care or in a suitable Child and Youth Care Centre or be returned to care of the caregiver from whose care they were removed. Unfortunately, social workers rarely make the last recommendation.

2. Problem Statement and Rationale for conducting the study

Ainsworth and Ansen (2011) claim that the increasing removal of children from their primary caregivers' care is not in line with the Children's Act, which places emphasis on the importance of family preservation. The Children's Act stipulates that the removal of children from their primary caregivers and placement in alternative care should be the last option. However, in practice once children are placed in temporary safe care, statutory social workers tend to prioritize rendering services to the children concerned to ensure that their physical and emotional needs are being met. Although social workers should also focus on rendering services to the primary caregivers of the children concerned, these services are not being adequately and effectively implemented. (Social Development Annual Report, 2011; Schofield & Ward, 2011). If the parents are not actively involved, the aim of family preservation cannot be met because there can be no improvement in the family's functioning if the link in the family system chain is not fixed (Alpert, 2005 cited in Schofield & Ward, 2011).

Much research has focused on the reasons for child abuse and deliberate neglect, as well as the personal experiences of children removed from their parents' care and placed in alternative care. This is probably because the principle of 'best interests of the child' underpins any statutory intervention and permanency planning is in respect of children. Consequently, there is a gap of knowledge regarding the experiences and perceptions of the children's primary caregivers (usually biological parents) when statutory intervention has taken place and the children concerned are placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of Children's Court Inquiry. Hence the purpose of the study was to fill this gap of knowledge. It was reasoned that if one could explore the experiences of primary caregivers, statutory social workers, and other key role players, could better understand the services that need to be rendered to improve the parenting capacity of primary caregivers and family functioning in general. By rendering effective family preservation and restoration services, consideration can be given to reunifying child and primary caregiver(s) as soon as possible if this in the child's best interests.

3. Research Question

The main research question that this study addressed was: "How do primary caregivers experience legal removal of their children from their care and placement in alternative care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry?"

4. Main aim and objectives.

The main aim of the study was: "Explore primary caregivers' experiences of legal removal of their child from their care and placement in alternative care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry."

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were formulated:

- 4.1. To explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the reasons why their child had been legally removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care pending finalization of the Children's Court Enquiry.
- 4.2. Explore how primary caregivers reacted when their child was removed from their care.
- 4.3. To explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the temporary safe care placements
- 4.4. Investigate how primary caregivers felt about the way their cases were managed prior to finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.
- 4.5. To explore what primary caregivers desired to be the outcome of statutory intervention in respect of their children.

5. Summary of Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted to acquire in-depth insight into the experiences of primary caregivers whose children had been placed in temporary safe care, pending finalisation of the Children's Court Enquiry. More specifically, the qualitative case study research design was selected. The 'case' explored was experiences of primary caregivers whose children were removed and placed in temporary safe care in terms of the Children's Act. The theoretical framework underpinning the study were the eco-systems perspective, person-in-environment social work concept and the Kubler Ross model of grief and bereavement (this will be elaborated on in Chapter 3). The sample consisted of twelve primary caregivers who were purposively selected. They were clients of the Department of Social Development in Johannesburg Metropolitan area. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews was the method used for data gathering. An interview guide with a list of open-ended questions that were aligned with the research objectives was used to guide the interviews so that meaningful data would be accrued. Data

were subsequently thematically analysed. Based on findings coming to the fore, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations made regarding the way forward.

6. Limitations and Delimitations of the study.

The limitations of this research included the following:

- Given the small sample size and the nature of the research design, the findings obtained cannot be generalised to the broader South African context.
- The research study focused on the experiences of the caregivers who had their children removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care. I did not approach other role players involved in statutory intervention and placement of children in temporary safe care, for example social workers, police officers, Commissioners of Child Welfare and people or institutions in which the children were placed in temporary safe care. If the categories of participants could have been larger and varied, a more holistic perspective of placement of children in temporary safe care could have been obtained.

Bearing in mind time restrictions to complete the research study, the study was delimited in the following manner:

- A specific State department that manages cases of statutory intervention in respect of children was selected as the context/boundary of the research.
- Typical of qualitative research, a small number of research participants were selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the objectives being explored.

7. Definition of Keywords

7.1. Temporary Safe Care/Alternative care

In terms of the Children's Act (No. 2005, as amended in 2007), temporary safe care is defined as “a care of a child in an approved Child and Youth Care Centre, shelter or private home or any other place, where the child can safely be accommodated, pending a decision or court order concerning the placement of the child, but excludes care of a child in a prison or police cell”. In this study the term ‘alternative care’ is used interchangeably with alternative care because both a Child and Youth Care or person (foster care) are also used as an alternative care placement.

7.2. Child

The Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child state that a child is any person below the age of 18 years.

7.3. Primary Caregiver

In this study, the term ‘primary caregiver’ is the adult who assumes primary responsibility for the health and well-being of the child. This term is usually associated with one or both parents because they are the most common primary caregivers. However, this reference could include grandparents and other adult relatives taking on major responsibility for the care of the child on a legal or informal manner.

7.4. Child protection official

In terms of the Children's Act, social workers and police officers are authorised to remove a child in terms of Form 36 of the said Act. A Form 36 of the Children's Act is interim authority for placement of child in temporary safe care.

8 Structure of Report

This chapter provided an overview of the problem-situation and rationale for conducting the study. The core research question and the main aim and objectives of the study were stated. The research methodology implemented was summarised. The research limitations and delimitations, as well as the theoretical framework underpinning were briefly described. Chapter Two describes the theoretical framework underpinning the research and then critically discusses academic literature related to the research topic. Chapter Three explicates in detail the research methodology employed to conduct the study. Chapter Four presents the research findings and provides a critical discussion thereof. The final chapter of the research report, Chapter 5, summarises the major findings and presents recommendations based on the findings

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework that underpins this study and then discusses important information relevant to research question, based on a rigorous literature review.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework section introduces and describes the perspective and theory that are relevant to and support the research problem under study. This study was based on the Ecosystems perspective and *Kübler-Ross* model of grief.

2.1. Eco-systems perspective and person-in-environment concept in the social work profession

Social workers adopting the ecosystems perspective use ecology as a metaphor for encouraging social workers to focus on transactions within and across systems and to seek sustainable, not only short-term, change (Healy, 2014). Based on this perspective, theorists argue that social work assessment and intervention should focus on ‘person-in-environment’ transactions. In this study, primary caregivers are the ‘persons’ in the environment. Their environment consists of sub-environments, including their physical, cultural, and social environments. (In Chapter 4, a description of some demographics of the participants appears). Issues such as child abuse, domestic violence, poor socio-economic status, and dysfunctional family systems – all factors that can give rise to exposing a child to risk – are key components of the environment in which primary caregivers function.

When children are removed from their caregivers, social workers have the responsibility to try ‘repair’ the fractured relationship between the person and environment. In other words, social workers need to recognise that problems arise because of “a poor fit between a person’s environment and his or her needs, capacities, rights, and aspirations” (Healy, 2014, citing Germain & Gitterman, 1996, p. 8).

2.2. The Model of Grief by Kubler Ross

According to Zeman (2005), parents who have experienced abrupt separation from their children tend to suffer and have the same experiences as those parents who have lost children through death. This includes feelings of shock, anger, denial, and acceptance (Zeman, 2005). According to the study conducted by Zeman (2005), parents whose children have been removed tend to experience painful and prolonged sense of loss and continuation of unresolved grief rather than the resolution of ending of grief. Bareqet-Moshe (2011, p.122) states that “... *in general removing children from the care of their parents has been found to increase the parents’ distress as they are normally left with the anguish of separation, loss and subsequent sense of bereavement*”. For this reason, the Kubler-Ross model of grief and bereavement is the second theoretical concept underpinning this study.

3. Literature Review

This section of the chapter summarises and critically discusses pertinent literature related to the research phenomenon that was explored.

3.1. International Legal Frameworks for Child Protection

The practice of removing children from the circumstances in which they are exposed to risk is a way of protecting them from any form of abuse and deliberate neglect. The practice

emanates from several conventions which are referred to as the international laws on the rights of the child.

The concept of 'removal of the child' begins with several treaties and conventions which were adopted by several government states, including South Africa. As pointed out in Chapter 1, South Africa adopted the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (hereafter UNCRC) on 2 September 1990. The UNCRC aimed at:

Endorsing the principle of social justice when coming to children's rights as well as establishing clear obligations upon all ratified States to legislate children's rights and make provision for these rights to be implemented and for all states to be accountable in protecting these rights (Articles 42 - 45 of UNCRC, 2007).

The UNCRC also aimed at addressing conflict in children's lives, including child labour; sexual exploitation and other human rights violation by stating that childhood is entitled to special care, protection, and assistance. The UNCRC was a calling to all governments to ensure that the rights of the children are protected at all costs. Shireman (2003) was of the view that the world has reached a dramatic point in the history of children's rights in relation to those of the parents. He argued that children are becoming the responsibility of the State and welfare departments, with the State providing and defining its own guidelines, without involving the parents.

The UNCRC puts emphasis on the fact that children are neither property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity, thereby further acknowledging that children's rights are humans' rights. However, the UNCRC neglects the fact that parents should still exercise their rights and responsibilities (UNCRC, 2007). This has led to parents being frustrated and experience erosion of parenting, particularly when the children are removed from their care and their views and opinions during the process of removal are ignored (Zeman, 2005).

3.2. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

On 7th January 2000, South Africa ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990, hereafter ACRWC). ACRWC is a comprehensive instrument that sets out rights and defines universal principles and norms for the status of children. This charter helps bring into focus the challenges that many children in Africa face around child abuse including but not limited to economic and sexual exploitation, discrimination around gender lines especially in relation to access to health care, early marriages, and migration. Furthermore, African children are affected by factors such as differences between urban and rural areas, child-headed households, street children and poverty. The charter makes provision for fulfillment of the rights of the child through certain obligations such as outright prohibition on the recruitment of children (i.e., under 18 years old) in armed conflict and deals with conscription of children into the armed forces; prohibiting marriages or betrothals involving children; prohibiting the use of children as beggars; granting girls the right to return to school after pregnancy and promoting affirmative action for girls 'education.

The charter also commits to protecting internally displaced and refugee children; protecting imprisoned expectant mothers and mothers of infants and young children and providing a way for children themselves to petition the Children's Charter's Committee of experts regarding infringements of their rights, including special reference to care of the child by extended families and encouraging the state to provide support for parents in times of need.

The fundamental principles guiding implementation of these rights include:

- Non-discrimination
- The best interests of the child

- The life, survival, and development of the child
- Child participation
- Providing for the responsibilities that every child has regarding them and society, the State, and the international community.

It is important to note that the ACRWC and the UNCRC are used in this discussion due to their importance as they are the only international and regional human rights treaties that cover the whole spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. To further enhance the rights of children specifically in South Africa, a discussion of South African Legislation will be entertained below.

3.3. South African legislation on child protection in the Bill of Rights

Section 28 of the Bill of Rights (Act 108 of 1996) puts emphasis on the protection and promotion of children's rights. This section highlights the rights of children as of paramount importance in any matter that that concerns them. Furthermore, this section states that every child should be protected from any maltreatment, neglect, abuse, degradation, and exploitation.

One aspect that this section puts emphasis on is the removal of the child from the family environment. In cases whereby the right to parental care is violated, the child has a right to be placed into alternative care. This is in line with the ACRWC (1990) which states that "regardless of the child's country of origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic factors, religious affiliation, gender, mental and developmental capacity, the child shall enjoy his /her rights within and outside the family".

3.4. Children's Act No. 38 of 2005

In order to give effect to international and domestic child protection frameworks, South Africa implemented the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005. The objectives of the Children's Act set out to promote the preservation and strengthening of families; give effect

to certain constitutional rights of children; and to give effect to the Republic's obligations concerning the wellbeing of children in terms of international instruments. The said Act further seeks to provide care and protection for children who are in need of care and protection (Children's Act, 2005). In essence, this Act generally promotes the protection, development, and well-being of children.

The Children's Act also focuses on family preservation as the first option before the removal of the child to alternative care, and states that parents should be included in programmes that will improve their parenting skills. According to the Social Development Annual Report (2019), programmes designed for parents whose children have been removed and placed in alternative care tend to be unjust. There is no impact in that these programmes are usually not conclusive and lack parental involvement and participation.

Addressing the potential of parents to improve their parenting skills and resume responsibility of parental care has also been a common problem with presiding officers in the Children's Court. Parents are frequently referred for counselling, therapy and parenting skills to organizations specialising in this area, for example the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (F.A.M.S.A) and the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (S.A.N.C.A). However, parents seem to be overwhelmed by the whole process. Instead of learning new ways of parenting, the after-care services that they receive appear to be, in most cases, not relevant to the challenges they face. As a result, not all parents benefit from these services (Social Development Annual report, 2019).

3.5. Specification of child removal in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended in 2007)

The general principles on the removal of children guide the implementation of all legislation applicable to children and all proceedings, actions and decisions taken by any organ of State in any matter concerning a child or children in general. The first principle

states that all proceedings, actions, or decisions in a matter concerning a child must respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the child's right set out in the Bill of Rights, and the best interests of the child standard set out in Section 7 of the Children's Act.

The second principle further states that if it is in the best interests of the child, the child's family must be given the opportunity to express their views in any matter concerning the child. Any approach which is not conducive to conciliation and problem-solving should be avoided and a delay in any action or decision to be taken must be avoided as far as possible.

Thirdly, it states that a child having regard to his or her age of maturity and stage of development, and a person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of that child, where appropriate, must be informed of any actions or decisions taken in a matter concerning the child which significantly affects the child (Children's Act, No 38 of 2005). Nelson and Gallagher (2007), highlight that the general guiding principles are silent on the role of the parents and their involvement on issues affecting their children in that this tends to overwhelm the parents. The Children's Act itself overlooks the experiences and the role of parents during the removal of their children and during the statutory processes, (Nelson & Gallagher, 2007). Furthermore, as much as there are guidelines and models relating to the care and protection of children, there is a need to refocus and challenge policies and legislation that side-line the involvement of parents and stripping them off their parental rights and responsibilities (Nelson & Gallagher,2007).

3.6. Parental rights and responsibilities and implication of child removal

The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (Sections 18-21) recognizes that parents need to fulfil their rights and responsibilities and strive towards family preservation. However, there seems to be a gap in guidelines of how parents should be assisted when their children

are removed from their care and how they can be empowered to resume their parental responsibilities.

According to the study conducted by Mayes and Llewlynn, (2009), findings indicated that little is known about the devastating outcomes for the parents whose children have been removed. Their study findings were that parents whose children had been taken away from them expressed grief after the defining event of their children being removed from their care. Furthermore, Mayes and Llewlynn (2009) indicated that most parents associated their loss not only as the absence of their children, but also with a loss of parental role. The resulting effects on parents included sadness; confusion; poor mental and physical health; anxiety; depression; sense of shame and guilt; feelings of helplessness; anger, embarrassment, frustration, and incapacity of coping with daily pressures. Depression sometimes led them to a point of self-harm or even contemplating suicide.

In most instances parents, regardless of their socio-economic group, race and gender had similar experiences (Mayes & Llewlynn, 2009). Having looked at these challenges Bareqet- Moshe (2011) highlighted that personal and social problems are common characteristics that lead to the removal of children from the care of their parents. The findings of study conducted by Mayes and Llewlynn (2009) also revealed that other parents whose children had been removed from their care deliberately fell pregnant with the perception that there is a need for a replacement for the removed child to restore the parental status and identity, as well as trying hard to prove that the removal was unjustifiable.

Bareqet-Moshe (2011) recommended that because there is currently a dearth in literature exploring the experiences of parents whose children have been removed from their care without systematic investigations, social workers can only best assume the serious consequences for parents and their children. Furthermore, the challenge is to

determine the support needed for these parents, and the initial step would be to have an in-depth understanding of parents' experiences and their responses as well as their reaction in losing the custody of the child" (Mayes & Llewlllyn, 2009).

Bareqet-Moshe (2011) and Mayes and Llewlllyn (2009) recommended that it is important for social workers to adopt family orientated interventions to assist families before statutory intervention and that grieving parents' models and programmes be modified in working and understating the experiences and feelings of parents whose children have been removed from their care.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter described the theoretical framework underpinning this study, namely the Kubler Ross theory of Grief and Bereavement and the Ecosystems perspective related to the Person-in-Environment concept. It then summarised literature pertinent study, including the UNCRC, and ACRWC legislation and the Children's Act. Sections of this chapter also emphasised that research focusing on primary caregivers' (especially parents) experiences of removal of their children from their care. The following chapter focuses on the methodology adopted to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology adopted to answer the research questions. This is done by describing the research approach and design, and the study population and sampling strategies used. A description of the data collection and analyses is discussed, as well as the steps taken to improve trustworthiness of the study. Finally, there is a discussion of the ethical considerations that were followed to protect the study participants from any form of harm.

2. Research Question

The main research question underlying the study was: What are primary caregivers' experiences when their children are legally removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry?

3. Aim and Objectives of the study

3.1 Aim

The primary aim of the study was to Explore the experiences of primary caregivers regarding legal removal of their children from their care and placed in alternative care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.

3.2 Objectives

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were formulated:

- i) To explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the reasons why their children had been legally removed from their care and placed in alternative care pending finalization of the Children's Court Enquiry.
- ii) Explore how primary caregivers reacted when their children were removed from their care.
- iii) To explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the temporary safe care placements
- iv) Investigate how primary caregivers felt about the way their cases were managed prior to finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.
- v) To explore what primary caregivers desired to be the outcome of statutory intervention in respect of their children.

4 Research Design

In order to address the main research question, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. This selection of research design was based on my worldview or philosophy, which is constructivism. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018, pp. 7-8) explain that this worldview adopts the perception that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are difficult and multiple, leading me to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing the meanings. Basically, a qualitative approach is used by researchers to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions (Pathak, Jena & Kalra, 2013, para.2).

A case study research design, which is qualitative in nature, was selected for the purpose of this study. Baxter and Jack (2008, p.545, citing Yin, 2003) explain that a case study design should be selected when the main focus of the research covers the following issues: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because

you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. The purpose my case study research was to explore “how” primary caregivers experience removal of their children to temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children’s Court Inquiry and “why” this is so. The ‘case’, evident in the main research question is the ‘experiences of primary caregivers having a child legally removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care’. The ‘boundaries’ included the fact that these primary caregivers were clients of the Department of Social Development (DSD) in Johannesburg and social workers from the DSD rendered services in this regard.

Furthermore, my background in social work practice (specifically statutory intervention in respect of children) and interest in human behaviour and development, was a motivating factor for me to include exploratory and descriptive elements to the research design. Monette, Sullivan and Dejong (2011) highlight that the emphasis in qualitative is on telling a story, as well as to gain an understanding through the depth and richness of detail provided. The detailed qualitative accounts often produced in case studies not only help to explore or describe the data in the real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of real-life situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research.

The primary focus of case studies is a description, not a generalisation. The advantage of these methods is the rich and detailed descriptions they provide of people's lives, experiences, and circumstances. In addition, the ability of these methods to allow people to speak in their own voices makes them valuable sources of data (Monette, Sullivan & Dejong, 2011). Case studies are tailor-made for exploring new processes or behaviours, or ones that are little understood (Hartley, 1994). Lastly, an additional strength of a case study research design is that it proves to be a useful methodology in interpretive approaches as it allows the people being studied to play a big role in framing and providing meaning for their lives.

Case studies are often accused of a lack of rigour. Yin (1984, p.21) notes that "too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, and has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions". Secondly, case studies provide very little basis for scientific generalisation since they use a small number of subjects, some conducted with only one subject. The question commonly raised is "How can you generalise from a single case?" (Yin, 1984, p.21). This is a common criticism of a case study method as its dependency on a single case exploration makes it difficult to reach a generalising conclusion (Tellis, 1997). The researcher overcame these limitations by maintaining the focus on exploring and understanding, rather than making generalisations, as well as ensuring the use of self-reflection on thoughts and processes and taking field notes to be aware and avoid biased views.

5 Population and Sample

The population in this study was all primary caregivers whose children have been removed from their care and placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. Non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select the sample of participants. Marlow (2005) and Rubin and Babbie (2005) described purposive sampling as selecting participants that best represent the larger population group with an aim of getting in-depth information.

In this study, the sample of purposively selected the research participants were 12 primary caregivers whose children had been placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. The criteria for selection of the sample of the participants was as follows:

- Adult primary caregivers who were clients of the Department of Social Development in the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Region.

- Male and female
- Social workers at the Department of Social Development were requested to contact their clients and inquire whether they would be willing to participate in the study.

6 Data Gathering

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the sample of participants to gather data on the phenomenon being explored. To guide the gathering of rich information from the participants, a semi-structured interview guide was used to guide the interviews, and mostly open-ended questions to allow the free-form answers from the participants. De Vos et al. (2005) stated that person-to-person interviews provide the researcher an opportunity of understanding better the participants' feelings, experiences and their challenges and allows flexibility to probe further regarding the question around the conducted study.

The interview guide was pre-tested with one primary caregiver whose child had been placed in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. This process ascertained whether the questions were clear and relevant to the study, as well as getting the required information. Grinnel (1993) explains that pre-testing is conducted before the study in order to ascertain whether or not the questions that are presented to the research participants are clear and understandable. Interviews were approximately one hour in duration and they were conducted at a venue that was suitable and offered privacy for the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of research participants.

Data gathering was stopped when saturation occurred. In other words, I did not get 'new' information coming to the fore; the experiences shared by each participant was similar to that of others.

7 Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves the researcher understanding and interpreting the data collected as well as asking analytical questions (Creswell, 2010). I used thematic analysis to complete data analysis. The steps that I implemented to conduct thematic analysis were the steps outlined by Tesch (1990, as cited in De Vos, 1998) which provide a structural format for discussion and analysis:

- Transcribing and analysing the interview. Similar thoughts are grouped together and given labels.
- These labels are then reviewed and organised into condensed categories as summaries which make data more manageable yet precise, as the original data are not lost (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Groups of categories are headed under singular themes which mirror the researcher's objectives.
- Direct quotes were used when presenting the data to further clarify and illustrate the categories and themes which are linked to past research in the report's literature review.
- A discussion was presented, comparing past research and relevant theory and literature to the research study and the researcher 'critical opinions, was provided.

I arranged data collected according to emerging themes that gave meaning to the data. The researcher arranged information according to categories, themes and patterns (De Vos, 2011).

8 Trustworthiness of the study.

According to De Vos et al. (2011, p. 419) there "are four constructs that reflect the assumption of the qualitative research more accurately". The four dimensions are clearly outlined by Lincoln and Guba model which include the following:

8.1. Credibility/Authenticity

De Vos et al (2011, pp. 419-420) explain this process as the “internal validity whereby the researcher ensures that subjects have been accurately identified and described”. My study was conducted with parents whose children had been removed and placed in alternative care. I also took detailed notes so as to keep accurate data.

8.2. Validity

Validity which is also referred to “jury opinion”, which is about the “degree of whether the instrument used measures what it is supposed to measure and whether the concept to be researched is measured accurately”. This means that the data collected are subjected to checking of biasness and misinterpretation (De Vos et al., 2011, pp.173-174). As this study used semi- structured interviews, questions were structured in a manner that the researcher could probeto gain in-depth insights into underlying factors.

8.3. Transferability

De Vos et al. (2011, p. 420) highlight that transferability is more about generalization, which means that the researcher needs to find out if the research findings can be transferred from one case to another. I tried to enhance transferability of the study by providing a thick description of the purposively selected participants (see demographic information in Chapter 4), made clear the boundaries in which the research study was conducted (namely DSD clients in the Johannesburg Metropolitan area) and perceived reasons for child removal and placement in temporary safe care pending finalisation of the Children’s Court Inquiry.

8.4. Confirmability

Confirmability basically refers to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. To ensure that readers of this study did not think that the study findings were a figment of my imagination, I used thematic analysis. When I present

my findings, I cite verbatim quotes to substantiate why they have been grouped under a certain theme emerging in the analysis process.

9. Limitations of the study

The knowledge produced might not be transferrable to other people or other settings (i.e., findings might be unique to the few participants included in the research study). For example, the quality of after-care services being rendered to parents by social workers in the employ of the Department of Social Development might differ from the quality of the after-care services being rendered by social workers in the employ of non-government child and welfare organisations.

10. Ethical considerations

Prior to proceeding with the study, I received ethical clearance to conduct research from the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical). The protocol number is H18/03/17.

To embed ethical principles in the study, prior to obtaining written consent from potential participants, I provided potential participants - in an honest and open manner - with the following information: the purpose and procedures of the study; the time commitment involved; the voluntary nature of participation and the fact that they could refuse to participate or could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. They were also told that they might refuse to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with answering.

The confidential nature of the research study was emphasized and it was also explained that no names or identifying details would be included in the final report (See Appendix 5). All names of participants were replaced with codes and raw data were kept in a

locked cabinet, which will be destroyed two years after any publications emanating from this research report or six years after completion of this study if there are not any publications.

Consent was also sought for the audio- taping of interviews (See Appendix C). To avoid the use of coercion or undue influence, no incentives for participation were provided.

I did not foresee the study exposing the participants to any risk, harm or wrongdoing. However, social workers responsible for providing the researcher with the identifying particulars of potential participants were also requested to identify social workers who could help with the debriefing or referral of participants to appropriate professionals in the event that any distress was experienced during and/or after the research.

Participants were also informed that at the conclusion of the study, a summary of the research findings would be made available to them on request.

11. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology used in the study. This included a detailed description of the case study research designed, how the sample of participants were selected, how data were gathered and analysed. I also explained steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness of my study and finally, I described the ethical principles I put into practice. The following chapter discusses my research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study in accordance with the study objectives and then critically discuss my findings. The themes that emerged in respect of each objective are highlighted and illustrated with verbatim quotes to allow for participants' voices to be heard.

2. Demographic Profiles of Research Participants

In Table 4.1. below the socio-demographic profiles of the participants are summarised.

Table 1: Socio-demographic particulars of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Relationship with child	Home language	Employment status
Mpho	37	Biological mother	Sesotho	Employed
Boipelo	33	Biological mother	Sesotho	Unemployed
Funeka	43	Biological mother	IsiXhosa	Unemployed
Margaret	39	Biological mother	Setswana	Unemployed
Zinhle	29	Biological mother	IsiZulu	Employed
Sandile	29	Biological Father	IsiZulu	Employed
Lebogang	34	Biological mother	Sesotho	Unemployed
Tshepo	31	Maternal aunt	Sesotho	Unemployed
Nokhuthula	41	Biological mother	IsiZulu	Unemployed
Zodwa	38	Biological mother	IsiZulu	Unemployed
Bongiwe	32	Paternal aunt	IsiXhosa	Unemployed
Zoleka	38	Maternal aunt	IsiXhosa	Unemployed

3. Identified Themes

The following themes were identified through thematic analysis. They have been grouped together under the specific research objectives.

Objective 1: Explore primary caregivers' perceptions of factors that led to removal of their children to alternative care.

The primary caregivers (mostly mothers) referred to allegations of sexual and physical abuse as the reasons for the removal of their child from their care. In terms of sexual abuse, the alleged perpetrators were people close to the children concerned, like biological fathers or another father figure, such as stepfathers. Cases of physical abuse were allegedly perpetrated by the mothers and fathers of the children.

Theme 1: Allegations of sexual abuse

Four mothers cited sexual abuse as the main reason for the legal removal of their daughters from their care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. The narration below by Mpho highlights the circumstances under which her daughter was removed from her care. Her daughter had reported that she was being sexual abused:

...they said it was to protect the child from her father, the perpetrator. He stays far from here but he has a car so it is not difficult for him to get here. It happened in the house but she didn't say anything and went to report at school. I got a WhatsApp message from my cousin on Friday afternoon saying they wanted to meet with me at school the following Monday. On Monday when I woke her up to get ready and go to school, she kept complaining about pains...I knew about that. When I got to school, I found some young man who asked me if I know why I was there. I said I think I'm here because of the pains she has been complaining about. I told him I only know that and he said: "You only know half of it. Nqobile says her father raped her and we were a family at home. Yes, her biological father. My mother and sisters were there and she didn't tell anyone".

Boipelo shared similar experiences to that of Mpho. She pointed out that her daughter had been removed on suspicion that she had been sexually abused by her father. Boipelo described the incident:

...on that day I started being suspicious when it was six pm and she hadn't come back from school and my husband hadn't come back from work also. Then I received a call saying that my husband is arrested in Linden police station and that he's been charged with child abuse. I was confused because even the child hadn't come back from school. I also thought my husband had committed this crime at work because he works at school. Until I went to Linden police station and I got to ask my husband why was he arrested. He told me that he had been accused of raping Leno, which was my daughter's nickname, but her real name is Lavender.

It is interesting to note that Boipelo had adopted the point of view that the allegations made against her husband were false. She recounted her daughter's confession:

When Lavender came, she started apologizing for all the pain she had caused. She then told me that someone told her that the only way to get what she wants and move from my care as her mother was to say she got raped because she has been wanting to go to this school named King's. That's the school at the church. She did not like the school she was attending...She told me that she had done her research from the person who attended school where she wanted to attend...Then that person told her that most of the students there come from rich families that can afford the school fees and that few others that attend there are children that have been adopted. So, the better plan for her to attend school there since her parents can't afford the school fees was to be under the care of parents that are rich who can afford the school fees. That's when they came up with the plan of rape to move away from my care. My husband's charge of rape was a set-up.

Funeka reported how she had become tired of her partner's reckless and indecent behaviour that led her to instruct her daughter to report her father at school:

So, what happened was that he came home intoxicated from alcohol and went into my child's blankets and she moved out of those blankets and came to tell me and we slept in my bed, but his father followed her into my bed and she complained in this bed that his father was still touching her while she was sleeping in between us and I took her to my side of the bed. I did not make noise because it was at night; we left it until the next morning. In the morning I asked him why he did what he did last night and he denied it. I told him that a child would not lie about such a thing. I told my child that she must tell her teachers at school, because I was tired of his father who always come home and breaks things while drunk and doing indecent things at home...I then went to my child's school and found that my daughter had already told her teachers and they called the police and social workers.

In one of the cases, the child concerned reported allegations of sexual abuse to the social workers on her own. Margaret pointed out:

My child told the social worker that he had been sexually assaulted by my boyfriend and the social worker said the child can no longer live with my boyfriend in the same house and the child was removed for that reason.

It is important to note that of the four allegations of sexual abuse highlighted by participants, three were related to acts of incest. The Sexual Offences Act (No. 32 of 2007) prohibits sexual acts between family members, regardless of age. One cannot consent to a sexual act with a family member in the same blood line or adoptive family members, meaning ascendants (parents, grandparents etc) or descendants (children, grandchildren etc). In this study, children were removed because of alleged father-daughter incest when the child was under the age of 18 years. This type of sexual abuse can be categorised as a form of child abuse and is, of course, a ground for finding a child in need of care and protection in terms of Section 150 of the Children's Act.

Worldwide, father-daughter incest is reported to be one of the most common incest types and regarded as a social problem that manifests itself worldwide; in all social classes and in developed and undeveloped societies (Yildirim et al., 2014). Unfortunately, in South Africa, reliable statistics specifically related to incest are not available. However, a nationally representative study of sexual abuse of children in South Africa conducted, which was conducted in 2018, found that child sexual abuse is widespread in South Africa and has severe health consequences (Ward et al., 2018).

The type of responses the mothers in this study had to the allegations of sexual abuse is evident in other studies. For example, Pretorius et al., (2011) also found that when the primary caregiver (usually mothers) learn that their child has been sexual abused in the home they are shocked and find it difficult to believe.

Funeka's response to her daughter's disclosure was best because she adopted a protective approach and encouraged her daughter to disclose to her schoolteachers. Other research findings indicate that the mother's support can build trust, stop the abuse from continuing and decrease the immediate and long-term negative effects on the child (Rakovec-Felser & Vidovic, 2016).

Theme 2: Allegations of Physical Abuse

In the three cases involving allegations of physical abuse, the mothers seemed to lack remorse for their actions, but rather tried to justify their actions or minimize the physical abuse. For example, Zinhle described reasons for her stepson's removal as follows:

They went away with him for about an hour and came back with the other child's parent who then explained what my child had done. I tried to pay the money back, but the parent declined to take the money and when she left, I took him inside the house and beat him as a way of disciplining him; not to kill or hurt him, but to discipline him as my child. After beating him, I went out to the toilet. On my return he was no longer in the house and when I

looked for him outside, I saw him running to the police station which is nearby our house.

Sandile, also defended her reason for ‘disciplining’ her son:

There was an incident whereby I discipline the child by beating him. This resulted in some physical injuries and he was hurt. I used my hands but when I hit him, he bumped our stove with his eye. I noticed the following day when he was going to school that his eye was hurt. I then took a pen and paper to explain to his teacher what happened. By doing this I made things worse. That is when the child was taken to the police station to open a case and I was accused to have punched him in the eye.

These mothers’ responses basically support the findings of Humphreys (2009) who reported that primary caregivers often try hard to justify the use of physical abuse as a way of trying to address uncontrollable behaviours their children are manifesting.

Objective 2: Explore how primary caregivers were affected when the child was removed from their care.

When analysing data gathered, it became evident that removal of children from the care of their primary caregivers resulted in emotional harm. Not only was the personal functioning of the primary caregiver negatively affected, but other members of the family system too. The main themes and sub-themes arising are as follows:

Theme 1: Primary caregivers experience mixed emotions.

Sub-theme 1: Feelings of hurt.

Most of the mothers reported feeling hurt after removal of children into temporary safe care.

Mpho shared:

... because of the love one has for her child it hurts a lot when that child is taken away and that pain is everlasting.... I still miss my child even though I know that she is with my sister. There are times where I sit and think if only

my child was here, we would be talking about this and that. So indeed, it is not nice to have a child taken away from you. ...you keep asking yourself, why did he do such a thing? But you can't get an answer...so that forever remains an open wound.

Boipelo explained:

It was so sad I can't even explain. The way the child was taken away from me hurt me the most. They treated me badly as if I'm the suspect, or I had raped her. You know when you are used to having your child next to you in bed at night... when she is taken away from you and you no longer share the bed you used to share, it feels like a part of you have been removed. It forever feels like an open wound.

In the case of Zinhle, she felt the officials' decision to remove her stepson from her care was incorrect because she loved him beyond the mistake of physically punishing him:

This deeply hurt me and it took me a long time to come to terms with his removal. This did not give me peace of mind at all. This did not stay well with me. It was a mistake that happened, and I did not understand why it was taken as if it was a fight. I was really hurt by this. This was painful, as it appeared that I was seen as though I was abusing him. My heart was painful because this child was left under my care and I was seen as a bad person towards him. This hurt me deeply because I love him and even now, I want to stay with him. This experience was hurtful.

In many respects this theme is concordant with earlier findings indicating that mothers tend to experience a great deal of emotional pain when child protection services intervene and they lose custody of their child. This often leads to a loss of self-esteem (Wall-Wieler, et al., 2017). However, it also became apparent that the siblings of the some of the children concerned,

also experienced feelings of shock, anger and emotional pain. For example, Nokhuthula expressed:

...there were changes in my life... it was clear that she was not around. She left a void in our lives. Her sibling, who is 12-year-old, was angry and his behaviour changed and was cheeky and when asked about his behaviour. He said he felt bad about the accident having happened to his sister and always fearing that this might also happen to him and he misses his sister.

Similarly, Lebogang shared:

Absolutely, all my children were affected; they couldn't understand. Knowing they grew up with him and that he was always naughty, always hitting and fighting with them and suddenly he was removed.

A rigorous literature indicated that there has not been much research focusing on how siblings are affected by the removal of their sibling to alternative care. However, a finding coming to the fore in a study focusing on child sexual abuse, highlighted that non-abused can also be negatively affected by family disruption and stress (Schreier, et al., 2017).

Sub-theme 2: Lingering feelings of anger

Some of the participants explained that they still felt angry about the fact that their child was removed from their care because of the long-term consequences. For example, Sandile felt angry because he now had a criminal record and consequently it would be harder for him to secure employment:

... the reason why I'm here... and it makes me angry that I am now being interviewed about the whole incident. I'm feeling angry as I'm explaining the whole thing to you, I don't want to lie... I'm angry at the system; it is totally diabolic because it separates a child from its parents. How do you remove a child from his parents? They should give people the benefit of the doubt; they should have investigated the matter further before arresting me. As I speak to you, I have a criminal record and as I result, I have missed out

on job opportunities. How am I going to feed my child if I'm just being criminalized like this? I lose jobs that I have capacity of doing and it is still going to continue like that... I don't feel the process was conducted in a fair manner... I reported the matter to the social worker before the incident, I reported it to Zola clinic twice seeking assistance and Naledi police station and I told them that I'm having problems with my child's behaviour, but the advice I got from them was not effective.

Lebogang complained about the officials' apparent blindness to human interactions, especially regarding implementation of discipline. This is how she vented out her frustrations:

... it made me feel angry and cheated and that people are too busy trying to follow rules in a rule book than think about human interaction, and that is important because each case is different. I have six children. If I was a bad parent all six should have been removed; am I right? I mean each child has their own discipline problems; has their own way in life in which they react to things and this was a problem child that we identified with.

It is obvious that these two participants projected a lot of anger and blame to the social workers who managed their cases. These 'hostile' relationships are quite common in child protection cases because in many senses the clients are 'involuntary clients.' They blame the child protection workers for the negative impact removal of the child had on their lives (Ferguson, 2021).

Sub-theme 3: A sense of reassurance that the child is now safe.

Although Nokuthula obviously experienced feelings of loss when her daughter was removed from her care by child protection officers, she also expressed that she accepts the fact that her daughter had to be removed because this ensured that her daughter would be protected from further sexual abuse by the neighbour:

I think I should have protected her, and I could have not allowed her to go to this guy's house. I could have gone myself to assist my neighbour to cook

that Pap. I felt relieved when she was removed cause this guy was not arrested, and he is still not arrested, so her safety was more important...I was thinking that the guy might come back and this affected all of us at home especially since the guy was our neighbour.

Mpho shared similar views to that of Nokuthula because she felt the only way her daughter was going to be safe from her father's alleged sexual abuse was to remove her to a new environment:

At first, I thought not having your child around you is not okay, but then I realized that she was removed because she had to be protected from her father who would have continued to rape her had she stayed in Devland. Thus, I thought a change of scenery; where she will make new friends and be around 'new faces' would be good for her... I think it was good for me and her.

This finding concurs with other findings related to what family in times of crisis face (Wall-Wieler, et al., 2017). To cope with challenges related to abuse within the family it may be necessary to change the environment for the victim or child in question. This is despite the well-known fact that family relationships play a central role in an individual's well-being (Grevenstein, et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Breakdown of intimate and family relationships

Some parental caregivers discontinued romantic relationships with their partners who were accused of sexual molestation. Margaret (39) had this to say regarding her partner: "He used to come here but I told him I don't want to see him again but he still insists on coming". Funeka reported how she actively involved her family to get her partner arrested and eventually got him ejected from her home and thus putting an end to their romantic relationship:

I asked my partner to move because I did not want my children to be removed but he refused. As a result, the children were removed. I then told

both our families about this and that I need my children to come back. I cannot bear staying with him, waking up at home while the children were removed from their home. The family got involved and he was taken to a police station where he was arrested. He was released two weeks later and he was escorted here by the police to collect his belongings...Since he came to collect his belongings he did not come back.

It became apparent when analysing data that primary caregivers' emotional hurt was exacerbated by the fact that close relationships that had shared with other family members broke down. Lebogang captured this point well:

.... it completely broke my relationship with my family. I have absolutely no contact with my parents or my family, my brothers, my sisters, I have absolutely no contact. So, on a larger scale a lot more harm than good was done. Yet there was the option of going for counselling with the objective of keeping the child in his parent's home with his mother and looking at the child as a problem and not the parents. One incident has entirely torn the whole family apart in three different directions. I do not have the same relationship with my parents and my in-laws attack me at every chance they get. That's what I live with daily.

One of the caregivers, Margaret feared judgment from her family because her boyfriend had allegedly sexually abused her sister's daughter. As a result, she decided not to disclose the child's removal to other family members except for her sister who is the biological mother of the child concerned:

What happened; however, it affected my sister and the other family members don't know. It's only me and my sister who know. we wanted to solve this thing by ourselves and not involve the whole family. I don't know maybe they will judge me because Mike is my boyfriend, so maybe they will say, 'How can you let this happen?' I didn't know this was happening under my nose.

In the case of Boipelo, she reported that her husband had walked out on his family, probably because he suspected she was involved in the allegations of rape against him:

...my husband's charge of rape was a set-up. He got out on bail, he then decided that after being released on a bail he won't stay with us me and the kids. I don't know if he thought I was part of his rape set-up since Monica is my sister's daughter.

The allegations of sexual abuse against her husband resulted in Funeka separating from her husband. This presented some challenges as the children missed their father and Funeka was wary of taking him back in case he sexually abused other children. At the same time, Funeka needed her husband's financial support to maintain the children. This is how she explained her situation:

My children are the ones that say they miss their father. The older one is the one that asks me to forgive his father because we miss him since he left. I asked them what if he comes back and do the same thing, I cannot allow him to come back here. The case is with the social workers but all I need from him is his assistance in supporting our children, that is all. He is the parent of these children and he must assist them. There are places that I cannot reach or support the children fully alone because I am not working. Despite this I do not want him to come back and stay with us.

It has long been reported that child removal can have many negative outcomes for the child concerned. However, recent research emphasises that child removals also pose a threat to family functioning. When a child is removed, there is 'separation' between the child and other family members, which can cause difficulties for the entire family (Sankuran, et al., 2019).

Objective 3: Explore the coping mechanisms implemented by the primary caregivers after the child was from their care.

Grief and loss are common reactions for primary care givers after their child was taken from their care. When analysing data gathered, it became evident that removal of children from the care of their primary caregivers resulted in emotional harm. To cope with and understand the impact of the removal of children from primary care givers' care, families received support from other family members or used their religion to cope. The main themes and sub-themes arising are as follows:

Theme 1: Support from close family members

Some primary caregivers reported receiving support from close family members when the child was removed into temporary safe care. These family members included husbands, sisters, and brothers. The following are some of the quotations from the primary caregivers that reflect this theme:

My husband had been the one who tried to investigate and find out the information about my niece and he helped me throughout” (Tshepiso).

It was my sister who spoke to me about this and made me realize that this is not wrong and showed what I was supposed to do. That is why I understand everything (Margaret).

The entire situation had to be resolved by the entire family, my sisters, brothers and the rest of the family. He had a sit down and agreed that we could not continue staying together while our children are not at home. We agreed together with my other children that he had to move out because I may end up dying from this case or even commit suicide (Funeka).

This finding supports other findings related to family support in times of crisis. It is well-known that family relationships play a central role in an individual's well-being (Grevenstein, et al., 2019; Scabini, 2016).

Theme 2: Recourse to Prayer

Turning to divine providence, some caregivers reported that they left their situations in God's capable hands. Explaining how she got solace from prayers, Mpho mentioned that: "It is prayer; God is always good all the time. No matter what happens, when you pray and bring all your burdens to him, he will help you".

Expressing similar sentiments, Tshepiso said:

I don't have much to say besides that I was hurt when the child was taken away from me. I'm just a person that believes that things happen God's way because I tried my best to do things my way. God is in control.

It is obvious that both Tshepiso and Mpho found comfort in prayer; it was an effective coping mechanism. Many researchers have explored the efficacy of prayer as a coping strategy. Study findings have usually revealed that prayer can play a meaningful role in helping ease stress and improve people's psychological well-being (Achour, 2019; Johnson, 2018).

Objective Four: Explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the way social workers and police officers managed the removal of the child and their placement in temporary safe care.

Some of the caregivers complained that child protection officials (social workers and police) had poor communication practices, that were often accompanied by poor attitudes. Other caregivers also bemoaned the fact that child protection officials often focused almost exclusively on the children removed leading to the neglect of the parental caregivers' need

for counselling. However, some parental caregivers were appreciative of the role played by social workers.

Theme 1: Social workers and police officers do not always actively involve primary caregivers in the removal process.

Sub-theme 1: Felt frustrated because their perceptions were not taken into consideration.

Generally, the participants felt frustrated because they had not been involved in the process of child removal; to voice their perspectives. One of the participants discussed how she had to immerse herself deep in the process instead of waiting to be involved by the social workers. The following is the account shared by Zinhle:

I don't remember them telling me anything. I was the one who involved myself and followed up with them to know where my children were and they agreed to take me to see my children.... No, they did not come to me or inform me as the person who lives with him; they did not let me know where they were taking him. I only heard from my brother that he will stay with him until the case is concluded. In the beginning I was allowed a telephone contact with them and I was the one who had to push them by following them.... I could not say they did not tell me anything, but all they said was they removing the children to place them in temporary safe care in Boksburg.

For Lebogang, the decision to remove her child was made by the officials who had already compiled a report without her input. This resulted in her questioning the concept of place of safety entirely as she pointed out:

I was not given an opportunity; it was written down in the report but it was of no use because everyone had made up their minds already before I even read the statement. My child had already been removed...I was told that he

was in a place of safety which turned out not to be a place of safety. So, who is going to determine what a place of safety is?

Tshepo also aired frustration that she was not involved in the removal process:

I was not partaking in any of the decisions taken about Nhlanhla (pseudonym). I don't even have any decision to make because I had heard that Nhlanhla doesn't want to stay with me anymore and I can't force her to stay with me...I also confronted her and asked her why she did not even wait for me to come from the America and resolve this issue as a family because I love her as my own child.

Sub-theme 2: Appreciated the fact that she was involved in the removal process.

From a positive perspective, some participants pointed out that they appreciated the fact that the social worker involved them in the removal process. For example, Funeka explained as follows:

The social worker arrived at my house and asked my partner to move out of the house for the safety of the children, or the children will have to be removed. I asked my partner to move because I did not want my children to be removed, but he refused as a result the children were removed.

When it had been ascertained that her child had to be placed under temporary safe care, Mpho was involved in the process that resulted in her children going to live with her sister:

Yes, they did (give me the opportunity to decide in removal process), from the beginning... they first went to inspect my sister's house in order to see whether it was safe for the child to move in with her. When they were done, they came back to inform me that it was safe and asked whether they could remove the child to go and stay with my sister and I gave them that permission. My sister also agreed to take her in.

It is critically important that all stakeholders involved in the child removal process be consulted. As could be seen from above, participants expressed mixed views regarding

involvement in the process of child removal with some like Funeka indicating that they were never or partial participated in the process whilst others like Mpho appreciated that they were involved.

Theme 2: Poor communication practices by professionals involved in the removal process.

Sub-theme 1: Social workers and police officers did not keep the primary caregivers up to date with the case developments and well-being of their child.

Parental caregivers generally felt that social workers had poor communication practices that left them in the dark regarding the location of the children's temporary safe care, as well as developments with the cases. For example, Lebogang was not impressed with the social worker managing her care, because she didn't explain what developments were taking place.

There was no follow up letter, nothing. I had had to keep on phoning. There was never a voluntary phone call back to me, and I was upset about that. Even when my son was moved to the social worker in Lenasia, I didn't get a single phone call from the social worker in Lenasia until this incident happened where I had to phone. And even now, I have been waiting for three weeks now for one phone call.

Sharing similar frustrations regarding being kept in the dark regarding her child's placement and developments in the case was Boipelo who also complained:

No, I was not told about anything concerning the decision taken about her. It was as if I didn't exist...I did not understand the reason behind them keeping the child away from me and not telling me the whereabouts of the child. I don't know if that's how the social workers do things or operate. It was not easy to get contact with the social worker even though I would see her at

courts because they would ensure that I don't have any contact with her up until today.

The police were also cited as poor communicators in cases when they were involved in removal of the children concerned. Zinhle felt both the police and social workers could have coordinated and communicated developments regarding her child better:

After they removed my child, the police came here and took a statement and they did not come back to me with feedback. The only thing they told me was that the case was forwarded to social workers. I was told that the social workers would come to provide me with a date for attending court. proceedings. After this they did not come back to me. In my opinion I feel as though they could have done more to explain things to me in detail. When the police came here, a lady came and then they changed and brought different police officers who reported that they are the ones who will handle the case. I expected that at least they could explain what was happening and going to happen, but unfortunately, they merely took a statement only and left. They then said I will hear from social workers.

In some cases, poor communication by child protection officials left primary caregivers whose children had been removed to suspect that their children had been taken away by criminals under the guise of social workers and police officers. This is how Zodwa described her ordeal:

I didn't trust anyone...even her father was calling me saying these people are not social workers; they are just criminals who came to steal the child. The social worker never phoned me back. She had promised to help us with Identity Documents but she never came back. That is why I wanted to open a case against them. I even went to her school to get the social worker's numbers because they took my child from school. They gave me wrong numbers, which is when I decided that if my child is not back by December, I will open a case against them because they were not communicating with either me or my sister.

Sub-theme 2: Social workers don't have the time to frequently contact the primary caregivers.

One parental caregiver, Lebogang, felt the social workers were communicating poorly because they were overstretched with heavy caseloads:

I'll tell you one thing; you definitely need more social workers. Because ideally you shouldn't have one social worker handling more than five cases. This is people's lives you are dealing with and you have one social worker handling 30, 40 cases that is absolutely ridiculous. We can see the pressure on the social workers in the system is what causes, not to say they are not good people...but the pressure is what causes them to just want to get things done. This is like a schoolteacher having 40 kids in the class, they have deadlines as a result they have to race through things. I totally understand the system and I have no personal grudges against any of the social workers.

This finding concurs with findings of one study, Kheswa (2019), which postulated that social workers fail to deliver quality services to clients due to extensive workload, job satisfaction and exposure to traumatic situations amongst others.

Theme 3: Social workers and police officers only focus on the needs of the child.

Most parental caregivers expressed concern because social workers and police seemed to only be interested in the welfare of the children removed into temporary safe care. As a result, some of these caregivers felt a need for counselling that was not fulfilled by social workers.

The following quotes by parental caregivers highlight their concerns:

They haven't said anything about me. They are still focusing on the child. I think I need counselling because I think that would put me in a position to be able to help someone who has been confronted by the same ordeal. That would also help me to deal with this thing and allow me to let it go. Maybe they are still going to refer me for counselling. My understanding is that they need to get help for the child first (Mpho).

For now, I have not been referred anywhere. It's only the child that is attending counselling, at Bara, but yesterday the Social worker called and

informed my employers that I also need counselling and I also feel that I need counselling because when I look at her, I ask myself questions like how can this happen to her and I don't get answers for also ask myself what if she was killed? (Nokhuthula).

No, I was told to go to FAMSA for one session and I was told I had to pay for the sessions after the social worker had told me they are offered for free and I never went back (Lebogang).

No, no one referred me to counselling or anything even though I wanted it...Yes, I did mention it to the social worker but then she told me that it's such a long process because you pay for counselling (Boipelo).

It is evident from the above verbatim quotes that various reasons contribute to primary caregivers not accessing social work services when needed. It is known that there is a disproportionate ratio of social workers to the clients they are supposed to save. As postulated by Kheswa (2019), social workers fail to deliver quality services to clients due to extensive workload, job satisfaction and exposure to traumatic situations amongst others. The workload given to social workers is huge such that they are not able to fulfil their roles holistically from removal of children in need to supporting the families or primary care givers who suffer from loss due to the removal of children from their care.

Theme 4: The attitudes of the social workers and police officers towards the primary caregivers vary.

Sub-theme 1: They show impatience and lack of respect.

Poor attitudes by some child protection officials elicited complaints from a few parental caregivers who felt the officials could have shown more patience and concern about them as humans. The following quotes illustrate some of the caregivers' complaints regarding the officials' attitudes:

It would help if some of the officials were a little bit more patient. Some of them just read out stuff to you and not explain it. A bit of patience and sympathy would help because that alleviates the pain a bit, somehow (Nokhuthula).

...even when I went to fetch him, they didn't want to get involved and all that the social workers wanted to do was to close their file (Lebogang).

The way they dealt with this case hurt me the most because I was treated badly. (Boipelo).

Sub-theme 2: Some social workers provide support.

Despite complaints of the poor communication and attitudes held by child protection officials highlighted above, a couple of parental caregivers acknowledged that they received good support from social workers. Funeka was impressed with the support and communication from social workers that left her fully understanding the reasons for removal as well as developments in the case:

In my opinion, when I went to them crying about the removal of my children, they listened to me and heard me as a parent who wanted to see her children. I wanted to see my children and they told me I was not allowed at that stage to see them and I asked them and explained that I needed to see them. They then called and allowed me to have contact with them. I wouldn't say they were wrong or bad towards me. During the removal of the children, they told me that they could not leave them behind because me and my partner were fighting at the time. So, it could happen that they left them and we got killed me and my children.

It is important that social workers are guided by and abide by the code of ethics of the profession and in accordance with the standards of professional conduct associated with the social work profession and as guided by the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP,2004). Furthermore, social work principles and values include

acceptance and having a non-judgemental attitude towards clients which helps build rapport and trust in the helping relationship.

Theme 5: Primary caregivers are accepting of temporary safe care placements if they feel that their children will be well cared for.

Sub-theme 1: If temporary safe care placements are related to the family, they are deemed suitable to take care of the children.

There were some participants who expressed satisfaction with, and acceptance of, their child's temporary safe care placements with relatives, who were sisters on both occasions. For instance, Mpho emphasised that she was happy that her daughter had been placed with her sister:

She is okay living with my sister...maybe that other person would be abusive towards her or not be good to her. I'm saying this because households differ. It depends on how one was raised, maybe she would be living with someone who is hard-hearted you see.

In like manner, Margaret was relieved that her daughter was living with her sister and she was showing signs of good adjustment there:

The child was taken to my sister's house as a place of safety. For now, I'm okay. I was not when it happened, but I can see she is happy here living with my sister and she doesn't have that thing on her mind anymore. Maybe she will later but for now, she is very fine, and I'm fine too.

Sub-theme 2: Temporary safe care parents are not suitable if they are single.

One of the participants, namely Sandile, was adamant that the place of safety selected was not suitable for the temporary placement of his son, because the lady is single and could not manage his misbehaviour appropriately.

By that I mean.... how can you move a child from his parent to a single parent? It happened that my child ran away from the lady he had been placed with at the place of safety and he was on the streets at 10h00 at night. The lady didn't even know where he was. I then asked the social worker why my son was then removed from my care, if he would not be offered sufficient protection at the place of safety, where he was allowed to roam around unsupervised. I would not have allowed them to place him under the care of a single parent, but I was not part of that decision.

Whilst the official placement of a child in need of care in alternative care is the result of a legal process carried out in the children's court, it is important for social workers to screen prospective adopters or foster parents. The screening process basically allows social workers to get to know prospective foster or adoptive parents and understand their motivation to take care of the child and their ability to offer a child a warm, loving and stable home. In addition, if the prospective foster parents are relatives, it may involve feelings of less severance of ties and hope that the child will ultimately return.

Objective Five: Investigate primary caregivers' desired outcomes of the statutory intervention process.

Primary caregivers' desired outcomes relating to the conclusion of the statutory processes varied. Some wanted to see justice prevailing against alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse. Others wanted the cases to be finalized for the children concerned as soon as possible and their children be returned to their care. Other caregivers were opposed to immediate reunification with their children.

Theme 1: Need for justice against sexual perpetrators.

The sexual abuse against her daughter left Mpho with a strong desire to see justice prevail against the man who had allegedly committed the sexual abuse. She felt so aggrieved that she wished for the reintroduction of the death penalty:

I just want to see justice being done...according to me they should bring back the death penalty... if he is arrested and taken to jail... it is not nice to come home and being told that your child has been raped.... At least if you don't know the perpetrator it's better. It is worse when you know the perpetrator whom you know didn't contribute anything towards the upbringing of the child.

Theme 2: Primary caregivers seek reunification with their children.

Most of the primary caregivers, including Funeka, wanted to be reunified with their children as soon as possible. Funeka described how she managed to get her children back while offering advice to other primary caregivers in similar circumstances:

...That is why I did the follow-ups with the social workers, and I even went to Vereeniging, they call it FAMSA, so that they can assist me to get my children back. And I want to say that those parents should not sleep and be active in getting their children back. They should not be happy that their children are not home, they do not know where their child is or what they ate. Can they please be brave? I don't know how to put it in a better way, but they must be very brave so they can get their children back because I am very happy with my children as you can see them.

Zinhle was also one of the primary caregivers who longed to be reunited with her child so that her life could get back to normal:

You know, this entire process does not sit well with me at all. This thing stays with me and is always in my mind. This case has not ended. I can only find peace and a sense of rest when he comes back home because now, I feel stuck and I cannot see past this. I can see how I move forward when he comes back to my care. It's like my life came to a standstill; like there something that is standing in my way, and I cannot move.

Theme 2: Resistance to reunification

In some cases, the primary caregivers were reluctant to be reunified with their children soon. They cited bitterness, mistrust and broken family relationships that arose from the circumstances around the children's removal into temporary safe care. Lebogang felt so strongly against the child concerned and the law:

At the end of the day there are consequences to every action. In the same way that there are consequences to me, this child now must take the consequences as well and the people that have influenced him, including the law and the way it has taken its course has to take care of this child for removing him. They can't just come and put him back to my care after two years and expect everything to be "hunky dory". The system has to go through the process of re-introducing him into our family through the counselling. The system must be a witness and compensate us for the financial burden we suffered as a result of what the system has put us through. Not immediately, there has to be a re-introduction. You must understand that there's a lot of hurt and pain that happened. My husband who has raised him up as his own child was turned around and called a stepfather after 14 years of being his father. My husband was arrested and that has caused so many problems in my own marriage, with my in-laws. I mean, it's not a matter of here's your child; just take him back. As much as there are feelings on his side, there are feelings on our side and there must be a process of re-introduction. That is what the state needs to understand. We are not paperwork you can just push around and put into files and swop from one file to another. We are real people.

Sandile seemed to be still harbouring ill feelings towards his son for reporting him to the police resulting in his arrest. As such he mentioned that he was not ready for any reunification in the short-term, as he felt he would not know how to discipline his son again:

We live in a society and a country that has its own way of doing things, which indicates that if you give birth to a child, he/she is not yours. What I

thought was that I should let them take him until he grows up and he is able to assess what he did and decide whether what he did to me was wrong or right. For now, I don't think I can stay with him because it will be hard to stay with a child who you cannot guide through life and discipline. I don't want to bring him back to an environment that will harm him more and cause more damage.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter the findings from the research study were presented and discussed according to research objectives. It emerged from the research that allegations of sexual and physical abuse were amongst the chief reasons for the removal of the child concerned from their care.

It also emerged that removal of children from the care of their primary caregivers resulted in emotional harm. Not only was the personal functioning of the primary caregiver negatively affected, but other members of the family system too.

Furthermore, the study found out that most primary caregivers expressed concern because social workers and police officers seemed to only be interested in the welfare of the children removed into temporary safe care. As a result, some of these caregivers felt a need for counselling that was not fulfilled by social workers. Some of the caregivers complained that child protection officials (social workers and police) had poor communication practices, that were often accompanied by poor attitudes. Other caregivers also bemoaned the fact that child protection officials often focused almost exclusively on the children removed leading to the neglect of the primary caregivers' need for counselling.

However, some primary caregivers were appreciative of the role played by social workers. As a result, primary caregivers' desired outcomes relating to the conclusion of the statutory processes were varied. However, in the main they desired eventual reunification

with the child. The final chapter will highlight the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduction

This chapter wraps up the study. A summary of the main findings is presented first, followed up by conclusions drawn from the study's main findings. An exposition of the policy and practice recommendations precedes recommendations for further study at the end of the chapter.

2. Summary of Findings

The main findings of the study, guided by the study objectives, are summarised below.

2.1. Perceived reasons for removal of children and placement in alternative care.

Most caregivers cited allegations of sexual and physical abuse as the reasons for the removal of the children concerned from their care. In terms of sexual abuse, the alleged perpetrators were people close to the children concerned, like biological fathers or other father figures, like spousal partners of their mothers. The incidence of incest, taking into consideration the small sample, was quite shocking.

Besides sexual abuse, child protection officials also removed children from their parents because the children concerned had been physical abused. Some of the primary caregivers seemed to lack remorse for their actions; rather they tried to justify their actions or minimize the physical abuse. It seemed that most primary caregivers firmly believed that physical punishment was synonymous with discipline leading most parents to bemoan that modern disciplinary techniques were ineffective and a hindrance to their parental and disciplinary roles.

3.1. Primary caregivers' involvement in the removal of children process.

Whereas some primary caregivers reported that child protection officials involved them in the removal of children concerned, most of the caregivers bemoaned the fact that they were not consulted or included in such impactful decisions. Most of concerned primary caregivers complained that child protection officials failed to consult them meaningfully prior to, or during the removal process. There were reports that some of the officials compiled statutory reports without input from the caregivers and such reports were presented as accomplished facts. One of the caregivers alleged that the officials deliberately left him out of the process since he had a prior criminal conviction. Some caregivers wished they had more say in the identification of temporary safe care placements for their children. One of the caregivers was frustrated that the alternative placement for her children seemed to be worse than her actual home.

2.3 Primary caregivers' reactions to removal of their children.

Most caregivers shared negative feelings of hurt, pain, anger, frustration, and grief upon the removal of their children. These feelings seemed to result from deep-seated personal perceptions of being a failure as a parent. Much anger was directed at the child protection system that came across as all too powerful and insensitive to the challenges faced by the parents in caring for their children.

Since the caregivers were not meaningfully involved in the removal of the children, most of them bitterly complained that the children were speedily removed when alternative arrangements, including counselling, would have yielded better results. As the children were then seemingly forcibly removed, some of the caregivers reported outright opposition to the process.

However, a few caregivers reported that they understood why the children had to be removed. These caregivers mentioned that the officials dutifully explained the process to them in ways they understood. These concerned caregivers reported cooperating more with the child protection officials and receiving satisfactory updates on the progress of their children's court cases. Such parents also reported being able to discuss alternative safe care placements, including nominating preferred placements. It was also easier to start working towards family reunification services under such cases.

2.4 Impact that removal of the children had on the primary caregivers and family members.

For some caregivers, their family relationships were adversely affected by the children's removal. Siblings complained missing their brothers or sisters removed into temporary safe care. In other instances, parental caregivers' relationships with other family members were significantly damaged. This was because the removal of children concerned brought about feelings of betrayal leading to significant stress fractures in relationships sometimes stretching to breaking point.

2.5 Coping mechanism implemented by primary caregivers to deal with removal of their children.

Positive coping mechanisms to deal with removal of children concerned included getting family support and recourse to prayer. Some caregivers reported getting support from close family members to cope with the removal of children into temporary safe care. These family members included husbands, sisters, and brothers. Turning to divine providence, some caregivers reported that they left their situations in God's capable hands as they felt they could not influence the process in any meaningful human way. Some caregivers preferred to keep the removal of the children a secret, fearing judgment and stigma from family members.

2.6 Primary caregivers' perceptions of the way in which the Child Protection workers managed their cases

Most of the caregivers complained that the child protection officials that had managed their cases had poor communication practices and poor attitudes. They felt that social workers had poor communication practices in the sense that they left them in the dark regarding the location of the children's placements as well as developments in the respective cases. The police were also cited as poor communicators in cases when they were involved in removal of the children concerned. They strongly felt both the police and social workers could have coordinated and communicated developments regarding her child better. In some cases, poor communication by child protection workers left caregivers whose children had been removed to suspect that their children had been taken away by criminals under the guise of social workers and police officers.

Poor attitudes by some child protection officials elicited complaints from caregivers who felt the officials could have shown more patience and concern about them as humans. Other caregivers also bemoaned the fact that child protection officials often focused almost exclusively on the children removed leading to the neglect of the parental caregivers' need for counselling. As a result, some of these caregivers felt a need for counselling that was not fulfilled by social workers.

Despite complaints of poor communication and attitudes by child protection officials highlighted above, some caregivers acknowledged that they received good support from social workers.

2.7 Primary caregivers' desired outcome of statutory intervention in respect of their children

Caregivers' preferred outcome of statutory intervention in respect of their children varied. Some wanted to see justice prevailing against alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse. Other caregivers wanted their cases to be finalised as soon as possible and for the children concerned to be returned to their care. However, there were other caregivers who were opposed to immediate reunification, citing damaged family relationships being hard to heal. They cited bitterness, mistrust and broken family relationships that arose from the circumstances around the children's removal into temporary safe care.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the experiences of primary caregivers regarding legal removal of their children from their care and placed in alternative care pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry. Most of the reasons for the removal of children were due to real and alleged child abuse infringements, especially sexual and physical abuse. There is substantive evidence to therefore conclude that child abuse remains a serious cause for concern in the study setting.

From the study findings it can be concluded that most primary caregivers had negative experiences regarding the removal of their children from their care. The negative experiences stemmed from various issues, but in essence removals of these children were not always conducted in a professional manner by both social workers and police officials engaged in child protection work.

The caregivers were in many respects traumatised by the removal of their children and found it difficult to believe that removal of their children from their care were in their best interests. This is because they were not actively involved in the removal process and kept informed of their children's well-being and case development.

The ill-feelings shared by the caregivers buttress the poor perceptions towards child protection officials who came across as poor communicators and having poor attitudes. The caregivers thus viewed the social work services they received in a negative light.

Empowerment of caregivers to resume responsibility for the care of their children in the long-term seemed to be neglected as the initial engagement and involvement of the caregivers was reportedly poor for the most part.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Implement prevention and early intervention services in respect of child abuse

Study findings suggest that child abuse, especially sexual abuse in the home setting, is still common and consequently needs to be rigorously addressed to ensure that children are not exposed to this risk. It is therefore recommended that child protection systems and structures at household and community levels need to be strengthened. This can be done through training workshops and community awareness campaigns to sensitize household and community members on definitions and concepts of child abuse. Such processes will do well to also include setting up early warning systems to nip child abuse in the bud, as well as mapping stakeholders and role players in child abuse cases. It will also be very important to clearly spell out the referral pathways when dealing with child abuse cases.

5.2. Actively involve primary caregivers in the child removal process and subsequent developments pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry

Most caregivers reported that child removal decisions seemed to be made using a top-down approach, leaving them frustrated with the process and the outcomes. Indeed, some of the caregivers were frustrated that their views and inputs were not solicited when court reports were done. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Social Development

develops a parental involvement guideline, clearly articulating the rights and roles parental figures need to play before, during and after the removal of children from their care.

5.3. Empowerment of primary of caregivers to resume responsibility for the care of their children as this would be in the best interests of their children.

Social workers should provide supportive counselling to caregivers and children involved in child removal cases. This is important as most of the caregivers reported negative feelings like pain, hurt, anger and missing the children. The counselling needs to be holistic to include familial households because the removal of the child tends to impact on family dynamics and relationships as well.

Social workers should also focus on empowering primary caregivers to resume responsibility for their children's care. For example, parenting programmes focusing on managing misbehaviour by using effective disciplinary techniques should be presented when rendering services to the primary caregivers pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.

5.4. Improve communities' perceptions towards child protection officials

Most of the caregivers interviewed had negative perceptions towards child protection officials. There is therefore a need to improve the community's perceptions of child protection officials through workshop trainings, community dialogues and community engagements so that both officials and caregivers play collaborative roles in the care and protection of children.

4.5 Further research should be conducted

The study did not investigate the quality of after-care services rendered to parents by social workers in the employ of the Department of Social Development. This quality of care might differ from the quality of the after-care services being rendered by social workers in the

employ of non-government child welfare organisations. These are interesting topics that still need to be explored in pursuit of the best model of care to provide to both primary caregivers and children involved in legal removal process.

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APPENDIX 1 CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY



SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



TITLE OF STUDY: Children placed in alternative care: experiences of primary caregivers pending finalisation of the Children’s Court Inquiry.

I hereby consent to participate in the research study. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me.

I understand that:

- My participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I may choose not to answer any specific questions asked if I do not wish to do so.
- There are no foreseeable benefits or particular risks associated with participation in this study.
- My identity will be kept strictly confidential, and any information that may identify me, will be removed from the interview transcript.
- A copy of my interview transcript without any identifying information will be stored permanently in a locked cupboard and may be used for future research.
- I understand that my responses will be used in the write up of a research and may also be presented in conferences, book chapters, journal articles or books, but I will remain anonymous.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

APPENDIX 2 CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF INTERVIEW



SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



TITLE OF STUDY: Children placed in alternative care: experiences of primary caregivers pending finalisation of the Children’s Court Inquiry.

I hereby agree that the interview can be tape recorded.

I understand that:

- The recording will be kept in a secret and safe place where no one else can find and no one other than me and supervisor will have access to the recorded information.
- The recording will be typed and some of the words or information that I share will be written in the final research report, but my identifying information will not be shared.
- The recording will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications are made on the study.
- I may be quoted directly in the research report but then my identifying details will not be disclosed.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 4: INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS



SOCIAL WORK
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4472 • Fax: 011 717 4473 • E-mail:

socialwork.SHCD@wits.ac.za

STUDY TITLE: Children placed in alternative care: experiences of primary caregivers pending finalisation of the Children’s Court Inquiry.

Hello,

My name is Busisiwe Mdluli and I am doing research on how parents or children’s caregivers feel when the social worker takes the children away from them and places the children with temporary safe-care parents or a children’s home until the children’s court has ended. I’m doing this research so that social workers can learn how you think and feel when the children are removed. It will also provide information on how social workers work with parents and caregivers to try improving their circumstances so that the children can be returned to their care. The study is done in partial fulfilment of my Masters’ degree in the field of Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. Very little is known about what social workers do when working with parents and caregivers when their children have been removed from their care so I feel that you can provide important information in this regard.

I am inviting you to take part in the study.

If you agree to participate in the research, your participation will be entirely voluntary with freedom to withdraw at any time without any consequences. There are also no personal benefits to participating in the research. If you agree to participate, I will arrange to interview you at a time and place convenient for you. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the research at any time and you may refuse to answer any question you are not comfortable with answering. Furthermore, if you agree to participate, I will ask your permission to record the interview and no one other than myself and the supervisor will have access to the recordings.

Personal information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be available to me and my research supervisor. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. The results of the research may also be used for academic purposes (including books, journal and conference proceedings) and a summary of findings will be made available to the participant on request.

If you have any queries, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical), telephone + 27(0)11 717 1408, email: hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za / Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Busi Mdluli

Researcher's name, email, phone number: Busi Mdluli; You can email me at:

Busi.Mdluli@gauteng.gov.za or busisiwe.mdluli001@gmail.com or telephone number: 084 567 92 47

Supervisor name, email, phone number: Dr. Priscilla Gerrand; Email

address: Priscilla.Gerrand@wits.ac.za; Telephone number: 011 7174475

Thank you for reading this Participant Information Sheet.

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

STUDY TITLE: Children placed in alternative care: experiences of primary caregivers pending finalisation of the Children's Court Inquiry.

1. Can you please tell me when you first had contact with the social worker?
2. What did she explain to you about why your child/ren were being removed from your care?
3. What did she say about where she was taking your child/ren to while she would be investigating the case?
4. After removing your child/ren, when did the social worker make contact with you again?
5. What did she explain to you about what services she would be rendering to you until the Children's Court Enquiry was completed?
6. What did the social worker say to you about what needs to be done she could consider recommending to the Commissioner of Children that your child/ren can be placed back in your care?
7. In what way did she help you try to improve your circumstances?
8. During the investigation, what did the social worker say to you about how the children's court enquiry works?
9. What did the social worker discuss with you about is included in the final court report she has to take to the Commissioner of Child Welfare?
10. What do you think can be done by social workers to help your circumstances?

APPENDIX 6: PERMISSION FROM RELEVANT AUTHORITY



LETTER OF
APPROVAL FROM DS

