

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, POSSIBLE SHORTCOMINGS AND FINAL REMARKS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence and the effect on the child in the middle-childhood phase is a phenomenon that according to various authors (Lewis, 1999:36; Laible & Thomas, 2002:142), The Child Protection Unit (CPU) as well as the South African Police Service statistic, is on the increase every year. Further Schoeman (2001:17) reports that the middle-childhood phase is suppose to be a period of peaceful development. Normal development and reaching the necessary developmental milestones for the child is emphasised in section 28 of the South African constitution. From a Gestalt play therapy approach the cognitive and emotional totality would include every happening of every person (Clarkson, 1989:1; Joyce and Sills, 2001:17-2). Blom (2004:10) emphasise that the person's body, emotions, mental aspect, language, thinking and behaviour cannot be separated during such happenings.

This study is aimed from the perspective that knowledge from a Gestalt approach is lacking with regard to:

- the child in the middle-childhood development phase;
- that is exposed to domestic violence; and
- needs to be assessed around their experiences to serve as a basis for play therapist during service delivery.

The lack of knowledge from a Gestalt perspective with regard to domestic violence in middle-childhood, as well as practical application of this data through compiled assessment guidelines, was identified as the problem. To address this problem, less resent literature and resources were utilised. **The aim of this study was to explore and described domestic violence in middle-childhood from a Gestalt perspective.**

In order to achieve this aim the researcher made use of **triangulation** as method to gather information. The process took place through a literature study and semi-structured interviews with children as respondents that are exposed to domestic violence.

The researcher made use of qualitative research to look at the situation of the middle-childhood child who is exposed and trapped in domestic violence. The process was done from a Gestalt play therapy approach to explore and describe the situation of these children.

The reason for this was, if a theoretical perspective existed, it could be used for future research to implement the recommended practical guidelines for assessment purposes. In order to test the usefulness and practicality of the Gestalt Play Therapy Approach it was necessary for the practical application of the concepts to be refined. Therefore the researcher made use of triangulation where all necessary information was collected.

The literature study that was undertaken gave a theoretical perspective of the child in the middle-childhood phase that is exposed to domestic violence. The information was adjusted with the view of incorporating play therapy and recommending guidelines for play therapists to use as a tool for assessment and providing support to children who experience similar difficulties. The assessment was done through semi structured interviews with the help of play therapy forms and techniques with six children as respondents. The experiences, feelings and behavioural reactions of these children were investigated. The usefulness and implementation possibilities of these findings, that is compiled in a guideline, was also explored and presented. In view of both sources of information it can be concluded that domestic violence in middle-childhood from a Gestalt theoretical perspective, have been explored and described.

2. CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions that indicate that the objectives of the research have been passed will be mentioned as follows:

- **Objective 1** – by means of triangulation through a literature study to focus on three central themes to explore and describe:
 - the extent and forms of domestic violence;
 - total development of middle-childhood; and
 - Gestalt play therapy approach, principles, play forms and techniques with the intention on assessment.

Domestic violence in middle-childhood was **explored** through literature, both on an international, national and local level, suggested that if a child is exposed to domestic violence where he sees, hears and even feel the pain physically and experienced it emotionally, the child would display aggressive and violent behaviour.

Violence in the community also reinforces their concept of domestic violence and the child often grows up thinking that this is the accepted way of things to happen. The above all impacts on the middle-childhood child who supposes to have a peaceful developmental stage (Schoeman, 2001:17).

The child in the middle-childhood phase, finds it difficult to adjust to domestic violence due to their emotional and cognitive level. They are prepared to expression. From a Gestalt approach play therapy was used as communication medium for expression during assessment.

When domestic violence exists, even if it is between parents, research states that the children suffer more than the parents do. It was found in the research that they live independent lives with extended families as support systems. It was also found that these children are aggressive and violent at school because of their limited cognitive ability, they do not know how to express themselves.

There are also no positive role models to model appropriate ways of getting rid of anger; at home they are being hit for doing wrong and making their parents angry and at school they are being hit for not complying to the curriculum and this also makes their educator angry. So, no where in their field are constructive ways of dealing with anger or ventilating being modelled for them. Violence as a behaviour indicator, has, thus to some degree, become part of their character and the only way they have been exposed to.

Children are being canned and hit children because they fight with other children in other way no learning takes place. The child learns to fight violence with violence and this is what he is exposed to at home as well. If alternative ways of coping is taught at home, this would manifest in and outside the classroom.

The researcher also found that with all the respondents they were exposed to physical-, emotional-, verbal abuse and neglect. Child abuse affects the total

functioning of a child and impacts on self-esteem, peers, schooling and the way they are accepted by others. It impact of the total being causing an imbalance in their lives.

In the research it was found that violence emanated from poverty, lack of housing, power and unemployment causing a lack of finances to address the basic needs. Due to the background experiences and exposure of the milieu disabled families, in which the respondents, it was found that the lack of stimulation at home, the parents cognitive, educational and emotional level there is a lack of insight into the needs of the families especially the children. This makes it difficult for the family to change because no one in the family are able, due to lack of understanding, to change the circumstances in which they live. The children often find stimulation and meeting of needs in peer groups that are formed in these communities. Consultation with experts proves that the cycle of these families continues and they form part of the larger groups in township communities.

The researcher would like to believe that, if external support can be directed to self-support for each member of the family, especially the middle-childhood child growing up in violence, then change would be visible. The middle-childhood child can through achieving the skill of awareness become fully aware of the circumstances and directs this awareness towards internal change and support for the self. A change in one part of the system can cause a ripple effect and possible change the entire system.

- **Objective 2** – To continue with the triangulation process and to gather more information through the empirical research by means of semi-structured interviews with children. Qualitative research was used to explore and describe domestic violence from a Gestalt approach. Play forms and techniques were used for assessment, which made the environment conducive for sharing of information. This also provided the opportunity to express and verbalise their feelings.

- **Objective 3** - To provide a theoretical framework on the development of middle-childhood child and to compile a guideline for assessment from a Gestalt play therapy perspective.
- The information that came from the theoretical process could be explored, refined and described.
- This information could be compiled in a suggested guideline for the child in the middle-childhood that is exposed to domestic violence.

The literature study on the developmental phase of the middle-childhood child was used as a guide during the semi-structured interviews. The literature of the middle-childhood child gave the researcher an indication of what to expect **physically** of the child: how big or small he should be; **emotionally** - if he could express himself by saying what emotions he is experiencing; **psychologically** to know what his level of thinking should be; **socially** - how he interact with the different fields that he is exposed to example, peers at home and at school, family, educator and strangers; **motivation** - if he is inspired by other; **development of self-esteem** - how he feels about himself, does he know his strengths and weaknesses. With this information as a guide the semi-structured interviews took place and it was found that because of their psychological background, upbringing and exposure in poverty, unemployment, domestic violence and falling into the categories of milieu-disabled families they enter school being disadvantaged to a large extend. They enter school with the expectation of forming part of a curriculum that was not designed to suit there needs, and this causes a barrier to learning for most of them. With the result they either repeat a grade or go over to the next grade being more frustrated because their needs were not met.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher would like to recommend that these children that are exposed to domestic violence could be assessed through Gestalt Play Therapy which provide a medium of communication to express and verbalise their feelings. The attached guideline (in Chapter four 2.4), that was used for assessment can be recommended:

Play forms and techniques for assessment purposes – A suggested guideline for play therapists.

The usefulness of the above guideline implies that Gestalt play therapists have valuable knowledge, practical training and practise in the field with regard to the child that is exposed to domestic violence, his experiences, feelings and behaviour. This should become part of the play therapist before entering the specialised field of play therapy.

The workability of this guidelines should be in future research through Gestalt play therapists be tested and evaluated because effective service delivery should occur to avoid fragmentation of contact boundaries by the child. Awareness, integration and self-support as aims of Gestalt Play Therapy are thus suggested.

Information to make parents aware of the effect of domestic violence on the child in the middle-childhood phase from a Gestalt perspective will develop insight for the child and his immediate field. Through this knowledge parents would then develop insight in the child's experiences, feelings and behaviour.

4. POSSIBLE SHORTCOMINGS

The following possible shortcomings were identified:

- Even though the theory from a Gestalt perspective on the child in the middle-childhood that is exposed to domestic violence as a research resource can be utilised, it is only the start of future service delivery. The resources that were found thus far was less resent and did not focus on the purpose of the research
- The recommended guidelines for assessment could only be used play therapists who were trained in Gestalt Play Therapy. Knowledge and practical training is necessary for the play forms and techniques that could be used for assessment.
- The time frames for the semi-structured interviews during which play forms and techniques were utilised could be seen as a negative aid. A possibility is that the researcher as a play therapist would like to become involve in service delivery as well as continuous assessment to move towards self-support – completion of the entire therapeutic process.

5. FINAL REMARKS

For a Gestalt theoretical perspective of domestic violence in middle-childhood, a thorough literature study needs to be done on three themes: domestic violence, the child in the middle-childhood development phase with reference to his experiences, abilities, needs, feelings and behaviour that needs to be assessed, and the Gestalt approach, concepts, play forms and techniques which is applicable for assessment.

The Gestalt play therapy approach provides the opportunity for play therapists to apply practical knowledge through play forms and techniques for assessment purposes. From a Gestalt approach a recommended guideline, as a finding, could be compiled. This refined knowledge could be implemented on a practical level.

