

# **REVISITING DELIQUENCY AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION**

by

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# ABSTRACT

Teenage delinquency is a growing phenomenon in the Sebokeng area. Parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, feel unable to parent and discipline their children.

It is not known what their perceptions are regarding their realities in relation to their children’s uncontrollable behaviour. A qualitative study was conducted to answer the following questions: What is the perception of parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult” in relation to their children’s uncontrollable behaviour? What does delinquency communicate?

This study found that the behaviour of the parents and children communicates something about themselves as people, their needs, feelings and identity, sometimes on an unconscious level, as well as about their perceptions regarding the interaction between them.

Neither the behaviour of the parent nor of the child should be seen in isolation.

Therefore, social workers should consider what delinquency communicates about each member of the family, as well as the family as a whole.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dinkmeyer and McKay (1990:1) say that parenting teenagers nowadays is more difficult than in previous years, because of sociological and technological changes taking place. According to these authors, these changes have brought great benefits, but also problems, for parents. Parent-teenager relationships have been drastically affected by these changes, to such an extent that parents feel that they are unable to control or discipline their teenagers, and, as a result, they seek professional help. Also, this might be an indication that parents acknowledge their powerlessness over their children, when they believe that social workers can resolve the dilemmas they face.

On the other hand, it is clear from the interviews the researcher had with the social workers, that the social workers did not hold the same opinion as these parents regarding the professional assistance they could provide to the teenagers. Some of the social workers felt that they had failed these parents, and as a result they also felt helpless.

For this reason, it is important to explore what this uncontrollable behaviour communicates, and, furthermore, to investigate how parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, view their reality.

It is the intention of this chapter to focus on the following:

- motivation of the study
- problem statement
- aims and objectives
- value of the study for practice and research development

## **1.2 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

The orientation of the researcher suggests that the topics of social research should come from the day-to-day activities and interaction with the work situation (Brown, as quoted by De Vos, 1998:51).

The researcher has an interest in studying this subject because of the increasing number of parents coming to the social workers' offices in Sebokeng.

Sebokeng is an area that is situated in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng. According to the Emfuleni Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan of 2006/2007, the population is estimated at 13 975. The composition of the population includes all age and gender groups.

Although parenting programmes, such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), are effective in providing training for improving parent-teenager relationships, these programmes have not been used to test the relationships of how parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult", perceive their reality in relation

to their children's behaviour. Therefore, the researcher wants to focus on how parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult", view their perceptual reality, and what this uncontrollable behaviour communicates about how the individual sees himself/herself, his needs and his interaction with the significant others.

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## **PROBLEM FORMULATION**

According to De Vos (2002:106), there are a number of factors that a researcher should take into consideration when formulating a research problem. He states that there should be a direct link between the research problem, the motivation for the study, and the goal.

The researcher has established, from her caseload, that parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult", approach the Department of Social Services in the Sebokeng area on a daily basis and seek the professional help of social workers. These parents complain that they are unable to parent and discipline their teenagers, and as a result, their parent-teenager relationship no longer exists. The Department of Social Services' statistics for 2006 reveal that 66 cases provide evidence of juvenile delinquent behaviour in Sebokeng (Sebokeng Department of Social Services, 2006: 2-6).

For instance, in January 2006, twelve youths in the Sebokeng area were charged with rape, twenty-five with assault, twelve with robbery, ten with shoplifting, three being in possession of marijuana and four pretending to be policemen.

Furthermore, parents seek professional help from social workers and ask them to correct their children's uncontrollable behaviour. For the researcher, it appeared as if the parents acknowledged their powerlessness over their children and had lost hope of them. The parents believe that social workers can resolve the dilemma they face in their homes.

On the other hand, it was clear from the interview which the researcher had with the social workers, that they did not hold the same opinion as these parents, regarding the professional assistance with which the social workers could provide them. In addition, there was an indication from the social workers that they had failed these parents by not meeting their expectations, and as a result they also felt helpless.

A study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of STEP in improving the parent-teenager relationship (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990:8). Another study was conducted to investigate the criminal activity of the youths and to examine their experiences from their perspective. This study revealed that a family's socio-economic status, such as poverty, was a contributing factor to young people coming into conflict with the law. This led the researcher to ask the following:

What does delinquency communicates about the individual's self-structure, his behaviour, his needs and his interaction with the significant others? How do parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult", perceive themselves in relation to their children's uncontrollable behaviour? One of the experiences that affects the self-structure is our perception of our interaction, of both with the environment and with other people whom we perceive as important to us (Rogers 1987: 498).

## **1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.4.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

A goal is defined as “the end towards which effort or ambition is directed” (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche’ & Delport, 2005:104).

Therefore, the goal of this study was to investigate what delinquency communicates about teenagers perceived as “difficult” as individuals, about their experiences, perception and needs.

### **1.4.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

According to De Vos (1998:7), an “objective is a step one has to take at grass roots within a certain time-span in order to achieve the goal.” Therefore, the following objectives were achieved in order to attain the above goal:

- to conduct a literature review on the person-centred approach, constructivism, and the systems theory. A review of the above literature enabled the researcher to explore how people view their reality and construct their world, and how the systems theory views a family as a system.
- to collect data and analyse it
- to make recommendations on which factors to consider when dealing with parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”

## **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The researcher aimed to execute a literature review on the person-centred approach, to discover how people perceived themselves.

Rogers (1987:497) describes that all the experiences we have are part of how we view ourselves, and that is our self-structure. For Rogers (1987), the development of an individual's self-structure takes places in relation to significant others.

Further, the researcher perused literature on constructivism, to review how people construct their reality, and on the systems theory – which examines the family as a system.

## **1.6 VALUE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT**

Royce (1991:13) points out that research is essential to a profession's self-respect and its ability to maintain the positive regard of outsiders whose opinions help to support and legitimise the profession's endeavours.

It was anticipated that this research might make a meaningful contribution to the Department of Social Services, due to the fact that it could serve as a yardstick to the therapeutic approach. In addition, the recommendations could serve as a basis for further research development by other researchers.

## **1.7 DIFFICULTIES ANTICIPATED**

The researcher anticipated that the participants might be reluctant to participate in this research, for fear of being stigmatised if they revealed personal issues about themselves and their teenage children. The researcher had to establish and

maintain a positive rapport with the families to be interviewed, and reassure them that confidentiality and anonymity would be avowed by not revealing any personal information discussed.

## **1. 8 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS**

### **Chapter 1**

Orientation of the study, motivation, problem formulation, aims and objectives of the study and its value

### **Chapter 2**

Literature review

### **Chapter 3**

Research design, case study, and method of data collection and recording of data

### **Chapter 4**

Data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and linking themes together

### **Chapter 5**

Literature controls and linking themes to the literature

### **Chapter 6**

Discussion of the conclusions and recommendations

## **1. 9 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

In order to avoid confusion of using all the following terms as one and the same the researcher has decided to define them.

### **1.9.1 delinquent**

Delinquent is defined as a young offender who is below the age of legal responsibility who has committed an offence (Concise Oxford ..., 1999).



### **1.9.2 difficult**

The term difficult is defined as a person who is troublesome (Concise Oxford ..., 1999).

### **1.9.3 uncontrollable behaviour**

Uncontrollable behaviour is defined as not controllable behaviour of a person who defies the norms and standards of the society (Concise Oxford ..., 1999).

## **1. 10 SUMMARY**

This chapter focused on the orientation of the study, motivation, problem formulation, aims and objectives, literature review, value of the study, difficulties anticipated, definition of term, and the outline of chapters.

## **CHAPTER: 2**

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

People throughout the world experience all kinds of problems that threaten their well-being, and as a result they become reliant on the helping professions.

Theorists have therefore developed various theories to understand people and to assist them to live effective and efficient lives. According to Rogers (1987:77), people have the capacity to deal constructively with their life situations as they arise – in some instances with professional assistance.

In order to understand how parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, perceive themselves, and to explore what delinquency communicates, the researcher has reviewed the following theories: the person-centred approach, constructivism and the systems theory.

#### **2.2 Description of person-centred approach**

According to Rogers (1987:30), the person-centred approach proffer an understanding of how people see themselves. In addition, Rogers (1987:31) adds that if the facilitator provides an understanding of how people perceive themselves, then there might be an opportunity for those particular people to discover for themselves what they are struggling with, and become more of who they are.

Rogers formulated his theoretical ideas by way of nine-teen propositions to look much more than people's feeling or behaviour. He often refers to to the self, the values and the needs of the people he works with. For instance, Proposition 3 states the necessity of understanding a person holistically when working with that person. According to Rogers (1987: 486) the wholeness of a person includes idea, feelings, behaviour, needs and physical attributes.

The reseacher presented only the propositions that are relevant to this study, and that will answer the reseach questions. Thus explains why the proposition were not presented chronologically.

### **Definition of a proposition**

A proposition is defined as “a statement expressing a concept that can be true or false” (*Concise Oxford ...*, 1999).

### **2.3 Proposition 1: Human experience on a conscious and unconscious level**

According to Rogers (1987:483), every individual exists or lives in an ever-changing world of experiences, which is a private matter. This experiential world consists of a conscious level and an unconscious level. These experiences are only known to that particular individual. In other words, other people might not have an idea of the experiences of other people, unless they communicate these experiences to them.

Therefore, the need arises to undertake this study to become knowledgeable about the experiences that parents have with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, on a conscious and an unconscious level. This has been achieved through the utilisation of unstructured interviews.

## **2.4 Proposition 2: Human perception**

Individuals react to the field as a result of how they experience and perceive this field (Rogers, 1987:484). This perceptual world is an individual's reality and also a personal matter. How parents with teenagers do perceived as "difficult", see their reality? This reality was expressed in discussion with the researcher during their interviews.

## **2.5 Proposition 4: Self-determination**

For Rogers (1987:487), people are constantly trying to actualise and develop who they are. This proposition refers to the way in which a person sees themselves. It might not be what other people see, but is that which is relevant to that person.

People have unique experiences, and these experiences include self-emotions, needs, behaviour and values. In this study, the researcher wants to find out whether the self-structure of parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult" have been maintained as their children grow up, or whether these structures have changed. Have they maintained their parental self? Are they different kinds of parents? Do they fear the loss of their self-identity? And do they have to change it?

## **2.6 Proposition 8: The self**

The self, for Rogers (1987:491), is the experiences and perceptions people have of themselves. Rogers further said that part of the perceptual world is differentiated and becomes the self – that is, who the person perceives himself to be. This study therefore explores how parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult" see themselves as parents and as individuals. People may face many experiences in

their experiential world, but they will retain some parts of who they are, and the researcher must respect this.

### **2.7 Propositions 9 and 10: The self, significant others and values**

Rogers (1987:498) states that the self is shaped when people interact with each other. It was the intention of the researcher to investigate the kind of self parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult” have, in relation to their children. Rogers further states that values are attached to experiences which are part of the self, but sometimes these values are experienced directly by an individual, or the values are taken over from others while interacting with them. These inherited values, taken over from others, might be assimilated into the self as if they were personally experienced. For Rogers, the self is shaped by interacting with family members and other people, e.g. friends, colleagues or peers.

### **2.8 Proposition 11: Dealing with experiences on conscious and unconscious level**

In terms of this proposition, people may deal with their experiences in various ways. For instance, individuals may perceive and symbolise their experiences and incorporate them into their self-concept, because a relationship exists between the experiences and the self-concept. On the other hand, these experiences may be ignored, because there is no perceived relationship to the self. In addition, these experiences may be blocked out because they are threatening the self-concept or given the distorted symbolisation because they are in conflict with the self-concept (Rogers, 1987:503). As a result, this study explored how a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, perceives himself/herself.

## **2.9 Proposition 13: Behaviour on unconscious level**

According to this proposition, a person may act in a particular way because their experiences and needs have not been symbolised. Such behaviour may have no relationship with the self (Rogers, 1987).

It is not known how a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, act in relation to his/her children’s uncontrollable behaviour, until the results of this research reveal it.

## **2.10 Proposition 16: Defence of the self**

In terms of this proposition, if the experiences one has, have no relationship with the self-concept, and if the perception of these experiences increases, the self will protect itself. It is not known whether the self of a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, is threatened by his/her children’s uncontrollable behaviour or whether he/she denies these experiences as a way of protecting the self. On the other hand, a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, might feel threatened if social workers take over the parental role (Rogers, 1987).

## **2.11 Proposition 7: Frame of reference**

This proposition states that in order to understand the behaviour of a person, it is necessary to know what that person’s frame of reference is (Rogers, 1987:487).

Rogers sees behaviour as motivated by needs and emotions, and states that the best way to understand these dimensions is in terms of the individual’s frame of reference. The intention of this research was to understand the parents’ responses during the interview, in terms of her frame of reference.

## **2.12 Proposition 14: Stress**

In terms of this proposition, unsymbolised experiences or distorted symbolisation of experiences which cannot be incorporated into the self-structure causes stress (Rogers, 1987:510).

## **2.13 Proposition 17: Creation of safe environment**

According to Rogers (1987:517), people have vast resources to perceive and examine their experiences which are in conflict with the self-concept. In this case, the self-structure is revised to assimilate and include such experiences.

Thus, it is important, during the interviewing stage, to create an environment that is conducive to enabling a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” to examine her experiences that are in conflict with the self-structure. A conducive environment is an environment whereby an individual’s self-structure is not threatened, feels respected, is accepted and not judged. This was achieved by using communication skills – namely, empathy and advanced empathy.

### **2.13.1 Definition of empathy and advanced empathy**

#### **Empathy**

Egan (1994:123-124) says empathy is a communication skill that involves listening, understanding a person from their frame of reference and communicating this understanding to the person. This implies that one should be in a position to understand what the person is experiencing. It was the intention of the researcher to put aside her frame of reference, to listen and to convey that understanding to the parent with teenager perceived as “difficult.”

#### **Advanced empathy**

According to Rogers (1987:142), advanced empathy is a deep understanding

of a person. In other words, advanced empathy is a skill of identifying, hearing and seeing clearly the intended or implied message of the other person. This relates to the experiences on an unconscious level – namely, those experiences which are perceived as threatening the self.

#### **2.14 Proposition 15: Reconstruction of the self-structure**

According to this proposition, a person who experiences a conducive environment can symbolise all the experiences and incorporate them into the self-structure (Rogers, 1987:513). In this case, the reorganised self-structure is in a position to symbolise a wide range of experiences and incorporate it into the self-structure. This might include positive and/or negative experiences. If this happens, Rogers (1987) says change has taken place, because the self has been reconstructed to have a relationship with all or most of the person's experiences.

### **3 Constructivism**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with constructivism and the manner in which constructivists perceive things in general, including people. Constructivism provides us with a means of working within our constructions – and those of other people – without being trapped by those constructions. In order to understand constructivism, the following principles are reviewed:

#### **3.2 Responsibility**

Constructivism differs from objectivism – which attributes responsibility in the causal sense to the environment. According to Fisher (1991:98), when we hold the responsibility in a causal sense, we tend not to accept responsibility for our own



meaning or constructions. Constructivists maintain that people are responsible for their own construction or meaning. Fisher (1991) says that we cannot separate ourselves from our constructions. This indicates that we are the “master” of our own world, not the other way round.

The conception of responsibility is grounded in the assumption that we construe our meaning and are active in constructing it. In other words, Fisher (1991) states that whatever meaning the individual gives to any situation or process, that meaning has been constructed by that person and not by external forces. According to the constructivist perspective, individuals take ownership of their meaning generated by themselves. In this study, a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” has taken an active role in constructing her own meanings or reality, and the researcher has taken full responsibility for her own construction.

### **3.3 No objective reality**

Objectivists sees reality as existing “out there”, independently of the observer. The observer is you, me and everybody (Fisher, 1991:16). Constructivists do not hold the same view about reality. According to Fisher (1991:16-20), human beings come to know about the world by creating knowledge through the process of using it – in other words, working with our constructions carefully by checking them and refining them in relation to other people’s meaning.

This means that reality is constructed as relative to the observer and the observed. According to Fisher (1991), there is no unconditional truth and it does not exist independently of our constructions. In other words, the truth is relative to the frame of reference of the observing person. It is therefore important for constructivists to be able to develop an understanding of people’s frame of reference and be able to work with that understanding.

It was the intention of the researcher in this study to understand how a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” perceives herself in terms of her constructions. The parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” can create new constructions about herself, her children and their relationships. From a constructivist’s perspective, we may choose to accept or reject particular knowledge, but we cannot say it is right or wrong. The researcher cannot know a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, in this study, as she is, but she can create shared ideas with her. In order for the researcher to check her understanding of the participants’ constructions, she utilised empathy and advanced empathy, as communication skills.

### **3.4 Fit**

In order to understand the concept “fit”, it is important to explain what the term “match” means. For Von Glasersfeld (as quoted by Watzlawick, 1984:20-23), the concept “match” refers to things or objects that are similar and have the same characteristics. Epistemologists are looking at an equivalent relation – that is, knowledge matches reality. In other words, reality can be considered to be the same as knowledge. The concept “fit”, for Von Glasersfeld, refers to those actions that people use to resolve problems which work – and sometimes they do not work. For instance, if our actions have worked to solve a problem, we say that they fit with us or that we have achieved coherence. This means that we have successfully made sense of things, events or meanings, and that they fit with our constructions. In this study, the researcher has tried to fit different ideas created by the parent.

### **3.5 Usefulness**

Fisher (1991:38) says that having an answer or action which is open for disconfirmation, is a useful approach, because one will be flexible and find which approach is more effective to change a certain condition. In other words, for Fisher (1991) to take into consideration that people have different perceptions, experiences and reality, is useful, because it enables one to be flexible and to accommodate other people's perceptions in a given situation. According to Von Glasersfeld (1984), there is no right or wrong truth. He uses the concept of usefulness to decide whether the ideas created by an individual, and shared with another, can be useful or not.

### **3.6 Creating meaning**

Constructivists view each individual as creating their reality and attaching meaning to their experiences. In addition, Fisher (1991:16) says that the reality or meaning that a person has created is relevant to the owner, and no one has the right to say that other people's meaning or constructions are correct or incorrect. Furthermore, Fisher (1991) says that each reality can be partially shared with other people, and is unique to each of us. It was therefore important, in this investigation, that the researcher allowed the participants to create their own meaning and to share it with her if they wished to do so.

## **4. Systems theory**

In order to understand the systems theory, it is important to express its meaning.

### **4.1 Description of the system**

Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson (1967:120) define a system as a set of components which are related to one another. For these authors, a system is not a thing in itself – there is a relationship between the components of the system

which ties the system together. In other words, the system is circular and has no beginning and no end. Watzlawick et al. (1967:124) states that a system is nonsummate. This means that a variation to one part of a system affects the other parts, or the whole, because the parts are dependent on one another. A system can be seen as an individual, parent/s and children, as part of the family system. In this study, the system consisted of a parent with a teenager perceived as "difficult", and a research system will be the researcher. This research system will be different from the parental system. In other words, the system is more than the sum of its parts. For instance, if a new member enters the system, a new system will be formed.

#### **4.2 Wholeness**

According to Watzlawick et al. (1967:123-127), the wholeness of the system can be traced to the relationship each part of the system has with its fellow parts. A change to one part will cause a change to all parts and in the total system. Thus, the system does not function as a single composite of independent elements, but as an inseparable whole. It is important, in this investigation, to view the researcher and the parent with a teenager perceived as "difficult", as inseparable and as influencing each other.

#### **4.3 Binocular Vision**

Bateson's (1979:68-69) conceptualisation of binocular vision claims that when two people interact with each other, they have different perspectives, and when these two different perspectives are viewed in relationship to each other, it will give a depth perception. Therefore, a parent with teenagers perceived as "difficult" will give her experience of raising teenagers – which will be a different perspective from her children's perspective or that of the researcher.

#### **4. 4 The map is not the territory**

Bateson's (1979: 30-31) idea of "the map is not the territory" is when a distinction is made between the name and the thing to be named. Sometimes, the brain is unable to distinguish between the name and the reported concept. This means that there will always be a number of situations in which a response is not guided by a logical distinction between the name and the reported concept. Therefore, for Bateson, non-rational type of behaviour is necessarily present in human life.

The parent's perception about her children, in this study, might not be as the children are, but represent only the parent's perception or map of the children.

#### **4. 5 Second-order cybernetics**

Keeney's (1983:110-112 ) assumption about second-order cybernetics is that the observer is seen as part and parcel of that which is being observed. This implies that there is a relationship between the observer and the observed. The researcher needed to be aware that she was interacting with the participants and that she could not be separated from them.

#### **4. 6 Autonomy**

Keeney (1983:123-127) perceives each part of the system as having a relationship with its fellow parts, and a change in one part of the system will cause a change in all the parts and in the system as a whole. Each system has its own identity, but when each part enters the system with its own values, perceptions, experiences and identity, it must be able to maintain its identity. According to Keeney (1983), the parts of a system are autonomous and have their own identity. These parts are perceived as a system with its own rights, as part of the system to which it belongs. Therefore, the participants in this study entered the research system with

their identities, their values, their perceptions and their beliefs, as did the researcher.

## **5. The link between systems theory, person-centred theory and constructivism**

### **Autonomy and wholeness**

According to Watzlawick et al. (1967:123-127) the system as a whole is autonomous and determines the outcome and its identity. This pertains to both the individual members of the family, as well as the family and the therapeutic system as a whole. In other words, the parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, in this study, was perceived as a systems with her own rights, apart from her children to which she belonged. Furthermore, she came to the interview with her identity, values, perceptions and beliefs. In other words, the researcher did not view the parent’s behaviour, in this study, in isolation, but understood it in its wholeness, including her interaction with her family and the researcher.

### **Creating meaning, frame of reference, map is not the territory, and fit**

As a researcher in this study, one has to create meaning that fits with the constructions and the perceptual world, which is the frame of reference of the parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult.” Care must be taken not to threaten the parent and her teenager’s perceived identity. Also, different constructions should also be introduced to them, to enable the parent and her son B to re-construct their self-structure from their frame of reference (Fisher, 1991; Rogers, 1987:487; Bateson, 1979:30-31).

### **Second-order cybernetics, no objective reality, responsibility and self-determination**

The researcher was part of what was observed – that is, parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, and son B while they constructed their reality and took responsibility for their own constructions, as she did her own constructions (Fisher,1991:18-81).

Fisher (1991) says that people are responsible for the meanings they have constructed. People are not empty vessels – they construct meanings internally, according to their own perceptions, needs and behaviour.

Furthermore, this link is also found in the position that Bateson (1979:67) holds about the system’s autonomy. According to Bateson, the system is able to monitor its performance and is “self-corrective.” This implies that the system has the ability to determine what to maintain and what to change. There is also a link between responsibility and what the systems theory says about autonomy. According to this theory, the system has its own identity as well as its parts. Both the system and its parts are able to maintain its identity (Palazzoli et al., 1993:37).

### **No objective truth**

Fisher (1991:17) holds that there is no unconditional truth, and it does not exist independently of our constructions. According to the constructivist perspective, the truth is relative to the frame of reference of the observer. This means that a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” will not be separated from how she sees herself, her perceptions and her behaviour, because all these dimensions form part of who she is. In other words, her perceptions cannot be seen as the objective truth about her children, but only as her frame of reference – as is the case with the researcher.

## **CHAPTER: 3**

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Rubin and Babbie (1989:3) define research as a method of inquiry or a way of learning and knowing the world. De Vos (2002:45) also agrees with Rubin and Babbie's definition of research, when he said that research is an inquiry or an exhaustive examination. According to de Vos (2002), research is the quest for knowledge that is conducted in a rational way, using scientific methodologies. Therefore, this chapter focuses on research methodology, which includes the research design, method of data collection and data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research design**

Mouton (2001:55) sees a research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing a problem or conducting a study. Rubin and Babbie (1989:107) define a research design as comprising all the decisions the researcher makes about the type of design to use in the study, procedures for collecting data, and how to analyse the data.

This study is exploratory in nature. Exploratory research is undertaken when a researcher wants to investigate new interests, or the researcher aims to yield insights about an individual, a community or a phenomenon (De Vos, 2002:109; Rubin & Babbie, 1989:86-87). The researcher selected this approach to investigate the perceptions of parent with teenagers perceived as "difficult" and how he/she construct her own reality when his/her teenagers inherit delinquent tendencies. Therefore, the study necessitates a qualitative inquiry.



### **Qualitative research method**

According to Mouton and Marais (1985:157), a qualitative approach is a process that is not formalised. In other words, it focuses on the respondents' perspectives and their meaning. In addition, it involves a close relationship between the researcher and the respondents. Furthermore, it focuses on understanding the behaviour of the respondents, rather than predicting it. This investigation takes place in the respondents' natural setting, which enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of parent with teenagers perceived as "difficult", from her frame of reference. De Vos (2002:110) also says that the "qualitative paradigm refers to the research that elicits respondents' accounts of meaning, experiences and perceptions". This approach enabled the researcher to achieve the aim of this study- that is; to investigate what delinquency communicates. The researcher participated in this study as an active participant who related the narrative from the respondents' frame of reference, as far as possible.

### **Case study**

According to Neuman (1997:29), a case study is an in-depth study done with one or more cases such as individuals, groups, organisations and forums. De Vos et al. (2005:273) view a case study as the "observation of a process, activity, event, programme or individual bound within a specific time and setting." The case study is a social system which consists of a parent with teenager(s) perceived as "difficult", from the social worker's case load. The researcher attempts to understand how this parent perceives his/her own reality.

### **3. 3 Methods of data collection**

#### **3. 3. 1 Unstructured interview**

According to Rubin and Babbie (1989:345), an unstructured interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the participants. Unlike structured interviews in which specific questions are asked, unstructured interviews allow the participants to give an account of their emotions, opinions and perceptions, and their behaviour concerning the phenomenon under study, without a list of questions or utilising any of the researcher's prior experience or information (De Vos et al. 2005:293). De Vos et al. (2005:292) see the unstructured interview as a "conversation with a purpose." It was the intention of the researcher during the interview to understand the experiences, beliefs and meanings of a parent with teenagers perceived as "difficult", in terms of his/her frame of reference. This will be achievable when the researcher creates an environment whereby the participant's perspective can unfold as he/she views it, not as the researcher views it. Although the researcher had some idea of what data to collect, no specific set of questions were asked during the interview. The researcher intended to establish an unstructured conversation, and pursued specific themes raised by the participants. This implies that the researcher respects the participant's self-determination. Rogers (1987:487) states that a client is an expert on his/her own personal matters, and determine the direction of the facilitating process. The researcher utilised unstructured interviews as a method of data collection, based on the person-centred approach.

#### **3. 4 Tape recording the interview**

A tape recorder was used as an additional method of data collection. De Vos et al. (2005:298) state that a tape recorder provides more concrete records than

notes do during the interview, thereby allowing the researcher to concentrate on the interview process. The researcher needs to request permission from the participants to record their interviewing sessions.

### **3.5 Recording of data**

In addition to using tape recording notes, Neuman (1997:363-366) identifies the following field notes for storing data:

- Jotted notes: These notes are brief and serve as a memory trigger.
- Direct observation notes: These notes serve as a description of the research participants, what they have said, events and activities. It is an exact recording of particular words, phrases or actions.
- Inference notes: These notes contain the conclusion the researcher draws from the collected data, new concepts the researcher has developed, and the connection the researcher has made between these concepts. Neuman (1997) says that a researcher should separate inferred meaning from direct observation, because the researcher can create new interpretations when re-reading his/her direct observation notes.
- Analytic notes: Methodological ideas are kept in these notes, in order to record the researcher's plans and procedural decisions.
- Personal Notes: These notes serve as a research diary whereby he/she records feelings and subjective impressions of events.

The researcher used unstructured interviews as a tool for data collection, in order to generate similar notes as expressed by Neuman (1997:365). Also, the researcher jotted down a few notes during or immediately after the interview. In

addition, the transcription of the interview was equivalent to direct observation notes. Furthermore, the researcher made inference notes and analytical notes when going through the transcriptions. In other words, the researcher used transcripts, jotted notes, research inference notes, analytical notes and personal notes, during data collection.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter the researcher focused on the qualitative approach, as it was appropriate for her study. Also, the exploratory nature for the study was employed and a discussion of the research strategies was offered. A case study was selected and discussed, and the method of data collection and the recording of the data have been proffered.

## **CHAPTER: 4**

### **DATA COLLECTION, DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the preceding chapter the research methodology was discussed – that is, how research information or data would be obtained, and what tool designs would be utilised to collect data. This chapter concentrates on the techniques the researcher utilised to collect data, data analysis and interpretation. There is a detailed explanation of the method utilised in data gathering and procedures undertaken for data analysis. Furthermore, there is a focus on the presentation of the findings of the study.

#### **4.2 Description of Participants**

The participants in this study were a mother – who is the main participant – and her younger son (B). She also had an older son (A) who was not present during the interview. The mother was a widow between 40 and 45 years old. Her son was a scholar between the ages of 14 and 15.

#### **4.3 Data Collection**

##### **First interview**

The researcher introduced herself, and thereafter explained to the participant that her responses would enable the researcher to understand her as a parent with a teenager perceived as “difficult”, from her perspective in relation to her child’s uncontrollable behaviour. The researcher informed the participant that she was

free to participate in this study, voluntarily. The researcher asked permission from the participant to utilise a tape recorder to record the interview, and it was granted. The interview commenced on the same day after the researcher addressed the participant. The data was collected only from the parent, that particular day.

The researcher utilised an unstructured interview to investigate how a parent with a teenager perceived as “difficult” perceived her reality in relation to her child’s uncontrollable behaviour. The interview took place at the participant’s house in Sebokeng.

The participant was allowed to respond in the language she understood; this was done to overcome language barriers.

The researcher jotted down some field notes during the interview. The interview was also recorded, and this enabled the researcher to concentrate on the interview proceedings.

### **Second interview with mother and son B**

A second interview took place, as the participant’s voice was hoarse in the first interview. The researcher also needed to get clarification and an explanation from the participant about her initial responses. The second interview took place in the researcher’s office, and the participant came with her younger son. Son B was not active during the interview. Again, the researcher utilised an unstructured interview to collect data. What follows is what transpired from the interviews:

According to the participant, she was concerned by her son A's uncontrollable behaviour. She told the researcher that she was hurt by her child's uncontrollable behaviour and by the bad things he had done.

The participant said that she lived in fear, and panicked whenever she saw a person approaching her house, thinking that the person was bringing bad news about her uncontrollable son. The participant told the researcher all this with tears in her eyes.

The participant explained that what exacerbated her pain was that her son A was still young, but he already smoked dagga and was involved with bad friends. Furthermore, she said that she was summoned to her son A's school time and again, because of her son's uncontrollable behaviour. According to the participant, the school found her son in possession of a knife and dagga, and her son's uncontrollable behaviour made her appear as a parent who is unable to discipline and control her children.

The participant saw herself as a caring parent and competent wife. She told the researcher that she took care of her sick husband, although they were separated. She said she came back to her husband, together with her children, to take care of him, as soon as she heard that he was sick.

She further told the researcher that she took care of her husband until his death. She said her husband asked to see his children before he died. Again she was telling the researcher her experiences, with tears in her eyes. She continued by saying that her husband put both his hands on his children's heads as if he was praying for them, but he said nothing. The participant then said that she could see

that her husband was dying and started to pray for him. With tears in her eyes she said that death is so cruel, because it has taken her husband and the father of her children.

She said that although they had marital problems, she did not want to be separated from her husband. She also said she thought that her children did not take their parents' separation well.

The participant's son B was crying while his mother was relating her experiences. He nodded his head when the researcher said that he appeared to be hurt. He then went outside, still crying.

Then the mother told the researcher that her children had not accepted their father's death. She asked the researcher if she could refer son B to her for counselling.

She further told the researcher that she believed that her son could benefit from counseling, and to accept his father's death.

The participant then said that she managed to deal with her problems and painful experiences, because of the assistance she received from the probation officer and her assistant. She mentioned that her uncontrollable son A also benefitted from home-based supervision provided by the probation officer. She elaborated that her son's behaviour had changed, he was always at home and he wanted to go back to school the following year.

Reading of scripture was also seen by the participant as another source of support for her family. She informed the researcher that she normally felt less stress when



she had read the Bible to her children – especially Psalms. She informed the researcher that she believed in God and attended church services on a regular basis. According to her, she wished that her children could attend church.

### **Third interview with mother and son B**

The participant then came with son B to the researcher's office a month after the second interview. The purpose of contacting the researcher was to give feedback about both of her sons, A and B.

She informed the researcher that son A had changed and had gone back to his previous school. Now she was concerned about son B's behaviour.

According to the main participant, son B was now uncontrollable. She said he sniffed glue and refused to go to school. The participant reported that she thought her problems were now over, when her elder son went back to school. She then asked the researcher to correct her son B's behaviour.

Son B was quiet during the conversation between his mother and the researcher. Then he suddenly said that he grew up without a father figure.

He further said that he missed his late father and that he only came to live with his father when he was ill.

He cried!

He told the researcher that being separated from his father for a long time felt as if some part of his life was missing. Still crying, he said that he wanted to be like children who have both parents. According to him, he wanted to take care of his

father and blamed himself for not being there for his father when he was weak and unable to help himself.

His mother also said that her husband did not have someone to take care of him while they were separated. According to her, she did not want to be separated from her husband; what she wanted was to solve their marital problems. She further said that she came back to her husband too late to work things out and reconcile. Death did not give them time to work things out.

#### **4. 4 Problems experienced**

Though the interview was recorded, the participant's voice was hoarse on the tape recorder, and it was difficult to hear what she was saying, or what her responses were. A follow-up interview was undertaken, with a view of obtaining clarity and an explanation from the participant about her responses.

The participant came with her younger son to the researcher's office for a follow-up interview, and initially it was not the intention of the researcher to interview the participant's son.

#### **4. 5 Data analysis**

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999:111-112), data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected. After data has been collected, there is a need to analyse it, in order to arrive at the findings and conclusions.

This study investigated how a parent with teenagers perceived as "difficult" viewed her reality, and explored what delinquency communicates about the individual.

#### 4.5.1 Data analysis procedure

The researcher translated the whole interview from Sesotho into English. The eight steps identified by Creswell (1994:155) were used in the analysis of all the responses. These steps are as follows:

- The researcher read all the responses carefully. She then jotted down ideas that centred on the topics relating to the participant's experiences.
- The first step was followed by carefully re-reading the transcripts, trying to get their underlying meaning, and developing themes. The focus here was on identifying sections of the transcript that were relevant to this study. The developed themes were highlighted by using different coloured pens.
- The researcher developed a classification system for the data material. A list of all topics was made, and similar topics were clustered together and sorted according to the participant's perceptual reality.
- The researcher then went back to the participant's experiences and ensured that they were all appropriately coded by the highlighters.
- The researcher went through the data again with the topics, and reorganised the data as new categories and themes emerged.
- The appropriate wording was then sorted and put into different categories. Categories relating to each other were grouped together to limit the number of categories. Grinnel (1997:66) and Stewart and Shamdansani (1990:102) call this process the "cut-and-paste". It involves separating each section of

transcribed unstructured interview according to its code, and sorting it with all material relevant to that particular category.

- After completing this task for all the categories, the researcher organised the categories in a logical order, in terms of how a parent with a teenager perceived as “difficult” views her reality and what delinquency communicates.
- Then, a preliminary analysis of the categories was done and the participant’s direct quote in each category was indicated.

The process pertaining to data analysis is now discussed.

### **Data analysis process**

The researcher used Marlow’s (1993:154) two-phase approach to data analysis:

- organising data
- construction of categories

#### **4.5.2 Organising qualitative data**

It is important to organise qualitative data, as it enables the researcher to look for ideas and actions that describe the data. The researcher used two elements to organise the data in this study:

##### **4.5.2.1 Field Notes**

The tool utilised to gather data in this study was unstructured interviews. During the interview process, the researcher made field notes. These notes were an invaluable resource to compare data during the analysis process.

#### **4.5.2.2 Transcribing**

After each interview the researcher transcribed the participant's responses. The transcripts were filed.

#### **Data presentation**

### **THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS CONTENT**

#### **Loss and Counselling**

It appears that there have been many losses in this family, due to separation of parents and the death of the husband and father.

According to the mother, counselling could be effective in dealing with these losses. She saw it as important that her family be counselled, in order to deal with problems.

#### **Professional support**

There was a change seen in the participant's son A's uncontrollable behaviour, and she experienced less stress. According to the mother, the contributing factors to these changes were the professional support she received from the social worker, and from home-based supervision rendered by an assistant probation officer to son A.

### **Caring for and helping each other**

The mother and son B viewed themselves as caring and helpful people. The caring nature of this family was indicated by their coming back from where they were staying, and taking care of the husband and father until his death. Both were concerned about the husband and father being sick alone, without anyone to take care of him.

## **CHAPTER: 5**

### **LITERATURE CONTROL**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

According to De Vos (1998:48), literature control involves planning narratives and comparing the findings of the study with the existing theories.

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the research findings with the literature discussed in Chapter Two, regarding how a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult” views her reality, and what delinquency could mean.

In the preceding chapter, the ways in which data was collected was discussed, analysed and interpreted.

This chapter concentrates on the themes mentioned above, and theoretical concepts, and linking them with the literature discussed in Chapter Two.

#### **5.2 LINKING RESPONSES IDENTIFIED FROM THE CONTENT TO LITERATURE**

##### **Human experience on conscious and unconscious level**

The mother and son B mentioned that they were hurt. The mother stated that she experienced hurt due to the bad things done by son A. She further stated that before son A's behaviour changed, she was always in fear whenever she saw a stranger approaching her house, asking herself what bad news this stranger was bringing regarding son A's uncontrollable behaviour.

According to her, son A smoked dagga at a young age, was found in possession of dagga and a knife at school, and was involved with bad friends. She perceived the above uncontrollable behaviour of son A as exacerbating her pain.

Son B mentioned that he was hurt by his father's death.

According to Rogers's (1987) propositions 8 and 11, the mother's self might have been threatened by the death of her husband, which might have been experienced on an unconscious level, thus creating stress and causing her to feel helpless about disciplining her children. Son B might also be crying for a father figure, although this might also be on an unconscious level.

### **Stress, defence of the self, need and behaviour**

In terms of Rogers's (1987:517) Proposition 14, the mother and sons might have experienced stress, because the death of the husband and father threatened their self-structure.

According to Rogers's (1987:515) Proposition 16, the loss of her husband and their separation, and her son's uncontrollable behaviour, might have threatened her self as a wife and as a competent mother. She mentioned that she had wanted to work out their marital problems and reconcile, but death had robbed her of that opportunity. In addition, she said that she had time and again been summoned to son A's school, regarding his uncontrollable behaviour, and this made her appear as a parent who was unable to discipline and control her children.



The mother's behaviour of asking for help for both sons could have been an indication of a need to protect her self. (Rogers, 1987:491).

Although son A was not a participant in this study it could be hypothesised that his father's death might have changed his self, perhaps becoming the man of the house, or fearing it and not being ready for it, and his uncontrollable behaviour might be seen as a way of defending his self or his family.

Son B's self might be threatened by not having a father figure in the house, and his recent uncontrollable behaviour, according to Rogers's (1987:491) Proposition 5, could indicate a need for his self or his family. According to him he wished his father was still alive.

### **Self-structure**

In terms of Rogers's (1987:497) Proposition 8, the mother appeared to be a caring wife and mother. This fact was highlighted when she mentioned that she came back and took care of her sick husband and by her being concerned about her two sons. Another factor that indicated that she was a caring mother was when she came with son B to the third interview and asked the researcher to assist son B to deal with his father's death.

Son B also appeared to be caring when he said that he blamed himself for not being there for his father when he was too helpless to take care of himself.

### **Frame of reference, meaning and objective truth**

In this study, each participant, the mother and her son B, behaved in a particular way and the researcher tried to understand their behaviours in terms of their frame

of reference (Rogers, 1987:494). For instance, both sons could perceive their behaviour differently from others, such as mothers and the social workers. This is an indication that each person – the mother, her children and the researcher –had their own meanings which they might attach to uncontrollable behaviour, and no one owned the truth.

### **Creating meaning and responsibility**

Fisher (1991:16) confirms that what the mother was experiencing was her own constructions and they were relevant to her – as was the case with the boys. According to Fisher (1991), the parent partially shared the uncontrollable behaviour of her two sons and the pain and hurt caused by it, with the researcher, of her own free will. In terms of Fisher (1991:98), the mother and sons took an active role in constructing their own world, and therefore they were responsible for their meaning or what they were experiencing.

### **Defence of the self-structure**

The death of the husband and father had threatened the self of both the mother and son B, on an unconscious level. For both it seemed that it was about control: it seemed that the mother felt incapable of being a father to the boy, and giving him the discipline/control he required. The boy's behaviour might have been a way of asking for a father's discipline.

The mother said that the death of her husband had robbed her of an opportunity to work out their marital problems, and reconcile.

Son B mentioned that he wanted to live with both his parents, like other children. It might be hypothesised that he saw his father as still alive, and as an indication of protecting his self or his family's identity.

### **System and wholeness**

From a systematic point of view, the family lived as a system, consisting of the mother, her two sons, A and B, and the father, although he might be dead (Watzlawick et al., 1967:120). The death of the father had therefore affected all the members, not just the mother or son B, but son A as well.

### **Second-order cybernetics**

There were shared ideas between the mother, son B and the researcher. For Selvini (1993:21-22) this is an indication that the researcher was interacting with the participants and was not separated from them.

### **Fit and usefulness**

The participant indicated that there was a change in her elder son's uncontrollable behaviour. In Von Glasersfeld's point of view (as quoted by Watzlawick, 1984: 20-23), the changes that had taken place in son A (the delinquent behaviour) may have been brought about by his ability to make sense of the events and meanings and ideas that he had shared with the probation officer, and her assistance (interaction with their environment). Son B might have found meanings that fitted with his constructions during the interview.

## **Binocular vision**

Although the researcher did not anticipate that the participant would come to the interview with her younger son, this enabled the researcher to get in-depth perceptions from their given different perspectives.

## **Map is not the territory or the objective truth**

Based on Bateson's (1979:30-31) concept of "the map is not the territory", what the participant stated about her children's uncontrollable behaviour might not be as her children were, but represent only her perceptions or map of the children. For Fisher (1991:17) it means that her perception cannot be seen as an objective truth about her children, but only as her frame of reference.

## **Autonomy**

In terms of this concept, it can be said that although the mother and son B came to the interviews as a family having its own identity, each had his and her own identity within the identity of the family they belonged to. This means for Keeney (1983) that the family members in this study had autonomy to have their own identity, beliefs and values, and could be perceived as a system in their own right, apart from the family to which they belonged.

## **5.3 INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

The research findings can be interpreted as follows:

- The uncontrollable behaviour of teenagers perceived as "difficult" threatened the self-structure (how she perceived herself) of their parent,

and as a result she experienced stress. She experienced predominantly hurt, pain and fear that resulted in seeking professional assistance.

- The parent indicated that she experienced less stress. This might have been brought about by the person-approach the researcher used throughout the interview.
- The research findings revealed that the mother's self and that of her children might have been threatened by the death of the husband and father, the parents' separation and the children's uncontrollable behaviour. This was indicated by the mother when she mentioned that she wanted to reconcile with her husband, but death had robbed her of this opportunity. She also mentioned that her children had not dealt with their father's death. In addition, son B also mentioned that he saw himself as living with his both parents, like other children. He saw his parents' separation as something that had robbed him of part of his life. These findings are confirmed by Rogers's (1987: 515) Proposition 16.
- The mother and her younger son viewed themselves as caring and helpful people. For Rogers (1987:497) this is an indication of their conception or experience of who they are.
- This study revealed that both sons' uncontrollable behaviour could be perceived differently by the mother, the sons and the researcher, based on their frame of reference and each one's own truth. For instance, the son A's behaviour could be understood as a way of getting help for his family, in

which he may be seen as troublesome, while son B's behaviour might indicate an unconscious need for a father figure in his life.

- It is a clear indication that this family lived as a system, with both parents and children; even though the father was deceased, he – or their need of him – could be still alive in their minds. This might be the reason that the death of the husband and father had affected all the family members, not just the mother and son B. Therefore, from a systemic point of view, the behaviour of both parents and the children could be seen in a different way, when viewed as part of the family system.
- Counselling was viewed as a necessity in assisting this participant in dealing with her problems. She also thought that her sons could benefit positively from counselling, as well.

#### **5.4 ASSESSING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESULTS**

To enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the research, the findings from the parent's perception of reality in relation to her teenager's uncontrollable behaviour and her younger son's experiences, were triangulated. The contribution of triangulation is that the findings from the parent's perception of reality supported each other, and the information gathered from her son supported the findings that professional support from social workers and assistance from probation officers contribute towards parents regaining their power to discipline and control their children.

## **5.5 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

The aim of this research was to explore what delinquency could communicate about an individual's self, needs, experiences and his/her interaction with the significant other in the Sebokeng area. At the end of the study the researcher was able to answer the central question of the study, which was: How parents with teenagers perceived as "difficult", view their reality in relation to their children's uncontrollable behaviour? The problem formulation was confirmed through the findings – there is a link between the findings and the problem formulation.

A case study of a parent with a teenager perceived as "difficult" was selected to collect data. Data was collected by means of an unstructured interview, and Creswell's eight steps were selected in the data analysis process. Categories were formulated and themes were developed and were subsequently linked to the literature.

The objectives of the study were achieved and literature control was conducted.

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The participant's voice was not audible on the tape recorder, and a follow-up interview was conducted. The other problem was that the interview was interrupted, as the participant's cell phone kept on ringing and she kept on answering it.

The participant came with her younger son to the interview; this was not anticipated by the researcher.

Unstructured interviews were utilised to collect data, and this necessitated a qualitative approach. This approach therefore limits this study in such a way that the findings cannot be generalised to parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 1 the researcher established that parents who raise teenagers perceived as “difficult”, approach the Department of Social Development on a daily basis, as they complain that their children are out of control and they are unable to parent and discipline them. According to these parents, the parent-teenager relationship no longer exists.

Furthermore, it appears as if parents who approach the Department of Social Development for professional help acknowledge their powerlessness over their children. They appear to relinquish the problem-solving responsibility to the social workers, and believe that this will resolve the dilemma they face at home. The research findings have ascertained that this statement is true. The uncontrollable behaviour of these teenagers perceived as “difficult” appears to threaten the self of the parent.

The researcher undertook an exploratory study, to find out how parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult” view their reality in relation to their children’s uncontrollable children. This exploratory study was done by means of an unstructured interview, and a parent with a teenager perceived as “difficult” was selected from the researcher’s case load, as a case-study.

## **6.2 CONCLUSION ON THE FINDINGS**

The study ascertained that the self of a parent with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, and that of her children, are threatened by the death of one family member as well as by the children’s behaviour.

The mother viewed professional support as vital in assisting to restructure who she was (self-structure), as well as minimising threats. Furthermore, the participant stated that a family could benefit from counselling rendered by professional people. This was illustrated by the fact that the participant invited her younger son to the interview, when it was not anticipated by the researcher.

Furthermore, the mother articulated that she and son A have benefitted from continuous support offered by the probation officer and the assistant probation officer.

It was evident that the focus need not be only on the person experiencing a problem, but also on the family as a whole. The focus on the whole family will enable one to find out how family members relate to one another.

Lastly, the study revealed that delinquency should not be viewed as uncontrollable behaviour, but as a form of communication.

## **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommends the following:

Counselling should be offered, not only to the person experiencing a problem, but also to his/her family members – the main participant perceived that family members could also benefit from it.

One needs to look at a person, the self, of the parent who complains about her children, and try to understand her frame of reference, so that one can enable her to understand herself better.

Continuous professional support, such as home-based supervision, should be rendered to families of uncontrollable children.

Since the researcher has understood the people involved in this study – that is, the parent and her child as whole people – at research level, it is recommended that there should be a therapeutic intervention with this family.

Last, but not least, this study was conducted to answer the following:

What does delinquency communicate within the family? How do parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, perceive themselves in relation to their children’s uncontrollable behavior?

In terms of all the theories discussed, the researcher has learnt that each member of the family has his/her own frame of reference and constructions, which might differ from one another.

In terms of the person-centred approach, both the children and the parent have their own perceptions and experiences, including needs which motivate their behaviour, which is connected to their perception of their “self”.

So, the uncontrollable behaviour of the child and the helpless behaviour of the mother communicate something about their needs.

In the case study described in this research project, the mother needed support to deal with her sons as a single parent. Her self as a competent and caring wife and mother was threatened by the death of her husband, which was experienced on an unconscious level, creating stress and a sense of helplessness.

If the social worker then takes over the mothering role, or gives advice, the mother will not be enabled to develop her own self as a single mother, with behaviour and values to fit with this (reconstructed) self.

Although the researcher did not speak to son A, it seems as if his uncontrollable behaviour brought the family the help the mother felt they needed. Once this happened, his uncontrollable behaviour stopped. His behaviour thus indicated a need, not only for himself, but for the whole family. As he was not able to communicate this need in a direct way, it was probably experienced on an unconscious level.

Son B's behaviour seemed to be crying out for a father figure, although this may also have been an unconscious need for parental control. This indicates that it is important to try and understand the people involved – whether it is a parent alone, or a child being accused of uncontrollable behaviour – as a whole, as well as their interactions with their family members.

Based on the findings of this research, the above questions have been answered. For the researcher, she now views her responsibility in a different way when

approach by parents with teenagers perceived as “difficult”, as well as by people who have other problems.

The researcher will create a conducive environment for them when they come to her office for professional assistance. For instance, parents will be listened to and allowed by the researcher to perceive themselves in relation to their experiences, and understand this reality in terms of their frames of reference.

The researcher would now see delinquency not as uncontrollable behaviour, but as communicating something. For instance, delinquency might be an indication that the self-structure of the child is threatened, or being afraid to take an adult role of protecting and providing for the family, if the family consists of one parent.

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**APPENDICES:**

**FIRST INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER**

**SECOND INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER AND SON B**

**THIRD INTERVIEW WITH MOTHER AND SON B**