GROUP WORK WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS STAYING IN A SHELTER

by

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I declare that "Group work with adolescent girls staying in a shelter" is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

(Miss T M Netshishivhe) DATE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to do group work with 10 girls staying in a shelter in order to contribute to their adjustment.

Lewin's field theory and the General Systems Theory were utilized to ground the group work. The epistemological framework of the study was exploratory and involved an in depth analysis of the group experiences of the participants. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with the participants. Hermeneutics as a method of analysis was applied to analyse data.

The following themes captured the experiences of the girls: trust versus mistrust, connection and disconnection, alienation and isolation, emotionally overwhelmed versus security, being labeled/stigmatized, security versus insecurity, and hope versus hopelessness.

This study provides a better understanding of the life worlds of girls staying in a shelter. It could also contribute to a greater awareness of the experiences of abused girls who stay in a shelter.

Key words: group, group work, group therapy, abuse, adolescent, shelter, field theory, General Systems Theory, group process, narrative, hermeneutics, qualitative research

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Outline of the problem

1.1 Introduction

Many children in our country and over the world are neglected and / or abused in some or other way, which impair their optimal development. Many of these children run away or are removed from their homes and land on the streets or in institutions such as children's homes or shelters.

In this study the focus is on a group of adolescent girls in a shelter who have been neglected and / or abused. These girls are challenged to form an identity and to adjust to their environment without the support of their family. The present chapter will briefly deal with effects of child abuse. Thereafter I will describe the research settings and the objectives of my research.

1.2 Effects of child abuse

The impact of sexual abuse can be devastating, especially for young girls at the crucial stage of adolescent development. Before ramifications of the trauma of sexual abuse are addressed, it is important to consider the stage of personality development associated with teenage years. Erikson (1968) describes adolescence as a time of searching for a sense of self and relationship to the world, developing a self-concept, and focusing on conscious thoughts versus earlier unconscious drives. Teens who have not experienced the trauma of sexual abuse wrestle with many decisions such as growing independence and separation from family, choice of peer group, values and beliefs, and career directions. Therefore, those who have been abused or traumatized face even a greater challenge in their identity.

The literature on the lasting effects of child abuse, (Ferguson & Mullen, 1999; Trolley, 1995) has noted that children who have been maltreated tend to have

some degree of impairment in the development of a cohesive, integrated sense of identity. Adolescent females who have been sexually abused are like a blender of emotions waiting for the next "button" to be pushed. Ferguson and Mullen (1999) pointed out that guilt, fear, anxiety, loneliness, and depression at times associated with suicidal behaviour have been found in children who have been sexually abused.

The impact of abuse on adolescent girls could contribute to sexual acting out, aggression, delinquent behaviour, abuse of alcohol and drugs, prostitution, and suicidal attempts (Kruczek & Vitanza, 1999). Trolley (1995) states that cognitively these girls are searching for answers to who they are, adult or child, what they believe in, what is right or wrong, and who is responsible for the abuse. They may inappropriately blame themselves or be blamed by others for the abuse; especially if they were prematurely physically developed or were negatively confronted about the way they dressed or acted.

Kruczek and Vitanza (1999) further point out that these young girls may have distorted body images, and may need to clarify issues of sex and sexuality, and associated normal development or changes. Feelings of being "damaged," "unattractive or "incomplete" are rampant. A typical concern which surfaces is whether or not physical intimacy in a healthy relationship may ever be achieved.

1.3 Erikson's theory on adolescence.

Erikson was the first to recognize identity as the major personality achievement of adolescence and as vital step toward becoming a productive, happy adult (Berk, 1998). The process of constructing an identity involves defining who you are what you value and the directions you choose to pursue in life. Erikson uses the term "ego identity" to denote certain comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his pre-adult experiences in order to be ready for the tasks of adulthood.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development describes crises at every developmental stage that arise primarily from social demands placed on the individual. Progress at each stage requires acquiring a competence or an attitude that resolves the conflict underlying the crisis.

Erikson believes that psychosocial development occurs across the entire lifespan. The individual has to move through and successfully resolve "eight crises" or "dilemmas" over his or her lifetime, in order to develop a complete and stable identity (Bee, 1996, p 53). The sequence of stages in Erikson's theory is based on the epigenetic principle, which means that each psychosocial strength has its own special time of ascendancy or period of particular importance. The eight stages represent the order of this ascendancy. Because the stages extend across the whole life span, it takes a lifetime to acquire all of the psychosocial strengths. Erikson realised that present and future behaviour must have its roots in the past, because later stages are built on the foundation laid in previous ones. These stages are depicted in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Bee, 1996, p.56)

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development		
Approximate age	Stage	Potential strength gained
0 -1 years	1. Basic trust versus mistrust	Hope
2 – 3 years	2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Will
4 - 5 years	3. Initiative versus guilt	Purpose
6- 12 years	4. Industry versus inferiority	Competence
13- 18 years	5. Identity versus role confusion	Fidelity
19- 25 years	6. Intimacy versus isolation	Love
25- 65 years	7. Generativity versus self-absorption and stagnation	Care
65+	8. Ego integrity versus despair	Wisdom

Erikson (1968) states that the fifth stage is the one that characterizes the period of adolescence. It is the stage of identity versus role confusion. The individual is faced with achieving a synthesis through transcending childhood identifications and undertaking expected social roles. In this period the adolescent is in a kind of moratorium between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is the period when individuals must form a personal identity and avoid role diffusion and identity confusion. The adolescent must address a number of identity questions: "Where do I originate from?" "Who am I?", and "What do I want to be?" The goal is to achieve an integrated synthesis of past, present and future which together contribute to an adolescent's identity (Bee, 1998, p. 303).

This identity development is also the product of reciprocal interaction between the individual and significant others, for example, the peer group and role models. The adolescent also needs to come to terms with physical changes and sexual desires. If the personal identity is poorly formed, the risk of delinquency and psychological problems can arise. "These problems can emerge due to past

difficulties with mistrust, shame, doubt, and feelings of inferiority" (Nicolson & Ayers, 2004, p 6).

The experiences of abuse can therefore have a negative impact on the positive resolution of the crisis of this developmental stage. Erikson (cited in Jillian & Carol, 1994) points out that the developmental needs of preadolescents and adolescents focus on individual competence, socialization, and identity. The age at which a child experiences abuse has developmental consequences affecting the child's ability to complete developmental milestones, for example, the forming of an identity during adolescence.

1.4 The shelter

This shelter is part of one of the initiatives by a ministry in a South African city ─ a faith based community organization working in the inner city. The shelter has been in operation since 1998 in response to the rising number of young girls in crisis, on the streets and in prostitution. Even though the shelter operates as a temporary shelter for girls in crisis, some of the girls have been staying there for more than two years. Presently the ministry has the following focus areas: the street outreach, the drop-in centre and the residential facility (the shelter where this study took place). The purpose of the street outreach is to build relationships of trust with young girls and women on the streets, in prostitution and in a prison. The drop-in centre facility offers social work intervention, distribution of condoms, counselling, advice, referrals, and hospitality to young women in crisis (The shelter's information brochure, 1998).

The shelter residential facility offers accommodation to 35 young girls between 11 and 18 years old who had left their families due to abusive experiences in their family or neighborhood and landed up on the streets. The shelter is also utilized by the Department of Social Services as a temporary shelter for girls who have been removed from their families especially those who had been sexually abused. It strives to build a community of love and care, where young girls are able to

rediscover childhood and learn responsibility, discipline, and values. They are stimulated through education, skills development programmes and a holistic family reintegration program. The following services are offered by volunteers to assist girls in the shelter: homework and study help, computer training, group activities such as arts and crafts, sports and fun, life and social skills, painting and gardening and shopping.

1.5 Statement of the problem

The problem statement of the study is: What methods and strategies can be employed to support abused adolescent girls staying in a shelter?

1.6 Background to the problem

The ten girls who participated in the study had been exposed to sexual, emotional and physical abuse. Some of the girls in the group were sexually abused by a family member with the result that the social worker removed them from the family and temporarily placed them at the shelter during the process of the trial. Some of them were deprived of food and shelter by their families. Most of these girls' parents are still alive or one parent is still alive. Their development has been affected by their traumatic experiences and deprivation of essential basic care that is necessary for normal, healthy optimal development.

1.7 Formulation of the problem

The shelter is a "multiple environment" because it comprises of many interacting systems which include the extended family, family of origin, the welfare system and sometimes the criminal justice system. It can be confusing for girls to belong to these different systems which function differently.

In a system such as this, the various members are often at odds with each other, for example the social workers and the house mother differing in opinion with

regard to how to punish girls who misbehave. Furthermore the girls themselves might have strained relationships among themselves or with staff. Thus, the problem is twofold: staying in a multiple environment, and also having strained relations with other members. They therefore experience difficulties with adjusting to the system and developing good relationships with other residents.

I decided to address these problems by doing group work with the girls at the shelter in order to strengthen their individual adaptive capacity and relationships with each other and the staff.

1.8 Aims

This study focuses on girls who are in a temporary shelter where they are waiting to be either reunited with their family of origin, or to be placed in alternative care. The study addresses the unique circumstances of these girls who, apart from the trauma of abuse, also face adjusting to the shelter and to the uncertainties of their future.

As a group therapist I aim to create a warm, empathetic, therapeutic context where each one of the girls will be able to have a voice about their individual experiences on how they had been navigating through troubled waters from their family of origin, and their present experiences at the shelter. I also aim to interface with the girls' reality in order to co-create a therapeutic context where new meanings can emerge. In addition, this study will also try to enable the girls to understand each other and also to use the group as a basis for support.

The overall aim is therefore to use group work to promote the girls' adjustment to the multiple complex environment of the shelter so that it may have a positive effect on their future development.

1.9 Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that the girls at the shelter are in a difficult position. They experienced abuse which led them to leave home and to stay in a shelter. Here they have to share their environment with strangers which contribute to their frustration. Furthermore, being in an ecology like the shelter, consisting of many interacting systems, could also be confusing, especially to adolescent girls who are in a developmentally difficult stage where they are searching for their own identity and striving towards autonomy. Some intervention is called for, and this research study aims to explore the effects of group work with these girls.

1.10 Presentation

The remaining chapters will deal with the following:

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical background
Chapter 3: Research method
Chapter 4: Group process
Chapter 5: Discussion
Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 2

Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will review some of the literature on group therapy. Lewin's field theory and the General Systems Theory will be discussed in detail. I will also give attention to the principles of communication and the major sources of influence on the group process.

2.2 Definition of a group and group therapy

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p. 27) explained "that people to whom the theory of group dynamics is important have done a great deal of work in an attempt to understand what group 'is' and to define it so that it can be observed, researched, written, and talked about". It is further mentioned that a major problem with this task is that when different people use the word 'group' there is no way to know if they are talking about the same thing. The reason being that one person's group is another person's "not group".

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p. 27) commented "that there have been many attempts to define group in such a way that observations of the group phenomenon can be generalized, but so far in the field of group dynamics there is no generally accepted definition of 'group' *per se*." Thus, people write about group dynamics, and do research, and describe group behavior, but it is not clear in all these literature how the concept of "group" is defined.

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were considered. Edelson (cited in Kaplan & Saddock, 1983, p.16) defines a group as follows: "A group

consists of a system of interaction, the parts of which are interdependent and acting to adapt to the realities of the immediate situation, to accomplish the group's goals, to keep the group intact, and to gratify individual members". In addition, Van Servellen (1984) mentioned that individuals become a group when they establish a specific pattern of information exchange and a set of goals. Commonly identified attributes of a small group include frequent interactions among members, identification as a group, shared norms, and goals, a pattern of interlocking roles and role relationships and activity that appears to have uniformity in terms of this goals and roles.

Groups can be structured in a variety of ways which can be either formal or informal to be able to address issues of interpersonal competence, peer relationships and social skills. They can also be modified to suit groups of children in various ages and can focus on behavioural, educational, social skills and psychodynamic issues. Furthermore, the mode in which the group functions depends on children's developmental levels, intelligence and problems to be addressed (Kaplan & Saddock, 2003). For example, in behaviourally oriented groups the group leader is a directive, active participant who facilitates prosocial interactions and desired behaviours.

Group psychotherapy is defined as "group processes occurring in formally organized, protected, and calculated to attain rapid ameliorations in personality and behaviour of individual members through specified and controlled group interactions" (Corsini, 1957, p.5).

This definition implies that group psychotherapy is a formal, not incidental process. It is not the result of other primary activities (e.g. to read, sing or draw). Psychotherapy is the primary activity. Although it may do one "good" to read, play or sing in the group, these activities are not examples of group therapy unless these processes are entered into the group activities with the explicit prior understanding that they are undertaken for the purpose of therapy (Corsini, 1957).

Corsini (1957) argues that in group psychotherapy there is always an understanding, whether implicit or explicit that the individual members are freed from some of the usual responsibilities of their behaviour. In a therapeutic situation group members can say and do things that people would not permit under other circumstances. The member of the therapeutic group understands that, as part of the process of exploration, members may safely operate in certain ways not generally accepted by society. They expect that their communication will be regarded as privileged and they also understand that they have to respect secrets of other members. For the purpose of the discussion that follows group psychotherapy and group work are used interchangeably.

2.3 Group therapy with abused adolescent girls

The assumption is made that children who have been subjected to sexual abuse have had potentially damaging experiences which warrant intervention (Doyle, 1997). There are only a few models of treatment described in the literature which address the development of functional behaviors with abuse survivors, particularly children and adolescents (Kruzeck & Vitanza, 1999).

Group work seems to be an effective intervention to use with abused children. Literature available (Hazzard & King, 1986) confirms that group therapy is appropriate with sexually abused children. Doyle (1997) argues that group work is a tried and tested method of enhancing people to function in a variety of settings. She further mentions that it has been used in recent years to help sexually abused children and those who witness domestic violence.

Group work can enable children to address feelings and issues which cannot be addressed in individual therapy. The various interactions in the group address perceptions, attitudes and behaviors that have proved to be pathological in members' day to day living. Such behaviours being enacted live in the group provides opportunities for feedback, experimentation with and practice of

alternative perspective and options. In a therapeutic group there are also frequent and various opportunities for peer reinforcement which are far more powerful than adult reinforcement, as group influences on behaviour can be much stronger than others (Dwivedi, 1993).

Authors such as Doyle (1997) believe that although group therapy is less readily used as a method of helping abused children unless they have displayed difficulties or behavioural signs of disturbance, it could however be considered for all forms of abuse, regardless of how far the children seem to have been harmed by their experiences. She emphasizes that this does not mean that children who have been subjected to different forms of abuse would benefit from being together in the same group. Members need to have enough in common to appreciate each other's experiences. Dwivedi (1993) concurs with Doyle by stating that effective group work can enhance social skills, self esteem and reality testing. It can also help children to learn delaying gratification, managing feelings, exploring abstractions and values, cultivating creativity and giving of one to others. It helps to overcome narcissism and improve the sense of interdependence as well as autonomy.

Ranchmen (cited in Dwivedi, 1993) emphasises the positive value of group affiliation and intimate emotional peer contact, where members perceive and support each other. He also sets out four therapeutic goals in group work with children and adolescents: to increase capacity to experience powerful affects (positive and negative, without acting them out), to increase capacity for empathy, to strengthen identification with the therapist and to encourage new behavioral patterns in helping the group resolve inter-group conflict through non-physical verbal means.

Furthermore, for most children and adolescents, the small group is a natural and highly attractive setting. Because of its resemblance and kinship with the natural peer group, therapeutic groups more closely simulate the real world for them. In

individual therapy settings the huge disparity between the status of the adult therapist and that of the child or adolescent becomes obvious. Group work can therefore be seen as less threatening and the participant numbers denote a greater degree of safety. It can also lessen transference between the therapist and client as transferences become diluted and distributed in a group setting (Doyle, 1997).

2.4 Group therapy models

There are several group psychotherapy models, for example psychoanalytic, Gestalt, rational emotive, Berne's transactional analysis, client-centered and behaviourist models. Lewin's field theory and General Systems Theory will be the main focus of the theoretical model of this study. In referring to the respective models, emphasis will be placed on the underlying rationale, conceptualizations of change and the therapeutic position of the group therapist.

2.4.1 Lewin's field theory

The background of Lewin's thinking came from Gestalt theory. Kurt Lewin changed the Gestalt definition of group from "a whole is more than the sum of its parts" to "a whole is different from the sum of its parts" (Agazarian & Peters, 1981, p.15).

2.4.1.1 Life space

Lewin's field theory postulates that an individual's behaviour can be predicted from knowledge of his life space. Lewin conceptualised life space as an egg spaced "map" that portrayed the individual in interaction with his perceived environment. To understand an individual's life space is to understand his goals, the tension system related to the goals, the barriers between him and his goals, and the probable next step that he will take along his path to achieving his goal (Agazarian & Peters, 1981). Lewin's theory is mainly concerned with behaviour, and how behaviour could explain the person's perception of the world.

Agazarian and Peters (1981) argued that a person's driving forces are the applications of energy moving the individual towards the goals, and restraining forces are those quantum's of energy that serve to restrain him from reaching his goal. Lewin stated that to draw an accurate picture of an individual's space was to be able to predict his next behaviour.

To summarise, Lewin postulated that the life space represented the person in interaction with his psychologically perceived environment. To know the life space is to be able to predict what the person will do next. In other words, behaviour is a function of the life space; therefore, behaviour is a function of the transaction between the person and his perceived environment. Lewin's life space is used in a group to represent both the individual and the group as a whole. The individual is a member and the environment is the group. In the group situation the interactions of the members create the environment within which they continue to interact. Lewin's statement that an individual's behaviour can be predicted from a map of the life space holds true for group behaviour. The map of the group life space will predict how the group will behave next. In other words the behaviour of the individuals in the group is influenced by the group dynamics of that particular group.

2.4.1.2 Group-as-a-whole

Lewin (cited in Agazarian & Peters, 1981) argued that the whole is not more than the sum of its parts, but it has different properties. He said that the statement should be: The whole is different from the sum of its parts. In other words there does not exist a superiority of value of the whole. Both whole and parts are equally real; the whole has definitive properties of its own. This definitional change from quantitative sum to qualitative difference provides a conceptual link to the principle of isomorphy which is central to general systems theory.

Lewin's idea is that the group can be thought of as having an environment, a goal, and driving forces relating to the goal. The concept of group life space permits a

therapist to think about a group as separate from the individuals who make up the group membership. In his application to the group, Lewin's argument rests on the notion that when groups develop out of a collection of individuals, it develops a recognisable and stable structure ─ the members are seen as parts of the group entity. As such, they behave as interdependent members of the group in group matters subject to psychological laws governing the expenditure of energies within the group and the group's aims and goals (Sewpershad, 2003).

Lewin (cited in Agazarian & Peters, 1981) concluded that the behaviour of individuals was seen to be heavily influenced by the effects of the group: the individuals were behaving as parts or components of the group, not simply as separate individuals. Thus the theory underlying group dynamics developed as a method and set of hypotheses about behaviour of individuals as members participating in specific groups.

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p.95) believe that "the therapist must be able to recognize the manifestation of group dynamics if he is to work with them." It is the recognition, diagnosis, and manipulation of these group dynamics in a deliberate manner that permits a group therapist to facilitate the development of the group into a tool of effective therapy. From this perspective of the group-as-a-whole, which is different from the sum of its parts, there are constructs of group dynamics such as therapeutic norms, goals, cohesiveness, structure and roles which are important and will be discussed in detail below.

2.4.1.3 Constructs in group dynamics

Every construct in group dynamics is interdependent with every other construct even though each construct is described independently. Five constructs have been chosen from group dynamics to define interaction in the group at both the conceptual and operational levels and will be discussed next. Four of these five constructs are the same as those that have been defined by Lewin and his students.

These are norms, goals, cohesiveness, and structure. Agazarian and Peters (1981) added roles as a special facet of group behaviour.

Norms

Norms and standards of the group members and leaders influence the content and process of the therapy group and its development (Donigian & Malnati, 1997). Norms are defined as the rules that govern behaviour in groups, while standards refer to the system of punishment and rewards for violating or cooperating with established or evolving rules of behavior. Norms and standards can be explicit and can be determined before the group begins (ground rules for the group and the therapist). Or they can be implicit – that is, evolve consciously or unconsciously during the group's development as a reflection of the individual's or the leader's view of what the norms and standards should be.

Every group evolves a set of unwritten rules or norms which determine the behavioural procedure of the group; the ideal therapy group has norms which allow maximum effectiveness; norms are shaped by both expectations of the group members and by the behavior of the therapist. The therapist is enormously influential in norm-setting; norms constructed early in the group have considerable perseverance. The therapist is, thus, well-advised to go about this important function in an informed, deliberate manner (Yalom, 1995).

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p. 98) concur by stating that "norms function as implicit modifiers or prescriptions for group behavior. An analysis of their relative flexibility and appropriateness to the group is an index of group maturity and effectiveness". Norms are so powerful that identifying them permits the group therapist to predict behaviours that will and will not occur in a group, and to decide which specific norms to activate when he or she wishes to modify the group. Sewpershad (2003, p.27) concludes that "one can deduce that norms can be therapeutic or anti-therapeutic".

Therapeutic norms

Yalom (1995) argues that the therapeutic group has norms which radically depart from the rules, or etiquette, of typical social intercourse – however these norms serve a therapeutic purpose. For example, unlike almost any other kind of group, the members must feel free to comment on the immediate feelings they experience toward the group, the other members, and the therapist. Honesty and spontaneity of expression is encouraged in the group. Yalom (1995) further comments that if the group is to develop into a true social microcosm, members must interact freely with one another.

Other desirable norms include high levels of involvement in the group, non-judgmental acceptance of others, high levels of self-disclosure, a desire for self-understanding, dissatisfaction with present modes of behaviour, and the eagerness for change.

Donigian and Malnati (cited in Sewpershad 2003, p.41) is of the opinion that, "A 'good therapy' is one that evidences, over time, a growing culture, with widening boundaries of acceptable behaviour. In other words, it shows greater acceptance of what can be talked about and how, and fosters a feeling of safety in members."

Anti-therapeutic norms.

Yalom (1995) explains that norms invariably evolve in every type of group − social, professional, and therapeutic. This does not automatically imply that all therapeutic groups will evolve norms which facilitate the therapeutic process.

Systemic observations of a number of therapeutic groups readily reveal that many are encumbered with crippling norms. A particular group may for example, value hostile catharsis so that positive sentiments are eschewed; the interaction may have a "take turns" format in which the members sequentially describe their problems to the group, and they may have norms which do not permit members to question or challenge the therapist.

It may frequently be the case that the group, during its development, may bypass certain important phases or never incorporate certain norms into its culture. For instance, a group may develop without ever going through the period of challenging the therapist. Alternatively, a group may develop without a whisper of inter-member dissension, without status bids, or struggles for control.

On the other hand, another group may meet for a year or more with no hint of real intimacy or closeness arising among the members. "Such avoidance is a collaborative result of the group members, both consciously and unconsciously, a constructing norms dictating this avoidance" (Yalom, 1995, p.12). It is further argued that a therapist who senses that the group is providing a one-sided or incomplete experience for the members can facilitate the progress of the group work by commenting on the missing parts.

Goals

Goal is a concept which provides a framework for talking about behaviour in terms of direction or velocity. The concept "goal" implies a location, or a preferred state, and this location provides an impetus to movement toward such a state or location. All behavior can be described as moving in relation to a goal, either away from it, or toward it.

According to Van Servellen (cited in Sewpershad, 2003) the most important aspect of establishing a group is the identification of the purpose and objectives of the group experience. It is the purpose and objectives of the group facilitator that determines all the initial decisions about membership.

The objectives of a group are influenced by the following:

- The theoretical background, philosophy, capabilities and interest of the facilitator
- The characteristics and needs of the group members
- The requirements and goals of the agency employing the group therapist

The objectives of a group reflect both the general and specific aims. They indicate the therapist's expectations of how the group will be of benefit to its members, and will in turn determine how members may be evaluated in terms of the behavioral progress.

Sewpershad (2003, p.30) describe the following general aims of any group experience:

- To enable members to gain greater knowledge of their behaviours and relationships with others through feedback from members and the facilitator in a group setting.
- To provide reassurance and support through interpersonal contact in a group setting
- To decrease the sense of loneliness and feelings of isolation in members regarding their specific problems and thereby modify their feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness
- To facilitate the opportunity for members to try out new, more effective communication with others
- To provide a safe environment where members can openly share their concerns and learn from the experiences of others in a group.

Sewpershad (2003, p.44) comments that, "although other several aims can be identified, these goals are basic to any group experience and affect the leader's determination of specific objectives for member participation." They also affect the nature of the therapist's leadership role and which interventions will be indicated. To operationalise each of these aims, the therapist must establish which group outcomes would provide certainty that the group is meeting its designed purposes.

When the goals of individuals are incongruent with the overall goals of the group, that is, they are not shared by all members, the group becomes dysfunctional. A group is further considered dysfunctional in one or more of the following cases:

when a group goal, once identified, is upheld rigidly and without consideration of other goals; change and growth are not tolerated; and the group does not recognize the individual's responsibility for change (Van Servellen, 1984).

Cohesiveness

Donigian and Malnati (1997) defined group cohesion as a sense of belonging or attraction to a group. Each element (i.e. a member, leader, and the group) influences the others toward or away from group cohesion.

Agazarian and Peters (1981) argue that from the perspective of the group as a whole, cohesion is the internal force that maintains the group as a system. It maintains the group system through phases of group development and defines the connectedness between the components of the group system and sub-system in terms of negative and positive bonding. Cohesiveness affects the available energy for bonding in reciprocal role-relationship; the energy available for the maintenance and modification for structure.

From the individual perspective, cohesiveness in the group appears to be related to members' expectations that the group will provide need satisfaction or fulfillment of individuals' goals (Agazarian & Peters, 1981). Furthermore, every member of a group gets something from a group and gives something in return. A measure of individual cohesiveness can thus be defined in terms of a satisfaction/cost ratio, that is, the ratio between the satisfaction that a member expects from membership in the group and the cost of belonging to the group.

Yalom (1995) believes that group cohesiveness is one of the more complex integral features of a successful psychotherapy group. The members of a cohesive group are accepting of one another, supportive, and inclined to form a meaningful relationship in the group. Highly cohesive groups are stable groups with better attendance, active member commitment and participation, and minimal membership turnover.

Donigian and Malnati (1997, p.44) concur by stating that, “the greater a member’s feelings of attraction to or belongingness to the group, the more likely that each member will be able to experience and acknowledge their presence in the group, and the more likely that each member will be to ‘risk’ participating in and contributing to the group”. They pointed out that for group cohesion to occur, member behaviour must be elicited, that is, members must actively participate in talking about their concerns. Therefore, leader behaviour requires interventions that stimulate members to talk. Group behaviour often influences the degree to which members will talk about their concerns. For instance, a therapeutic group can manifest group behaviour that is resistant to participating, that says: “We won’t talk”, or “we are reluctant to talk at this time.” Group behaviour, in this case, restricts the development of group cohesion.

To promote cohesion, a group leader must encourage interactions, by addressing the group behaviour instead of focusing on a member’s behaviour. For example, the therapist may reassure the group as a whole that reluctance to participate is not unusual in the beginning groups, or they may ask the group to examine its resistance to talking by saying, “What makes it difficult for any new group to get started?”

Sewpershad (2003) comments that not all groups are automatically cohesive. It is the group therapist’s task to actively ensure that the group moves toward cohesion. A group that has failed to become cohesive can be identified by the following characteristics:

- A feeling of group identity is not achieved
- Members do not personally identify with group outcomes
- The group atmosphere is either one of veiled hostility or polite friendliness
- Members do not know other members, nor do they look forward to seeing one another at subsequent sessions.

Groups that posses the above characteristics are usually considered dysfunctional.

To summarise, each element (i.e. member, leader, and the group) influences the others to move toward or away from cohesion. At different junctures in group therapy, one element usually exerts more influence than the other two. However, to further the process of cohesion, each element must be able to interact freely with the others.

Structure

Agazarian and Peters (1981) state that the word "structure" is frequently used in the literature of group dynamics. By and large, the phenomenon to which the word "structure" is applied appears to fall into three classes. The first class covers the broad usage, as when writers are referring to the "structure" of norms, roles or other group dynamics terms. For our purpose, we will not use "structure" in this general sense.

The second common usage for "structure" refers to the large class of analytical models which provide methods for collecting data and presenting them in a consistent and analyzable form. "Structure" in this sense is used to refer specifically to communication structures like interaction patterns, who-to-whom matrices, and socio-metric choices. This interpretation of structure will be discussed under "communication structure" below.

The third usage of the word "structure" is more literal, referring to how the group is made up in time and space as well as in its member's composition. The discussion of these demographic and temporal aspects of "structure" comes first, and then continues with structural models and communication.

The structural organization of the group

According to Agazarian and Peters (1981) the physical characteristics of a group define the way it exists in space. These may include, for example, the place where a group meets, the number of members, and the seating arrangements. The way a

group exists in time is defined by its temporal variables: when the group meets, for what length of time, how often and how regularly. The nature of the group is further defined by its type, for instance whether it is open-ended or closed, a short-term or long-term group; or whether its population is homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of age, sex, culture, occupation, socioeconomic position, diagnosis, etcetera. A group's location in space and time, and the nature of its make-up, will tend to be reflected in the kinds of communication structure that can emerge in the group. In turn, the kinds of communication structure will influence the norms and goals and roles that emerge.

Group structure and boundaries

Another important aspect of the group as it exists in time and space is the group environment. "This important aspect of group process (which involves the boundary of the group and the nature of the group's relationship with the environment) we think about in terms of systems analysis" (Agazarian & Peters, 1981, p.114). The group is a system which is a component of other systems, with inputs from and outputs to the other systems which affect the group. It is important for the therapist to be aware of the need to manage the relationship between the group and the larger system of which it is a part.

Agazarian and Peters (1981) give an example of the need for the management of the group as a sub-system − this is particularly important for the therapist who is working within a specific environment such as a given mental health system. If the group is part of an outpatient department, the therapist must be aware of the structure of the particular group, which is a component of the outpatient department, which in turn is a component of a company of health service.

It is very important for the group therapist to understand the function of group boundaries. Group boundaries mark the transition between life inside the group and life in the outside world. A group is an environment where therapeutic risks are taken, however painful these risks, even when they turn out badly, do not have

real consequences in the outside world. Group boundaries can therefore be seen as the border between the group norms that have been developed to facilitate experiential learning, and the outside social norms which have been developed to reinforce socially acceptable behaviour. Group boundaries are defined by such things as time, location, money, and role; each of which has both dynamic and reality meanings within the group, and has many reality meanings outside the group.

If the therapist is ambivalent about maintaining boundaries, she* is likely to condone the group's ever-present efforts to blur them. She may permit the group to run overtime, or to come late. She may avoid confronting the group with the cost to group work of socializing outside the group. She may make significant changes in group time or location to suit her own needs without involving the group. She may change fees without involving the group; she may confuse the role of therapist with that of saviour, friend, or teacher (Agazarian & Peters, 1981).

All these are common ways in which a therapist may wish to deny group boundaries. Time, location, money, and role are realities both in the group and in the outside world. They provide stimuli for analysis of, and insight into, developmental issues that may well be missed if the meaning of real boundaries is not explored. These realities also provide material for real decision-making, which have been found to be the single group activity that yields the most therapeutic results for the individuals involved in it.

*No gender preference is indicated. I used "she" to make my writing less cumbersome.

Most important of all, group boundaries define the possibility of group process and contribute to the controlled conditions within which member interactions can be therapeutic and group work can be conducted. In summary, structural elements provide the means to open and resolve boundary issues.

Communication structure

The group function is defined by its structure (Agazarian & Peters, 1981). Sometimes the structure modifies the function, and sometimes the function modifies the structure. The building of communication pathways between members, through which group energy can flow, is determined by which group members communicate with each other. A member with whom no one communicates may have an energy relationship in terms of cohesiveness, but does not yet have an energy relationship with individual members that can be described structurally. In other words, the communication network does not include a pathway for isolated members.

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p.119) commented that "it is important to distinguish between communication dynamics as they are manifested in communication networks". It is explained that the manifestation of the dynamics of communication can be charted in terms of a network. This network, however, can only be regarded as a map. It is not the thing in itself.

For this reason, when one talks about communication as a structural variable, one is talking about a communication network that has resulted from the way that people have been communicating. Communication is continuously defined as an independent variable which manifests itself in different ways in structure, norms, goals, and roles. One can therefore conclude that the nature of communication can change the structural map of who speaks to who, can change the nature of the sanctions and thus change the norms, can change the potential for information transfer and thus change the potential group goals, and can change the nature of behaviour and thus affect roles.

Roles

Agazarian and Peters (1981, p.104) explained that "from the perspective of the invisible group, a role is a set of interrelated functions that contribute to group movement". These functions however can be located at different levels that are from the individual level, the sub-group level or group level. It is further argued that a role has flexibility of locus, meaning that different members or combinations of members can perform it. This quality makes it easy to understand a role as a function of the group rather than as idiosyncratic to an individual.

Furthermore, this implies that a role cannot exist in the group as a function of the individual alone. Every role in a group is not just a reciprocal relationship between two or more people, but it is also a manifestation of the group dynamics. "It is for this reason that we interpret 'roles' in terms of the 'voice' of the group when we are deliberately influencing group dynamics, and we interpret them in terms of 'self-fulfilling prophecies', 'individual repetitive role relationships', or 'personality styles'" (Agazarian & Peters, 1981, p.105).

Leader: role or label?

The construct of the "roles" has been so far deliberately discussed without discussing the role of the "leader". Agazarian and Peters (1981) give us a definition of the role which is dependent upon behaviour and not upon people. It is however pointed out that the title "leader" is a significant one in our culture, and is important to group therapists who are typically referred to as the leaders of the psychotherapy groups.

The word "leader" is "a title publicly designated within a system such as a group, carrying with it the potential for power, authority, responsibility and accountability" (Agazarian & Peters, 1981, p.109). In any system the person, who fills the formally designated role called "leader" can be observed in terms of the degree to which he actualises power, influence, and accountability. Van Servellen (1984) believes that leadership is basic to effective group experience. It

contributes to the attainment of group goals, the viability of the group for members, and effective interaction − in short to group performance.

There are four basic leadership functions appropriate for the group leader in executing supportive and change-agent responsibilities. These functions pertain to the group facilitator's role, regardless of which type of group she may lead and regardless of the client composition.

Basic functions of the leader

The following are four basic functions of the leader as described by Van Servellen (1984, p.133):

(i) Facilitates benefits of group membership

Van Servellen (1984) explained that certain natural benefits have been ascribed to all groups. Groups are believed to meet people's needs for security, belonging and companionship. They are thought to provide members an opportunity for realization of individual capacities as well as opportunities to develop a type of community consciousness. The group leader, by establishing a group, starts a process by which members can meet their needs for security, belonging, and companionship.

(ii) The group leader maintains a viable group atmosphere

The group leader is in a position to safeguard and enhance the natural benefits of group membership. Closely related to this function is the ability to maintain a viable group atmosphere in which persons are free to be present, free to talk about what concerns them, and free to experiment with new behaviours without severe threat. Van Servellen (1984, p.133) commented that in "some ways the function of maintaining a viable group atmosphere parallels what Cartwright and Zander describe as 'group maintenance' functions: to keep interpersonal relations pleasant or, if not pleasant, relatively safe". The group leader does not attempt to ensure a viable atmosphere without undue stress and anxiety − there is always the

possibility that the group will not learn from one another and will not be able to remain intact.

(iii) Oversee group growth

Cartwright and Zander (cited in Van Servellen, 1984, p.134) believe that most groups have goals. In less formalized groups these goals might not be explicit; but still there would be some defined reason that keeps members together and guides the growth of the group. They further point out that, on the other hand, in groups such as therapeutic and self-growth groups, the goals may be specified and explicit. They argue that whatever the goal of the group, the group leader has a direct responsibility to the achievement of this goal and to the group's progress in meeting it. In the process of accomplishing her role as observer of group growth, the leader may keep the attention of the members on the goals, clarify issues in terms of how they relate to the goals, and evaluate with the assistance of members the group's progress toward meeting the goals.

(iv) Regulates individual members' growth within the group setting.

Individual members frequently proceed toward meeting group objectives at different rates; in addition, the leader may formulate specific and more particularized objectives for some members' experiences in the group. For these reasons, the leader is concerned with regulating individual members' growth in the group as well as with enhancing total group movement toward group goals. Van Servellen (1984, p.135) believes that "when the leader intervenes with respect to one member, she is concerned not only with the progress of the total group but also with the individual's growth within the group".

2.4.1.4 Summary

The background of Lewin's thinking came from Gestalt theory. Kurt Lewin changed the Gestalt definition of group from "a group is more than the sum of its parts" to "a whole is different from the sum of its parts".

Lewin's idea is that the group can be thought of as having an environment, a goal and driving forces relating to the goal. The concept of group life space permits a therapist to think about a group as separate from individuals who make up the group membership.

From Lewin's perspective of the group that it is different from the sum of its parts, there are constructs of group dynamics such as therapeutic norms, goals, cohesiveness, structure and roles which define interaction in the group at both conceptual and operational levels.

2.4.2 General Systems Theory

The perception of group therapy as a social system has its roots in General Systems Theory (GST), which was developed by the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He believes that scientific thinking has become reductionist in attempting to explain phenomena. Von Bertalanffy then decided to set out to challenge the micro approach to scientific inquiry − he took the position that in order to understand phenomena, one should place them in a context where they could be viewed as parts of larger systems. He therefore challenged the view that it was best to reduce phenomena to their smallest parts and study those parts in isolation. Thus he introduced General Systems Theory (GST) (Donigian and Malnati, 1997).

Nichols and Swarts (cited in Donigian and Malnati, 1997, p.2) mentioned that to Von Bertalanffy, a living system was one whose parts were in dynamic interaction. He holds the opinion that the way to grasp how a system works is to observe the interactive processes taking place among the elements that compose it. Those who subscribe to GST thinking, then, consider how systems are organized and how their parts are interdependently related. This was different from the traditional scientific inquiry which had a tendency to seek out basic cause-and-effect-explanations for phenomena. In contrast, adherents of GST are more concerned with the interactive pattern formed by the relationship of the parts within the system or among systems than with the parts themselves. "Thus the process of the interactive patterns becomes the focus of study" (Donigian and Malnati, 1997, p.2).

2.4.2.1 The need for change: A Shift to GST

According to Durkin (1981, p.7) during the "forties and fifties, while group therapy was struggling with change and dissension, systems theory had become more prominent in scientific circles". Since then, the quantum mechanics and relativity theory from many countries and a variety of disciplines had begun to classify the complex organised phenomena of existence in terms of their organisation rather than their subject matter. The body of knowledge it produced came to be known as systems science. This structural approach served to bridge the gap between the physical and natural sciences. It seemed plausible that it could do the same for the behavioural and social sciences, as well as for the "group therapies."

The complex organised phenomena of existence were called "systems". The several original definitions of "a system" did not vary greatly from that of Von Bertalanffy (cited in Durkin, 1981, p.8): "a system is an order of parts and process standing in dynamic interaction". As the theory developed, the definitions became more modernised. Each system is composed of parts called subsystems, and itself

becomes a part of a larger suprasystem with characteristics of its own called "emergents". Each category of such interacting wholes forms a hierarchy. For instance, living systems, from the cell to society, form a continuum. Thus, system thinking is a holistic, synergistic point of view. In other words, systems are the product of the interaction of their parts.

System thinking gradually filtered into the literature of group therapy, as it did into other fields. But the terms, such as interface, input, feedback, and the like, were used in a vague and loose manner. However, two particular branches of systems thinking − cybernetics and general system theory − have made a more organised influence on group therapy (Durkin, 1981).

2.4.2.2 Why GST?

General Systems Theory seems to be particularly relevant to group psychotherapy. Durkin (1981) argued that whereas psychoanalytic and other group theories rely solely on the structure and content of personality systems, GST is based on a comparative study of the whole range of system levels from cell to society, regardless of the subject matter. For this reason GST was seen as able to generate a considerable amount of fresh information about the common features of systems, which has been touched on but never formally elaborated by group therapy. GST thinking and the more traditional group psychotherapy thinking complement each other and provide a more complete account of the clinical events.

2.4.2.3 General Systems Theory and group psychotherapy

Donigian and Malnati (1997) commented that historically, most group therapy models developed out of individual psychotherapy. This means that, essentially, therapists conducted individual therapy within a group setting. Hence the crucial elements for change were limited to the dynamics of the interaction between

therapist and client. It was their belief that if group therapy is to be an effective system for change, it is necessary to escape from these beginnings and to think of it as a social system. What distinguished systemic interactive group therapy from individual therapy is the presence of group processes, along with an understanding of how they are generated and how they influence group development.

The following discussions will focus on General Systems Theory concepts as they pertain to group therapy

The group as a system

Group therapists who think systemically realise that it is the group as a whole that needs to be addressed. They perceive the group as being more than a gathering of eight or nine individuals. They focus on the interactive patterns of the subsystems that make up the group; on how each of the subsystems interacts with the group as a whole, and on how the group as a whole interacts with each of the subsystems (Donigian & Malnati, 1997).

In other words, the group therapists who think systemically are conscious of "circular causality." For example, when they intervene with one member, they are aware that they need to consider the effect of that intervention on every other member of the group, on the group as a whole, and ultimately on themselves as group leaders. Group therapists who think systemically believe that it is shortsighted to perceive member A's issue in isolation of other members' issues, the leader, and the whole group.

To sum up, systemically thinking leaders do not observe events that occur within the group in isolation, but rather in terms of their interdependence and the subsequent patterned responses these events evoke in each of the subsystems over time.

Van Servellen (cited in Sewpershad, 2003) points out that while it is acknowledged that systems are interdependent, thus allowing one to view the group as part of a larger whole, the value of hierarchical approach in general systems theory, is the ability to isolate one sub-system for analysis. Hence, the therapist can concentrate on understanding one system at a time without becoming immobilised by the complexity of the total universe.

System level and isomorphy

The first result of the GST comparative study of systems according to Durkin (1981) yielded the revolutionary discovery that systems of all categories, across the board share certain basic structural features called isomorphies and also share common structural laws of operation. The systems approach to groups has important consequences for the group therapist: just as an isomorphy between the inner world of the therapist's experience and the events in the group, there is an isomorphy which has practical consequences for the therapist. The therapist is viewed as much more inside the group and a part of the group system than regarded previously by other approaches (Durkin, 1981).

Durkin (1981) explained that this change of perspective has many roots. He said the society has witnessed a rebellion against impersonal technical knowledge. In contrast to the emphasis on objectivity in the past, which increased the distance between the knower and the known and required the knower remain anonymous, we now demand that all knowledge be accompanied by a personal signature. The observer is not seen as distinct from what is observed. In addition there is now the understanding that objectivity has often involved excluding parts of the observer that were essential to the process of knowing.

The basic shift in the paradigm of the therapist's relationship to individual patients, or to group, is from linear concept − A causes B which causes C, with

the therapist unilaterally acting on the group − to a systems concept which sees A, B, and C as mutually influencing each other. This involves paying some attention to the influence of the group and its members on the therapist.

Durkin (1981) concludes by commenting that, in spite of this welcome unifying tendency and the new information, we must not forget that GST, taken by itself, is insufficient to account for the special characteristics of human and social interaction. Both Ludwig von Bertalanffy and Miller (cited in Durkin,1981, p.12) "have pointed out that anyone who deals with a given system will fail to give an adequate account of it unless he also takes into consideration the 'emergents' or unique characteristics which came into being at its particular level of complexity". Fortunately, psychoanalysis and other current group theories have already provided a good deal of this special information. Using the two complementary characteristics increases clinical effectiveness.

Autonomy and the process of boundarying

Von Bertalanffy (cited in Venter, 1992, p.24) argued that given the autonomous nature of living systems and the inherent capacity to control boundary permeability, therapeutic intervention is aimed at the facilitation of the boundary process of the respective levels of systems in the group therapeutic context.

The therapist assumes the role of the organizing sub-system and temporarily takes responsibility for carrying out the boundarying function for all three interacting systems that is the group, the members, and the internal personality structures. Stated simply, the therapist facilitates the opening of boundaries, which restricts the potential for growth, and the closing of boundaries when stability is endangered, thereby regulating energy/information flow. Boundary opening is facilitated by means of emotional input from the therapist, whereas closing is facilitated by means of cognitive input.

Durkin (1981, p.54) states that one "cannot say what causes opening / closing because it causes itself, even though some external event may well be the occasion for it to do so, or some internal process might be recruited as an instrument for carrying out such boundary event". Irrespective of the level at which the intervention is delivered, the transformation will be circular and will affect all the respective systems.

Flux equilibrium

Durkin (1981, p.12) pointed out that "of even greater consequence for group therapy, is the new paradigm of living structure developed by Von Bertalanffy". He is of the opinion that it provides new information about special characteristics which distinguish living systems. Up to that time all structure has been regarded as static, but Ludwig von Bertalanffy, in his search for a unified theory of biology, discovered that a living structure is not inactive and static, but active and dynamic. He found that over time living systems develop a hitherto unrecognized phenomenon which he called *"Fliessgleichgewitch"* or flux equilibrium.

He then delineated the structural features which account for this unique phenomenon. Living systems, or as they were often called "open systems" have permeable boundaries which the system is inherently capable of opening or closing. Consequently, each system is able to exchange energy and information with other systems and with the environment. It can close its boundaries to shut out input which is in excess of or inharmonious with its inner state in order to maintain its stability or even its identity. It can also open its boundaries to import energy and information, and process it for the purpose of change and growth by restructuring itself (Durkin, 1981).

Von Bertalanffy (cited in Venter, 1992) believes that the group therapist takes his cue from the way normal living systems stabilise or transform themselves by monitoring the permeability of their boundaries and over time develop their own

flux equilibrium or steady state. The therapist's primary focus is to facilitate change in the member systems because it is they who have come for help. He may choose to catalyse members' capacity to move towards flux equilibrium by bringing about change in their personality subsystems, or he may achieve a similar effect by dealing with boundaries in the group suprasystem. Whatever the level at which he intervenes, the therapist continuously observes the group system as a whole since it is a powerful force field whose continuing influence on its members he wants to maximize. The power of the group suprasystem as a whole depends on the steadiness of the flow of energy/information (Venter, 1992).

2.4.2.4 Summary

General Systems Theory, a theory about living structure, provides a paradigm applicable to the therapeutic group, itself a living structure, with organising properties. The most notable influence of this paradigm on group therapy is to be found in the conceptualization of the isomorphic qualities of systems at different hierarchical levels, allowing a transcendence of the artificial delineation between group member and group process (as often done in the traditional models). This indicates a conceptual leap towards emphasising the self-referential nature of systems at all levels.

2.5 Group process

Yalom (1995) refers to group process as interactions, verbal and non-verbal, which take place during a group therapy session and are related to change. In order to get a clear understanding of the term process, it would be useful to contrast process with content. The content of a discussion consists of the explicit words spoken, the substatiative issues, and the arguments advanced. Process on the other hand refers to the "how" and "why" of that communication, especially insofar as the how and the why illuminate aspects of the patient's relationship to other people. The therapist considers the metacommunication aspect of the

message, “why”, from the relationship aspect, looking at the fact that the patient makes a statement at a particular time, to a specific person and in a certain manner.

Yalom (1995) mentioned that in the group therapy setting, the understanding of process becomes more complex ─ we search not only for the process behind a simple statement but for the process behind a sequence of statements made by a patient or by a number of patients.

Group process within a systemic framework

Based on the previous discussion on General Systems Theory it is clear that authors such as Durkin (1981), Donigian and Malnati, (1997), and Agazarian and Peters, (1981) all have the same view that group therapy occurs because of the interactive process between the leader, the individual members, and the group as a whole. This makes it essential that all three of these elements are considered in relation to one another and to realise that their interdependent nature means that a change in one element will affect a change in the other two. In fact, what distinguishes interactive group therapy from individual therapy is the very presence of these group processes. In order to recognise and manage these processes the group therapist must understand how they originate and how they influence group development.

2.5.1 The Principles of communication

According to Van Servellen (1984) an understanding of the group process comes from an analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication. An analysis of communication allows one to assess the quality of relationships in the here-and-now context of the group process. “Here and now” means the immediate interaction (verbal and non-verbal) that the therapist can observe first hand.

Another important process of group communication is that "In groups needs are met through negotiation. Negotiation, for the most part, is carried out verbally. Verbal communication identifies which needs are being expressed and how they are being negotiated" (Van Servellen, 1984, p.36).

Van Servellen (1984) believes that a discussion of basic communication principles will assist in the application of communication theory to the practice of group therapy. He states that the basic premises of communication theories were developed by the basic premises of communication theories developed by Ruesch, Bateson, Jackson, Watzlawick, and Satir and further says that these theories have obvious and direct application to the study of human interaction in groups.

Van Servellen (1984) pointed out the following principles:

2.5.1.1 Individuals have a basic need to communicate

Inherent to individuals is the capacity to seek gratification of needs through communication, a process learned early in life and continued throughout the lifespan. The individual's need to communicate is in itself basic to sustenance. Blocks in communication are felt as threats to security and result in anxiety reactions of varying proportions. The inherent need to communicate leads to another extremely important premise of communication theory.

2.5.1.2 One cannot not communicate

Individuals communicate verbally and nonverbally. In essence all behaviour is a form of communication. Van Servellen (1984) mentioned that a great deal of an individual's communication is non-verbal, such as that expressed in facial movements, gestures, postures, and movement toward and away from objects and other persons. Silence is also a form of communication. Although persons have the power to decide which modes of communication they will use or rely on, they cannot not communicate.

Remembering the concept that it is impossible not to communicate, the group therapist may view group members with greater awareness. Posture, seating arrangements, gestures, and facial expressions within group therapy are forms of communication. Members are often surprised and unaware of the fact that they have sent, and others have received, messages about their moods, thoughts and feelings. This is because they assume they have revealed nothing unless they have spoken. It is the responsibility of the group therapist to make known to the group members that they have communicated and to help them decipher what they are communicating to one another (Van Servellen, 1984).

2.5.1.3 Communication is a multilevel phenomenon

Watzalwick, Bateson, Jackson and Satir (cited in Van Servellen, 1984) stress the proposition that communication is a multilevel phenomenon. All messages have two parts: the communication aspect or content of the message and the metacommunication aspect dealing with the message about the message. In other words, messages can be dissected in terms of the informational or content value of a message as well as what the message is about and how the sender conceives of his relationship with the receiver.

Van Servellen (1984) pointes out that one must be concerned not only with the stated message but the implied message, the non-verbal aspects (e.g. the tone of voice, posture, and gestures) and deal with the meta-communicational aspects of the statements. One must therefore be concerned not only with the stated message but the implied communication about how the sender sees his relationship with those persons with whom he is communicating. Confusion and upsets result when members are unaware of the implied aspects of the messages they receive and give, for example the command or request aspect.

2.5.1.4 Messages connote and denote

The fact that messages, words as well as nonverbal expressions, have connotations as well as denotations makes communication highly complex. The result that arises, as explained by Watzlawick (in Van Servellen, 1984), is that the message sent is not necessarily the message received.

Essentially what the sender intends to denote by his message does not necessarily have the same connotation for others. Because messages can denote and connote different things, they can easily be misunderstood. If no one bothers to evaluate what the sender actually meant to denote, the sender will most likely continue to be misunderstood.

This principle applies to group therapy − Van Servellen (1984) explains that when members are sending and receiving messages, it is possible that they will be misunderstood or will misunderstand others because their messages may be interpreted in several ways. It is important for group members to be made aware of the fact that the messages they send might not be the messages received by others in the group. By asking for different interpretations on an unclear message, members learn the complexities of their communication from the incongruency of others' perceptions. This message will point out that messages connote different things to different persons. As a result, members are more likely to clarify their statements and check out how they have been received.

2.5.1.5 Messages have both manifest and latent elements

Closely related to the proposition that communication is a multilevel phenomenon is the premise that all communication has manifest and latent elements. Manifest messages are overt messages, which may be feelings, thoughts, or opinions that the sender is aware of and is purposely revealed in his communication. Latent elements, on the other hand, are hidden or covert aspects of communication that

the sender is not aware of and has little control over when communicating with others.

Van Servellen (1984) argued that usually latent communication is the meta-communication of a message, since how one conceives of his relationship with another or what the covert message is about is rarely communicated explicitly. These latent aspects may be feelings or thoughts that the sender is not aware of but which he gives clues about during interaction with others. Thoughts or feelings may be communicated through his tone of voice, choice of words, facial expression or the timing of his silence.

In group therapy sessions there are several opportunities to examine both latent and manifest elements of members' communications. The group therapist can direct members in this process as well as determine the extent to which members deal with latent aspects of their messages. Pointing out the possibility of double or multiple messages at different levels is one approach of teaching members about this aspect of human discourse (Van Servellen, 1984).

2.5.1.6 Communication is accepting responsibility for one's interaction with others

Van Servellen (1984) explains that the most important premise of communication stressed by Satir and others is that when one communicates, he/she accepts responsibility for the interaction. Satir suggests that when individuals cannot assume responsibility for interaction that ensues, their communication becomes dysfunctional. For example, the communicator may deliver conflicting messages, act on assumptions, leave out whole connections, or act as if he communicated clearly when in fact he did not. Dysfunctional communication is a result of failure in learning to communicate properly, as well as the inability of the communicator to accept the responsibility of communicating with others.

The group therapist should be aware that dysfunctional communication serves a purpose. When pointing out dysfunctional patterns, the group therapist may force members to become more responsible for their interactions, and this may be quite threatening. Members will need support and a sense of security if they are to look at and change their dysfunctional patterns. The group therapist treatment of the communicator, timing, and the participation of other members are terribly important if the therapist is to move the members towards effective communication. Direct confrontation is not always helpful. Satir recommends that a good portion of the therapist's role should involve acting as model communicator, that is, the group therapist should communicate clearly and directly (Van Servellen, 1984).

Furthermore, by pointing out discrepancies, spelling out non-verbal communication, and identifying double messages, a leader can help others learn to communicate clearly and directly. However, this should be done in an environment free of threat. Van Servellen (1984, p.42) commented that "in essence the group therapist acts as a model communicator and builds up members' self-esteem as she helps them establish more effective modes of communication".

2.5.2 Major sources of influence on group process

Beck (in Durkin, 1981) gave the following brief descriptions of the six major sources of influence on a group's process.

2.5.2.1 The environment or context within which the group and its members exist

The entire system (group) is immersed in an environment which impinges on the group process in two primary ways: The physical-interpersonal setting in which it meets, defines certain limitations, codes of behaviour or criteria for participation. In addition, the entire complex of factors of each member's life outside the group

determines his state upon entering and re-entering the group and may influence the group in a variety of ways, but primarily through the perceptual sieve of the member himself/herself.

2.5.2.2 The purpose for which the group comes together, elaborated into a system of goals over the lifetime of the group

This includes the intents, images, and motivations of each member regarding the group, prior to its formation; the interaction of these intents, images and motivations as the members assess each other and the potential for meeting their own personal goals given the composition of the group; and, finally, the process of stating, restating and integrating the individual goals into a set of group goals that all can accept. These goals are evolved and are articulated further as the group progress through each phase of development.

2.5.2.3 The specific work to be done or the content aspect of the group's task

It is assumed here that subject matter has its own organizational component and, therefore, influence on the group process. Included in this dimension would also be the knowledge that the members possess regarding the task of the group, the resources required to accomplish the task, and their availability, as well as the degree to which the group as a whole plus its resources can adequately provide all the necessary components required to complete the task.

2.5.2.4 The personalities and skills of the members

The personality, for the purpose of group behaviour, would include the developmental stage of the individual and therefore the salient issues for him or her at the particular time for his participation, the competence and sophistication of each person with respect to the goals and activities of the group (particularly as these are perceived by other participants), and the "readiness" or "neediness" of the individual to use the group to achieve or facilitate his/her own personal growth and goals.

2.5.2.5 The qualitative aspects of the group life and the methods for facilitating or hindering them in the developmental context

Included here are style of leadership, style of members in group participation, accuracy and inclusiveness of communication, the way members feel about each other, the amount and quality of conflict generated in the differentiation of roles, the way in which work is done (in a therapeutic group, for example, the depth of emotional issues that are dealt with, and the adequacy of the resolution that is achieved), the comfort and meaningfulness of the group's norms for its members, the skill or ease with which the group progresses through its formative stages. Qualitative issues determine how one feels about the group and how one's experience takes place.

2.5.2.6 The living structure of the group and the development sequence through which it evolves

Structure can be observed in the emergence, reification, and final distribution of group leadership roles; in the group level issues that the members address in each phase; in the creation of group norms that guide behaviour and in the group level identity which is formed and which gives a characteristic coherence to the group's process. The term structure is used here in the same sense in which it has been used in social psychological studies of small groups. The structure is akin to the skeleton, whereas, the qualitative dimension is akin to the outward appearance of the body, the texture of the flesh, the colour, the tone of voice, the "feel."

2.5.2.7 Summary

In summary, the qualitative dimension has a reciprocal relationship with developing group structure, both causing it and being caused by it, and both are strongly influenced by it, and both are strongly influenced by the group goals, members' personalities, the context in which the group operates, and of course the content of their task together. Each of the six sources of influence is seen as being in process and interaction with each other.

Beck (in Durkin, 1981) mentioned that the output of any group in terms of productivity and effectiveness and the outcome of group experience for any member are determined by the interaction of all the sources of input.

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore some of the principles of group therapy. The discussion focused on two theoretical views which were utilized to understand group therapy. The major concepts that contributed to the understanding of groups were derived from Lewin's field theory and the General Systems Theory. These theoretical perspectives were viewed as being complementary, since each represented a way of approaching the group rather than presenting the therapist with a hard and fast set of constructs.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe the research methodology used in the present study. The qualitative research paradigm which I utilized as well as the essential characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research will be presented as a background. In this respect I will describe the presentation of the research procedures implemented, the sample, data collection and data analysis used in my research.

3.2 Qualitative research

"Paradigm" refers to a guideline in research where one takes three dimensions into account, namely ontology, epistemology and methodology, which together assist the researcher in practice and thinking for the purpose of the definition and enquiry of the research. "**Ontology** specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it. **Epistemology** specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known. **Methodology** specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known" (Terre Blanche & Durheim, 1999, p.6). Similarly, Guba (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.19) defines paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action."

Quantitative and qualitative research paradigms are examples of two different sets of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality, which result in different research objectives. A qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study because the characteristics of qualitative research would serve the aims of this study. The characteristics of qualitative research (as opposed to those of quantitative) are the following:

Qualitative research is described as more "constructive", "generative", "inductive", and "subjective", than quantitative research which Goetz and Le Compte depict as more "enumerative", "verificative", "deductive", and "objective" (cited in Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990, p.358).

Therefore, qualitative researchers focus on qualities, processes and meanings rather than on quantitative concerns such as measurement (quantity, amount, intensity, frequency) and causal relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. Qualitative investigators argue that quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects' perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials.

Qualitative researchers believe that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable, whereas quantitative researchers, with their etic, nomothetic commitments are less concerned with such detail. "Quantitative researchers are deliberately unconcerned with rich descriptions because such detail interrupts the process of developing generalizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.10)." Therefore, qualitative as opposed to quantitative research provides a rich source of information.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) define qualitative research as: "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world … qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3).

According to Moon et al. (1990, p.358) qualitative research reflects a phenomological perspective and researchers attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions and interactions in context, from the point of view of the participant involved. They go on further to add that "these researchers look for universal principles by examining a small number of cases intensively". They also try and understand phenomena in a holistic way.

In summary, qualitative research (used for this study) is conducted in a natural setting, where in-depth, detailed information is gathered from the participant's direct experience through various methods in order to build a complex and holistic picture of the topic under investigation.

3.2.1 The appropriateness of a qualitative research paradigm

The rationale for utilizing a qualitative approach in this study is derived from the following premises (Moon et al., 1990):

3.2.1.1 Qualitative methods are compatible with the assumptions underlying systems theory

Qualitative methods are in line with this investigation, because qualitative methods may be more effective than quantitative ones in grappling with the full complexity of systems theory. Like systems theory, qualitative research emphasizes social context, multiple perspectives, complexity, individual differences, circular causality, recursion, and holism. Qualitative methods will provide an ideal avenue for examining the experience of girls in a shelter from the perspective of the client rather than from the more typical research perspectives of the therapist and/or researcher, (Steier, cited in Moon et al., 1990).

Todd and Stanton, (cited in Moon et al., 1990) argue that life and research are inevitably "messy". The use of a qualitative research design could thus provide a

systemic, scientific, and holistic way of looking at the experiences of adolescent girls staying in a shelter with all its "messiness" intact.

3.2.1.2 Similarity to process-oriented research

Qualitative research has much in common with process research, which emphasizes the study of change, and "smaller is better" philosophy (cited in Moon et al., 1990). The principles of process research as enumerated by Rice and Greenberg, (cited in Moon et al.,1990) include criterion based and theoretical sampling, pattern exploration, detailed descriptions, and observations, process in context, a discovery-orientation, and clinical relevance which can also be applied in qualitative research.

Qualitative research may help to answer the process researcher's call for context – a specific micro theory of change because qualitative research is generative, inductive, and constructive. A qualitative research design therefore provides one way of studying a rare and complex event such as the experiences of girls staying in a shelter in context across time.

3.2.1.3 Qualitative methods bridge the gap between research, theory and practice

Moon et al. (1990) explain that a perplexing problem of therapy during the past two decades has been the lack of integration between research, theory, and practice. Although certain basic similarities exist between the methods of discovery in clinical work and research, Green (cited in Moon et al., 1990) argues that clinicians and researchers have tended to divide into two isolated camps, separated by a communication gap.

Moon et al. (1990, p.367) concur with the above argument by stating that "Qualitative research could help reunite clinicians and researchers because qualitative methods are close to the world of the clinician. Qualitative researchers

tend to ask the kinds of questions that clinicians are asking and to explore these questions in ways that are clinically meaningful."

3.3 Narrative approach

A narrative approach is used in this study as it allows the girls in the shelter to tell their own narratives of their experiences staying in the shelter.

According to Cobb (1993, p. 250), narratives are material in the sense that they blur traditional distinctions between discourse and action − to tell a story is to act upon the world. That is why participation in narrative processes is so important − the shape and composition of the social/material world is at stake.

Dean (1998), Rappaport (1993) and Sarbin (1986) typify the narrative approach as the threading together of a set of events or experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense of them. In most narratives there is a set of characters or a protagonist and a plot of line that carries the reader or listener along. The story or narrative may be told to make a point, teach a lesson, or provide a moral example. Sometimes the telling is for the sole purpose of imparting meaning. Often, in the process of telling stories to other people we create meaning for ourselves. And it would seem to impact on the meaning-making of others (Dean, 1998).

Sarbin (1986, p.3) states that "a story is a symbolised account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has a beginning, middle, and an ending." It is "held together by recognizable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure is human predicaments and attempted resolutions". From these definitions it is apparent that narratives have certain structural features and they serve various functions. Structural features "include event sequences arranged in context over time" (Rappaport, 1993, p.249).

The stories people live as well as their stories about those stories, is all that a therapist or a qualitative researcher has to work with. "In this sense, therapy

(research) is a conversation, an exchange of stories…" (Keeney, 1983, p. 195). Bateson (1972) theorized that it is the perception of difference that triggers all new responses in systems. He also showed how the mapping of events through time is essential for the perception of this difference, for the detection of change. Freedman and Combs (1996) describe how the narrative metaphor of Michael White combines Bateson's concepts, in that a story is a map that extends through time. White (1995) emphasizes that he is not speaking in representational terms, as if he is proposing that a story is a map of the territory of one's life. He says that he is not talking about stories as if they are descriptions of one's life, but the structure of life itself.

White (1995) points out that in telling stories, and in the process of interpretation, we derive meanings that have real effects on our behaviours and the decisions we make in our lives. White (1995, p.13) further mentions that "it is the story or self-narrative that determines the shape of the expression of our lived experience. It is to propose that we live by the stories that we have about our lives, that these stories actually shape our lives, constitute our lives, and that they 'embrace' our lives".

White's (1995) particular emphasis is not on trying to solve problems, but rather on working with people in such a way as to share in their stories and to render "thicker" or more lucid descriptions of their stories. Stories facilitate the understanding of human experience from the point of view of a person in a social context (Rappaport, 1993). They function "to order experience, give coherence, and meaning to events and provide a sense of history and of the future" (Rappaport, 1993, p.240). They explain people to themselves and to others. In addition, they also create identities and influence how people manage their lives. The sharing of stories seems particularly helpful in creating new and healing stories. Narratives are thus dynamic rather than stable, and include context which is part of meaning.

White (1995) emphasizes that there is no single story in life, as there is no story that is free of ambiguity and contradiction. It is in living through the ambiguity that further meaning making occurs, and sub-stories unfold. It is within the telling and living of the multi-storied processes of life, that therapists / researchers can bring forth and thicken (Geertz, 1978) possible alternative stories that do not support or sustain the problems presenting in people's lives. Within new stories, people create different opportunities to live out new self-images. Consequently new possibilities for relationships arise, and new futures become possible. These assumptions fit well with my aims of my research, as I investigate experiences of girls in the shelter and I try to derive the meanings that they have about their lives. I also endeavor to offer a space where alternative meanings and ways of being can be explored.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the dominant discourses, especially discourses that disqualify their voices. Working from a narrative perspective, the therapist (researcher) creates contexts, through sharing in the child's stories, in which the child's knowledge and skills can be honored (Morgan, 1999). The saying of "not-yet-said" stories becomes possible through dialogue with others.

3.4 Research Design

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explain that the decision to make use of a qualitative research design has a variety of consequences with regard to sampling, data collection and analysis. In developing a research design, the researcher must consider whether the aims of the research are mainly exploratory, descriptive or explanatory.

Exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research. They employ an open, flexible, and inductive approach to research as they attempt to look for new insights into phenomena. In

other words, exploratory studies generate speculative insights, new questions and hypotheses (Flick, 1988), as is the case with this study.

The aim of this research as mentioned in a previous chapter, is to explore how abused girls staying in a shelter, navigated the troubled waters of their existence in their paternal homes as well as in the shelter.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and or social process to observe (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

A variety of sampling and selection methods are available in qualitative research. Researchers, however, purposely, select small samples which fit the aims of the research. Research participants are selected for a number of reasons namely because they (1) have personal experience of the topic being researched; (2) are able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences; and (3) are able "to articulate their experiences and be willing to give complete and sensitive accounts" (Wilson & Hutchson, cited in Rapmund, 1996, p.115)

Since this study utilizes a qualitative, exploratory research design and is concerned with detailed in-depth analysis, I utilized a purposeful (i.e. non-random) sampling procedure by doing my research on 10 girls living in the shelter. The ages of the group members ranged from 12 to about 23 years of age.

3.6 Determining instrumentation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that only the human as instrument is sufficiently adaptable to be able to encounter the complexity of the meanings that emerges through interactions with others. Only the human is capable of identifying the inherent values that underlie the different constructed realities, and so be in the

position to take the resultant biases into account. As human instruments, qualitative researchers can also respond to feedback. They can adapt and simultaneously collect information about multiple factors at multiple levels. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain how the human as instrument has the ability to process data immediately, and thus formulate new hypotheses that can be explored within the same context than the one wherein they were created. In using the human as instrument, unexpected responses can be explored further by giving richer descriptions in the co-construction of meanings.

Using this perspective in my research allowed me to remain open and flexible in the process, and to further feel free and comfortable to approach each session with limited expectations and much curiosity. I could thus be able to respond to events in the session in the here-and-now in whichever way seemed appropriate at the particular time. By using myself as an instrument of data collection it created a context of spontaneity, flexibility, adaptability, and diversity wherein richer meanings could emerge.

3.7 Data collection

There is a widespread agreement that the data should be valid, in order to capture the meaning of what the researcher is observing. Many qualitative researchers argue that social phenomena are context-dependent, and the meaning of whatever it is that the researcher is investigating depends on the particular situation an individual is in. “No phenomenon can be understood out of relationship to the time and context that spawned, harbored, and supported it” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.189). Qualitative researchers seek valid observations. Validity, however, is not defined in terms of the extent to which the operational definition corresponds with the construct definition, but by the degree to which the researcher can produce observations that are believable for him or her, the subjects being studied, and the eventual readers of the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Being consistent with the principles of qualitative research in data collection, the researcher has to rely on techniques such as observations, interviews, and recording human behavior in contexts of interaction. Unstructured interviews were conducted at the shelter to explore the experiences of the girls. The interviews were done over a period of six months and the time devoted for each session was an hour.

The fact that unstructured interviews were used to gather data meant that there was no interview protocol, which required the researcher to become more attentive to the direction taken by the respondent in the interview. Denzin (1997) points out that in an unstructured interview the respondent direct the topics that are covered during the sessions.

Data was recorded using a tape recorder and field notes were made after each session. The data recorded on the tapes was later transcribed by the researcher in order to facilitate accurate analysis of information.

3.8 Data analysis

Analysis of information is the process whereby order, structure, and meaning are imposed on the mass of information that is collected in a qualitative research study. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) argue that data analysis issues should be carefully considered when designing a study, since the aim of data analysis is to transform information (data) into an answer to the original research question.

A careful consideration of data analysis strategies will ensure that the design is coherent, as the researcher matches the analysis to a particular type of data, to the purposes of the research and to the research paradigm. It is a time and labour intensive process and allows for patterns to emerge from the data. Marshall and Rossman (cited in Rapmund, 1996, p.119) described this process as "…a messy, ambiqous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process."

Hermeneutics as a method of data analysis was chosen to analyse the data. This approach is consistent with both the qualitative paradigm and the data of the study.

3.8.1 Hermeneutic method

Hermeneutics as a discipline, was initially applied in the interpretation of ancient Biblical texts (Rapmund, cited in Mill, 2005) and has been named after Hermes, "….the messenger who changed the message to suit the audience". Modern hermeneutics has been developed by "Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1975) as a general philosophy of human understanding and interpretation" (Rapmund, 1996, pp.119-120).

The aim of hermeneutics is "to discover meaning and to achieve understanding" (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991, p.266) or to make sense of "that which is not yet understood". The idea of the hermeneutic circle suggests that, in the interpretation of a text, the meaning of the parts should be considered in relation to the meaning of the whole, which itself can only be understood in respect of its constituent parts. This is usually conceived of "as circular movement between part and whole" (Kelly, 1999a, p.409).

Hermeneutics is based on the following assumptions (Addison, cited in Rapmund, 2000) namely that:

- People give meaning to what happens in their lives which is important if others are to understand their behaviour.
- Meaning can be expressed in different ways, not only verbally.
- The meaning giving process is informed by the "immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices, and language" (Addison, cited in Rapmund, 2000, p.140).

- The meaning of human action is not a fixed entity, it is constantly being negotiated, and changes evolve over time, in different contexts and for different individuals.
- The process of interpretation enables a person to make sense of his or her world. However, these ideas are informed by the interpreter's values and therefore the notion of "thruth" or correspondence to an objective reality, are not important issues in this approach which does not adhere to the belief in an objective reality.

This method does not have a set of prescribed techniques. The following approach however will be used which has been adapted from Addison (cited in Rapmund, 2000, p.140), Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, pp.141-144) and Kelly (1999a, p.408) and involves the following practices:

Step1: Familiarisation and immersion

This step refers to the process whereby the researcher familiarizes him-/herself with and immerses him-/herself in the data by rereading the text a few times over, making notes and summarises (Mill, 2005). In this stage the researcher will be working with texts rather than with lived experience. The researcher needs to immerse herself in the world created by the text so that she can make sense of that world. This means becoming very familiar with the text to the point of knowing where particular quotations occur in it, and getting a feel for the overall meaning and the different types of meaning in a text (Kelly, 1999a).

Step 2: Thematising

This refers to the process of identifying specific principles, themes or general rules underlying data. Kelly (1999a, p.409) refers to this process as "unpacking". It starts with listing themes, drawing mind maps and branching notes of all themes that come to mind as the researcher studies the text. It shows connection between themes, sub-themes, sub-categories and clusters of information. This stage is

therefore moving towards looking at material "from the outside" (Kelly, 1999a, p.410) but still based on what the participants have shared.

Step 3: Coding

The process of coding entails "breaking down a body of data (text domain) into labeled meaningful pieces, with a view to later cluster the 'bits' of coded material together under the code heading and further analyzing them both as a cluster and in relation to other clusters" (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999, p.143). In practice, thematising and coding blend into each other, because the themes which we are using tend to change in the process of coding as the researcher develops a better understanding of them and how they relate to other themes. Kelly (cited in Mill, 2005) cautioned that researchers should not focus merely on getting information that they are looking for, but also to focus on data that does not fit in the identified themes.

Step 4: Elaboration

In this stage the researcher explores the generated themes more closely. This enables the researcher to gain a fresh view and deeper meaning than was possible from the original coding system, and might entail changes in the coding system. Dialoguing occurs between what the researcher reads and the contexts in which the participant found themselves; between the researcher and the account itself, her own values, assumptions, interpretations and understandings (Rapmund, 2000).

The researcher maintains a constantly questioning attitude, looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper meanings, alternative meanings and changes over time, as she "moves back and forth between individual elements of the text in many cycles, called the 'hermeneutics spiral'" (Tesch, 1990, p.68).

"Analyzing is a circular progression between parts and whole, foreground and background, understanding and interpretation, and researcher and narrative account" (Addison, 1992, p.113).

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

This refers to the written report of the phenomenon being investigated. The report presents the analyzed themes as sub-headings. Although research projects normally lead to new questions, all research projects will need to reach a conclusion. Kelly (cited in Mill, 2005) provides a number of pointers to indicate that this point has been reached namely when:

- New thoughts are not contributing to a deeper understanding that has already been developed.
- All questions that have been asked at the beginning of the research have been answered.
- The interpretation matches the data that has been collected.
- A large number of fundamental questions seem to add to the account rather than break it down.

The point that is reached when data has been interpreted by the researcher, to such an extent, that it has resulted in a rich account of experiences is called "saturation" or "exhaustion". Kelly (1999b, p.422) mentioned that the researcher should then be able to claim that he/she had exhausted the interpretation of the data and has reached a point where he/she has "…a satisfactory sense of what is going on".

Step 6: Integration: The final report

There should be a balance between the particular and the general in the final report. The challenge at this stage is to draw the individual themes together into the final general report which is the "…researcher's retelling of what research participants told him or her" (Kelly, 1999a, p.422). The reconstruction of the experiences shared by the respondents is written in the third person containing

both the actual words of the respondents, the notes made by the researcher and the interpretations (Kelly, 1999b).

3.9 Conclusion

I used a qualitative research paradigm as it is consistent with the aims of the study. This approach provides in-depth information, data is gathered directly from the participant in a natural setting, and its emphasis is on process research. The qualitatative research paradigm is appropriate because its methods are more compatible with the assumptions underlying systems theory. Furthermore qualitative methods bridge the gap between research, theory and practice.

A narrative approach is used in the study as it fits well with the aims of the research as I am to investigate experiences of girls in a shelter and I try to derive the meanings that they have about their lives. I also endeavour to offer a space where alternative meanings and way of being can be explored.

Since the study utilizes a qualitative, exploratory research design and is concerned with detailed in depth analysis, I utilized a purposeful sampling procedure by doing my research on 10 girls living in the shelter. The unstructured interviews were conducted to gather data, and the interviews were mainly conducted in a group. Hermeneutics as a method of analysis was chosen to analyse the data.

CHAPTER 4
Group process

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will briefly describe the group process that occurred in this group of adolescent girls staying in a shelter. The ten girls will be described with reference to their age, level of education, background information as well as their participation in the group. I will further give the duration and number of group sessions. The process of each session will be briefly summarized.

4.2 Group participants

The participants' brief background information is presented in Table 3.1. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identity.

Table 3.1 Group participants.

Name	Age	Background information	Time spent in group or with therapist	Education
J	19 years	J is the first born in her family. Both her parents are still alive. She came to the shelter for safety. She was sexually	J attended 9 sessions of the group and missed one as she was not feeling well. She also requested to have an one-	J passed her Grade 10 in a normal mainstream school. She was busy completing her Grade 12 through the

		abused by her own father since the age of seven. She has a son.	on- one session with the group therapist by writing a letter. Only two sessions were done individually with J.	adult education program.
G	15 years	G is J's younger sister. She was also sexually abused by her father. She also opened a charge against him.	G attended all ten group sessions.	G was attending school doing grade 10 in the mainstream school.
A	17 years	A has a history of staying in different foster homes. She ran away from home when she was 12 years old. She comes from an	A attended all ten group sessions. She also requested to have one individual session with the researcher when she heard that she was being	A was doing Grade 11 through the mainstream school.

		unstable family where she was neglected and abused. Her mother is still alive but they have a poor mother-daughter relationship.	adopted.	
F	16	F's parents divorced while she was still young. She was abused and also neglected by her parents since an early age. She had been placed in different places but had always run away.	F attended all 10 group sessions.	F was doing grade 11 in a mainstream school.
D	14 years	D is the youngest daughter in a family of three. She has	D attended all the group sessions. The therapist arranged for	D was doing grade 9 in a normal school.

		two older brothers. She was physically and sexually abused by her two brothers since she was seven years old. D came to the shelter for her own safety.	D to receive psychotherapy at the community clinic as she was quite depressed.	
B	15 years	B mentioned that she does not know her biological parents. She grew up with foster parents and she was abused by a relative.	B missed one of the group sessions as she was studying for a test.	B was doing grade 11 in a normal mainstream school.
C	16 years	She was sexually abused at a young age. She came from an unstable family.	She attended all ten group sessions	She was doing grade 12 in a mainstream school.

I	16	She comes from a poor family where she was neglected. She was taken from home by people who offered to help. They then abused her emotionally and sexually.	She attended all ten group sessions.	I was doing grade 12 in a mainstream school.
H	13 years	H ran away from home when she was 12 years old. She alleges that she was being abused by her step father. She is part of the groups in the streets. She often runs back to the streets.	She attended all ten group sessions.	She was not attending school as she ran away from the shelter to the streets in the beginning of the year and she came back when registration had closed.
E	15 years	She was brought to the	She attended all ten group	She was doing Grade 10 in

		shelter by social workers. She reported that she was being physically and emotionally abused by her aunt.	sessions.	the main stream school.

4.2 Number and duration of group sessions

The interview sessions were mainly conducted in a group setting. Ten sessions were conducted with this group. Each session lasted for approximately one hour to one hour thirty minutes. The research project itself, was conducted over a period of six months from June to November 2005. Individual sessions were only conducted in circumstances where participants felt that they had personal issues which they felt could not be discussed in the group.

4.3 The process of each session

First session.

During the first session with the group the house administrator introduced me to the girls in the shelter. I told them something about myself and the purpose of the project. I also asked the participants' permission to record the group sessions. I asked the girls to introduce themselves and to ask questions if they had any about the project. I also reassured them of confidentiality. The girls mentioned some of the ground rules and also what they feel comfortable to discuss. Even though the

group seemed interested they presented themselves as being guarded. The group seemed to be still negotiating on whether they can trust me.

Second session

During this session the girls spoke about their feelings of isolation and that nobody listens to them at the shelter. The issue of trust and fear of being betrayed by other group members was discussed. They resolved that they are not going to discuss their home problems. The group members shared how they treat each other at the shelter. Anger and frustrations were expressed by those girls who felt they were victims of physical, verbal and emotional abuse by other girls at the shelter. They also discussed the struggle for power among them which resulted in feelings of inferiority and superiority. They pointed out that they harbour a lot of emotions due to fear of being punished or expelled from the shelter. Respect was a crucial issue as they felt girls in the shelter do not respect each other's property. Respect of each other was then included in the group norms.

Third session

The group spoke about their expectations of the shelter. They expected to receive love and warmth but they did not. They then started to speak about home and where they regard as home. I asked the group where they feel they belong ─ the shelter or their homes. This question made the group to reflect on their connection and disconnection between home and the shelter. Factors in their present context (the shelter) which contribute to connection and disconnection between the shelter and their family were discussed.

Fourth session

The girls had to draw their world and people who belong to it and those who are outside. After the drawing they had to reflect on their feelings. Each girl in the group had to speak about their world. During the process of discussion the girls in

the group started to acknowledge each other's importance as most of them realized that they need each other. The girls also validated each other in the group.

Fifth session

Relationships among the girls in the house and the staff members were raised. The girls' experiences are that the staff members have a coalition against the girls and when there is a problem between staff members and the girls, staff members always blame the girls. They spoke about their fears of being punished by staff members and being isolated. The expressed lack of consistency by staff members when applying the rules.

Sixth session

The girls asked the educator to join the group session as the discussion was around dreams for the future. The girls spoke about their dreams and later asked the educator the future plans of the educator with girls staying in the shelter. The educator gave each of the girls her plan for her future. She further gave each of the girls feedback on how she experiences their commitment to their education. The process of giving feedback helped both the educator and the girls to reconnect as there was a lot of miscommunications and misunderstanding. This created a sense of hope that if they work together the girls can be able to achieve their dreams with the support from the educator.

Seventh session

The group pointed out how difficult it is for them in the community and at school as they are labelled prostitutes and streets kids. They expressed feelings of anger towards the community. This results in isolation as they avoid visiting places like parks where people will dehumanize them. They are disappointed with staff

members as they feel they do not understand their frustration from being dehumanized.

Eighth session

The focus of this session was for the girls to look at things they could change by themselves based on their experiences. The girls spoke about how they could accommodate each other in the shelter to make their life easier. They also spoke about support in the sense that they could start their own project to raise money for their books and other necessities. This session's focus was more on positive things (which they are in control of) which can help them in their daily lives. Planning for the future and the challenges were discussed. The group also discussed possibilities to overcome their challenges.

Nineth session

This session took place a day after an attempted break-in at the shelter. The girls in the group expressed anger and feelings of being insecure in the shelter. Anger was directed towards the shelter staff for failing to make sure all security measures were functioning. The girls in the group also blamed two other girls who came late at night for being irresponsible and risking others' lives. The older girls pointed out that they felt they need to protect the younger ones and risk their lives. The shelter staff was blamed for failing to apply the house rules appropriately as they failed to act towards the two girls. The girls complained of being exhausted due to insufficient sleep.

Tenth session

The girls gave feedback about the group process. I asked them what was helpful. The group pointed out that the group was helpful as they learned to utilize each other in the shelter. Furthermore it also created a space for them where they can

voice they concerns. The girls in the group also mentioned that it was also a different group as it was about what they wanted to discuss and it helped them not to only complain about problems, but to also give input to solutions to the problems. The girls also had to reflect on what was not helpful. They pointed out that the fact that the group was held at the shelter was a problem for them. The girls in the group also suggested that it was going to be good if the researcher managed to have individual sessions with all of them. They wanted the group sessions with the researcher to continue.

4.4 Conclusion

The group process started when participants set out the norms of interaction in the group which also formed the identity of the group. Trust was a concern for the group towards the researcher and other members of the group. This was an issue which the group negotiated and later resolved. The group spontaneously started to discuss their experiences in the shelter. At the end of the group sessions the group reflected on the process to evaluate what was helpful and also gave feedback on what can be taken into consideration in future group sessions.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1. Introduction

I will discuss the following themes extracted hermeneutically from the text: trust versus mistrust, connection and disconnection, alienation and isolation, emotionally overwhelmed versus security, being labelled, security versus insecurity, hope versus hopelessness, and communication. These themes will be grounded in excerpts from the text. I will also report on a session where the participants reflected on the group sessions and gave some feedback, and I conclude by giving my own reflections.

5.2 Discussion of themes

5.2.1 Trust versus mistrust

One of the eight stages of Erikson's ego development is trust versus mistrust. Erikson argues that the infant's development of basic trust in the world stems from his or her earliest experiences with a mother or primary caregiver. Erikson further asserts that trust depends not on absolute qualities of food or demonstrations of love, but rather on the quality of maternal relationships (Erikson, 1968). The girls in the group have been abused which has resulted in feelings of mistrust toward the external world. These girls have experienced betrayal even at the shelter to the extent that during the first session one of the group norms mentioned was that they would not like to discuss their home problems as it will be used against them. This group norm was accepted by all members as it fostered a feeling of safety amongst members. Agazarian and Peters (1981, p. 98) states that, "norms function as implicit modifiers or prescriptions for group behaviour". Even though the girls have gone through the same experiences of being abused they could not trust each other to share their

own unique experiences of abuse. The following extracts illustrate their difficulty to trust each other:

A: I want to say something, let's not talk about our home problems. Let's put our home problems aside.
Researcher: I hear and respect what A is saying that she is not comfortable to talk about her home problems. I wonder what will be easier and comfortable for the group to talk about?
B: Some of us are not comfortable to speak about their home problems.
Researcher: I understand what you are saying that it is not easy to speak about your problems in front of other people. I have just been wondering what makes it difficult to speak about your problems in front of other girls here.
C: You know what we are scared to tell our problems in a group because someone maybe tomorrow we fight and then you will be told this and that about your problem. Do you understand?
A: Exactly, Your problems can be used against you to harm you.
Researcher: So what I am hearing from you is that you are scared to talk about your problems because it can be used against you.
D: Yaa. It's true.
Researcher: Did that happen before that your problems were used against you?
A: My problem is that I saw my dad after three months and they used information I wrote in my diary against me. It made me to lie in the hospital the whole week.

From this illustration and excerpt, one can see that although they had difficulty to trust each other with sharing personal experiences from home they were able to trust each other with sharing their experiences at the shelter. This process started spontaneously. Donigian and Malnati (1997) point out that norms and standards can be explicit and can be determined before the group begins or they can be implicit – that is, evolve consciously or unconsciously during the group process. Sharing of their experiences at the shelter was one of the implicit group norms while it was explicitly stated that the group will not discuss home problems.

During the first session they started sharing their experiences in the house as illustrated in the following excerpts:

A: My problem in the house is that they steal our things, sometimes they even throw them away or in the dustbin.

Researcher: When you say they, are you referring to the girls in the house?

F: Staff members are good to us they give us love that we need. The girls in the house sometimes are ugly. Sometimes we fight, they are jealous.

Van Servellen (1984) mention that individuals become a group when they establish a specific pattern of information exchange and set of goals. Commonly identified attributes of a small group include identification as a group, shared norms and goals and activity that appears to have uniformity in terms of this goals and roles. During the first session the group discussion about trust was not only about trust but also about negotiation of group norms and goals for the group. They also developed a group identity when it was resolved that their main goal will be to share their experiences in the shelter. Despite their experiences which led to mistrust and fear of betrayal, the girls in the group also proved later in the group that they are able to trust the researcher to the extent that they felt they could share their personal experiences from home with the researcher. The following excerpts illustrate their trust in the researcher:

E: I agree with A that we must not talk about our home problems but I suggest that you give us some writing papers so that we can still write down for you our problems at home and you can read so that you can be able to help us.

F: I think it was going to be good if you also had the opportunity or time to speak to each one of us alone. We need somebody like you who we can trust.

5.2.2 Connection and disconnection

The shelter is a "multiple environment" because it comprises of many interacting systems which include the extended family, family of origin, welfare and sometimes the criminal justice system. Whiting and Roberts (2003) mention that it can be a problem for children to belong to different family systems which function differently as it can confuse them. German (cited in Milner, 1987, p.115) concurs by stating that often the various members of the ecosystem work in ignorance of or at odds with the other members, which result in less effective involvement with children. Connection and disconnection refers to a situation in a person's life in which circumstances occur that make the person feel connected to others and at the same time disconnected. With regard to the girls at the shelter this theme applies in their relationship with their family of origin and the shelter. During the discussions I realized that one of the difficulties with regard to the girls being unable to integrate their connection and disconnection, especially between their families and the shelter, is due to the fact that they belong in this "multiple environment".

Furthermore limited visiting rights and lack of consistency with regard to when they can visit their families also contributes to their inability to balance connection and disconnection. This is further exacerbated by lack of communication and consultation between the girls and staff members when it comes to finalizing the decision about the visit. The girls in the group expressed feelings that their voices are not heard and that their choices are not being considered. Morgan (1999) mention that children are vulnerable to the dominant discourses especially discourses that disqualify their voices. A shared with me her difficulties when she was just informed that one of the pastors will adopt her and that she will have to move from the shelter to her new home. She felt uninvolved in the process, pressurized and pushed to make a decision that she is not comfortable with. Her connection with the shelter formed part of her identity and it was as if this identity was threatened by the adoption process.

Researcher: Earlier on you spoke about going home. It is still not clear to me which place you regard as your home?
G: I am in the middle between the shelter and my home where I was born.
H: I always feel I belong back home where I can be with my family. I am always thinking about my parents and how they treated us. My mother who looked for me when I was lost and my father who will never look for you when you are lost.
A: You come from an uncaring family and run to a place where they promise you love and care and when that is not being provided, you feel like I will rather go home and face my problems.
Researcher: If you run away from the shelter, where will you go?
J: Running to the streets to do wrong things because you think people there care about you.
*H: I want to go home, my younger sister is even forgetting about me. I met her the other day, she was crying. I miss my sister and my brother, not my father. It hurts me becau*se I *do not know what is happening with my family. I feel it's much better to struggle together.*

B: That's why I feel staff members need to sit down and discuss with us. Because sometimes they even decide for us. It's like holidays when you want to go and they decide where you must go, which family you must visit. They do not care how you feel as long as they are fine. They will tell you staff has decided you cannot go there. They decide which part of the family you can visit.
Researcher: Which family do you visit most?
J: It's difficult because they say different things at different times. Sometime they say you will visit after a month or after two months.
E (looks at A): she does not go home even during holidays. It's painful for her. The staff changes every time and they keep her here.

Some of the girls in the group showed that they are disconnected from their family because they cannot visit as illustrated above. In A's situation she is at the

same time disconnected from the shelter as a result of feelings of resentment and anger towards the system due to the feeling that they are being prevented from visiting. Erikson (1968) refers to adolescence as a period when individuals must form a personal identity and avoid role diffusion and identity confusion. The adolescent must address a number of identity questions: "Where do I originate from?" Who am I?" Identity development is also the product of reciprocal interaction between the individual and significant others. Their difficulty with regard to connection and disconnection to their family of origin and the fact that they have been abused complicates their search for their identity. The literature on the lasting effects of child abuse, (Ferguson & Mullen, 1999; Trolley, 1995) indicates that children who have been maltreated tend to have some degree of impairment in the development of a cohesive, integrated sense of identity.

5.2.3 Alienation/Isolation

Rachmen (cited in Dwivedi, 1993) emphasizes the positive value of group affiliation and intimate emotional peer contact, where members perceive and support each other. For most children and adolescents, the small group is a natural and highly attractive setting. Because of its resemblance and kinship to natural peer group, therapeutic group stimulate the real world for them as it provides a sense of affiliation. Donigian and Malnati (1997) define group cohesion as a sense of belonging or attraction to a group.

Feeling alienated or isolated occurs when a person does not feel that he or she belongs, nor is loved. It can also mean that a person has a perception of being unfairly treated when compared to others in similar circumstances.

The girls express feelings of alienation and isolation as a result of how they treat each other amongst themselves in the house. They isolate and alienate each other using language and food. They also physically and emotionally abuse each other which leads to the abused girls feeling alienated in the house. Some of the girls

feel isolated because others are gossiping about them. The feeling of being isolated and alienated is experienced in different contexts: the shelter, at school, and at home. Agazarian and Peters (1981) argue that cohesiveness in the group appears to be related to members' expectations that the group will provide need satisfaction or fulfillment of individual goals. Every member of a group gets something from a group and gives something in return. Being in the group does not only provide the space to share their feeling of isolation and alienation but also provides them with a sense of belonging.

Researcher: H, you are quiet, how is your experience of the shelter?
H: Its not nice in the house, people are always fighting about small things. For example, the other person will fight over food saying she was given a small piece and she will revenge.
J: H is right, some people are unreasonable because other people would cook things which they do not eat and it's unfair. I want to know why they do it.
K: People talk bad things about me. It bothers me because they even steal my stuff.
C: They talk about you with each other and then they decide not to talk to you. Like last time people were not talking to me and they called me names. That's why we fight and hit each other.
E Some of the girls do not allow us to speak our home language, they tell us to speak English.

One morning I was early for my appointment and I found the girls still having breakfast. As I waited, I observed C's frustration as she had been waiting for others to finish eating so that she could wash the bowl and have her cereal. Those who were eating took their time as if they were not aware of her situation. C was feeling isolated as she was the only one who still had to eat her breakfast and still join the group.

On another level the girls feel alienated and isolated from each other by staff members when they treat them differently. The girls seem to also feel isolated when staff members punish them for expressing their feelings towards them. Staff members also seem to form a coalition with each other towards the girls especially when there are differences between the girls and staff members. Donigian and Malnati (1997) state that the greater a member's feeling to or belonging to the group, the more likely that member will be to feel his or her presence to the group and the more likely members will be able to "risk" participating in the group. Members must actively talk about their concerns. Due to cohesiveness in the group the girls are willing to share their experiences of isolation from each other, from staff members, as well as revealing their concerns.

B: Sometimes some of the girls will be playing radio and others watching T.V. Some of the staff members will go and switch off the radio and leave the T.V. I do not think they treat us fairly. They must switch off both.
D: It's like when two girls fought and staff members punish one and leave the other because she is favoured.
F: The same applies if two girls left the house without permission and only one is being punished. They discriminate.

Researcher: G, you mentioned that you cannot express your feelings. How come?
G: Because we face consequences. It's like when people are screaming names to us in the streets and you shout back. If you scream back the house mother will look at you and say you will face consequences without even asking what happened.
Researcher: What I heard from you is that you are afraid to express your feelings because of fear of consequences. I also hear you saying there is no space where somebody can listen to your feelings of frustrations. I wonder how that makes you feel.

A: It makes us feel bad, regret why you explode. It also makes you feel nobody cares. This makes some of the girls to start disrespecting staff members because why should we care for people who do not care for us?
B: You must know that staff members are always right.
F: They will take the house mother's side in the office and you will be blamed for everything and they will make sure they will put you down and you will suffer the consequences.
I: The children are discriminating. At school you are discriminated against, your language, your culture, your make up. They break us.
C: At my school they treat me because I speak Tswana. And also that I come from the shelter. They call me street kid.

J's story shows how she was alienated and isolated from other members of the family. J told me how her extended family encouraged her to go and cancel the case against her father for sexual abuse. It was as if she did the wrong thing to open the case. Her voice was not heard. J was isolated from her family and the community because nobody helped her. Her father got bail and continued to rape her. She was ashamed of herself and she became more alienated and isolated even from her own mother. Trolley (1995) mention that adolescent females may inappropriately blame themselves or be blamed by others for the abuse especially if they were prematurely physically developed. J blamed herself and had guilt feelings for the abuse and the fact that she had a child with her father. She was also blamed by her family for accusing and reporting her father for sexual abuse. This is what J wrote explaining her story to the researcher:

"Hello, this is J. I have a big problem. My father raped me since I was seven years old and when I was 15 years old I open a rape case and they came and arrest him after 3 months. His family came to me to say go and tell the police that he did not do that, and then I said no. After a month they looked for a lawyer and make a bail for him, then when he is out he took us from my mother's home to the township and continue with his job and telling me that there is no where I can

report him because he is not afraid of jail, he will go and come back soon, and he told me that there is no one can help me because they are afraid of him, then I told myself that there is no one can help me, then he continue with his job until I fall pregnant and give birth a baby boy, This year I told myself that enough is enough. I went to police station and open a rape case again and they came with me to arrest him and he ran away. And now they are still looking for him. That's why I live at the shelter. Please help"

During the individual session with J she mentioned that she wants to go home because she feels isolated and alienated at the shelter. She feels unwanted and that people at the shelter do not love her. J has never been to counselling as promised by the social worker. J's life is starting to be a pattern which is perpetuating because at home she felt unwanted after reporting her father to the police and they failed to protect her. She is now experiencing the same at the shelter were she feels unwanted and that the social worker has failed to help her too. She ends her letter with a cry for help.

5.2.4 Emotionally overwhelmed versus security

Ferguson and Mullen (1999) point out those adolescents who have been sexually abused are like a blender of emotions waiting for the "next button" to be pushed. Behaviourally the impact of abuse and feelings of emotions may be acted out in many forms such as sexual acting out, aggression, delinquent behaviour, prostitution, and suicide attempts. Feelings of being "damaged," "unattractive" or "incomplete" are rampant. A typical concern which surfaces is whether or not physical intimacy in a healthy relationship may ever be achieved. Suicide attempts, aggression towards each other and staff members and outbursts were prominent among the girls as a way of venting out their frustrations.

Researcher: How do you cope with all your difficult experiences?

D: Like some of us we experience mood swings due to all our problems.
H: I feel like running away, doing drastic things like committing suicide because you feel nobody cares.
A: My life depends on pen and paper. I cut myself to release my inner pain. I feel rejected. I want to be alone but I also want to be with others.
Researcher: It must be very difficult for you when you feel lonely and you want to be with others but in the same time you want to be alone.
F: You do not trust the people because they use your situation for their own advantage.
G: It's like when you cry and somebody comforts you. You then cry more because you then realise that somebody cares. Its tears of joy and pain.
F: Some staff members after you explode of your frustrations they ask you to pick a broom to sweep the whole yard or collect sand.
A: The girls in the house threaten us; they abuse us emotionally, verbally and physically.

The above statements by A and F illustrate the ambivalence which these girls experience due to their feelings of being emotionally overwhelmed. They are aware that they are emotionally vulnerable and have fear of exposing themselves to others. D wrote a poem where there is an acknowledgement of being emotionally overwhelmed and feelings of loneliness. She however had faith that God is there for her and cried to God to send an angel to rescue her. Her faith in God seemed to contain her emotions. This is an extract of D's poem:

I know I just have 2 B strong
But everything is taking 2 long
I don't wanna be all alone
I just need someone 2 hold

GOD please sends me an angel
2 B there and make me feel better

Coz I know u always there for me
And it's true you ll never forget me

Dwivedi (1993) states that effective group work is helpful with abused children as it can help them to learn delaying gratification, managing their feelings, exploring abstractions and values as well as cultivating creativity and giving of one to others. Furthermore Dwivedi (1999) points out that it can also enhance social skills, self-esteem, reality testing, improve the sense of interdependence as well as autonomy.

5.2.5 Being labelled and stigmatised

Individuals communicate verbally and non-verbally. Van Servellen (1984) mentioned that a great deal of an individual's communication is non-verbal, such as that expressed in facial movements, gestures, postures, and movements toward and away from objects and other persons. Essentially what the sender intends to denote by his message does not necessarily have the same connotation to others. Because messages can denote and connote different things, they can be easily being misunderstood. If no one bothers to evaluate what the sender actually meant, the sender will most likely continue to be misunderstood. The communication of the purpose of the shelter as it has evolved over the years has been misunderstood by the communities and this has led to the labelling and stigmatizing of the girls.

The shelter is part of one of the initiatives by a ministry in a South African city ─ a faith based community organization working in the inner city. The purpose of the street outreach is to build relationships of trust with young girls and women on the streets (The shelter's information brochure, 1998). This is how the communities perceive and understand the purpose of the shelter even though some of the girls who are presently staying at the shelter have not been staying in the streets. The impact of how the communities understand the role of the shelter

to the girls staying there is that people label them as prostitutes; they are called names in the neighborhood and even in the streets. The girls felt dehumanized, disrespected, and discriminated. They mentioned that at school and in other social contexts they are embarrassed to mention that they stay at the shelter. As a result of being called names they avoid visiting places associated with prostitutes such as parks which relate to the theme of being alienated discussed earlier because they cannot socialize and interact like young girls of their age in public places.

H: At school they call us street kids because we come from the shelter. They even call us prostitutes.
D: It's very difficult for us because we know people call us names.
B Especially just going to the streets and people call you prostitute, that's something really. That's humiliating and it lowers your self esteem.
Researcher: I hear you saying that you are being called humiliating names because you stay at the shelter.
C: You hear people talking saying that maroon house next to the zoo is a prostitute house. So, when people ask where you stay, I say at home. Where is home? I will rather say (names of townships). The shelter becomes the last place in your mind. Because it's really embarrassing when someone call you a prostitute during the day in the streets with other people passing by.
Researcher: I can see your feelings of frustration and pain when you are talking about your experiences of being dehumanized and embarrassed in the street. I can imagine how difficult it is you to deal with these names people call you.
J: To get a child ending up like a prostitute is a process. It starts from being ill treated at home, sometimes poverty where you do not even eat. This situation can push you to go to the streets. Imagine myself telling B that you are a prostitute. How is she going to feel? Some people feel great by doing that. But they do not think about what she has been going through in her life ending up being a prostitute. Nobody will just finish school and say I will just stand in the street.
G: That is the reason we do not like going to places like Burgers Park. Because people think we are prostitutes even in the taxi rank. Just imagine it and the fact

that you are not a prostitute you cannot go around telling people you is not a prostitute.

Group work can enable children to address feelings and issues which can be difficult to address in individual therapy (such as being labelled a prostitute) due to embarrassment and fear of being judged. The various interactions in the group address perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that have proved to be pathological in members' day to day of life. Such behaviours being enacted live in a group provides opportunities for feedback, experimentation with and practice of alternative perspective and options (Dwivedi, 1993).

5.2.6 Security versus insecurity

Another important aspect of the group as it exists in time and space is the group environment. "This important aspect of group process (which involves the boundary of the group and the nature of the group relationship with the environment) we think about in terms of systems analysis" (Agazarian and Peters, 1981, p 114). The group is a system which is a component of other systems which, with inputs from and outputs to the other systems that affect the group. It is important for the therapist to be aware of the need to manage the relationship between the group and the larger system.

The theme of security versus feeling insecure amongst the girls prevails on two levels: firstly, on a physical level (feeling unsafe) and secondly on an emotional level (feeling inferior). On the first level the girls express feelings of not feeling safe due to lack of security in the house. The alarm system in the house does not function properly and some of the windows are insecure. They pointed out during one of the sessions which was held a day after an attempted house break that there have been several attempts to enter the house. During the session after the break-in the girls expressed feelings of anger, frustration, and blame towards the other girls especially the two who came in late during the night of the incident. They

also expressed anger and disappointment towards the shelter staff for not securing the house appropriately where the girls are sleeping and also for giving attention to the other two girls who were perceived as contributing to security problems by coming late at night were also experienced. The break-in experience was quite traumatic to the girls and manifested in lack of energy and concentration. It also provoked feelings such as fear, anger, loneliness, guilt and being unwanted.

Researcher: I heard somebody attempted to break into the house. What happened?

B: It was early this morning. The house mother went to open for the girls who came late. Luckily C was standing by the door when they came back. As the house mother was locking the door, she said that she saw something like a shadow of a person. When she looked she saw a man. Then she started screaming. We all woke up. We were just wondering what to do and that's when we gave the person a chance to run away. The thing is the alarm was not working.

F: You know what I would like to say the problem is that young girls are acting like adults. And if you think you are a woman and you act like a woman that is the problem. Why would you come to the house late at night? The worst part is that there are two girls who are making all of us to be at risk.

A: Maybe these two girls know who this person is. He was with them. Because last time there was also somebody in the house. The guy managed to come inside the house without any problem through the kitchen window.

Researcher: What are your thoughts and feelings about what happened early this morning?

C: I think our alarm needs to be fixed. Because the alarm in the office is working and they also have a camera. We need a camera where there are people.

G: They keep on telling us that they will fix our alarm but it's not taking place. They only give attention to those two girls.

J: I am not ashamed to say that I was scared last night. I was even crying. Just imagine two girls going out to risk their lives to protect us. I was scared praying nobody must hurt them. I was crying.

Researcher: Were you feeling helpless and guilty that other girls are taking risk to protect you?

The second level of feelings of insecurity relate to the girls' confidence and self esteem. Feelings of insecurity emanate from competition amongst the girls and striving to be superior and unique from the others. They will compete with clothing, relationships and physical appearance which lead to jealousy and rivalry among the girls. The sense of insecurity among the girls can be explained by Erikson's stage of industry versus inferiority. Erikson (1968) describes industry as a sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly.

When the children's efforts are thwarted, they are made to feel that those personal goals cannot be accomplished or are not worthwhile and a sense of inferiority develops. Erikson further pointed out that a sense of inadequacy and inferiority results from several sources: children may be discriminated against at school; children may compare themselves unfavorably with others and denigrating their social or family environment. A sense of insecurity amongst the girls at the shelter stems from comments in the house amongst the girls to each other, and from the staff members. Some of the girls were not going to school, and some were attending a program for educating adults ─ these differences also impacted on the girls' self esteem as those who were attending full time seemed more confident than their peers. Those who do not go to school seemed to feel more inferior even to those who attend the adult education program. The girls' experiences of being abused also precipitated their feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.

5.2.7 Hope versus hopelessness

According to White (1995) people find meaning in the process of telling, reflecting and interpretation of their stories. They derive meaning that positively impact on their view of life which then affect their behaviours and the decisions they make in their lives. In one session the educator was invited to be present by

the researcher and the girls, because the girls once expressed the need to have her there. In this session the telling and interpretation of their stories (in which the educator participated) derived hope in them about their future. The sense of hope which replaced hopelessness affected their decisions with regard to commitment towards their studies and their attitude towards their educator.

As the group members continued talking about their future dreams with the educator, there was a sense of hope. They mentioned positive things like wanting to get married and perusing different careers. During this discussion not even one of the girls expressed feelings of hopelessness towards the future. However, when the discussion went further on how they want to achieve their dreams, some of the girls came to realise that they cannot fulfill their dreams if they did not commit themselves to their education. One important thing which stood out during the discussion was that some of the girls showed a high level of maturity and insight with regard to circumstances beyond their control which could hamper their dreams for the future and how they had practical solutions such as working part time so that they can finance their studies while working, which instilled a sense of being in control and hope towards the future.

This was important as it also helped other girls in the group to be hopeful towards the future despite lack of resources such as books and financial difficulties. However, there was also a feeling of hopelessness expressed by one of the group members who mentioned that she is feeling hopeless and helpless. She felt demotivated to even going to school:

J: *Now I tell myself "I do not want to go to school anymore".*

During the discussion one of the girls invited their educator to be part of the discussion:

B: As we were talking about dreams, I wanted to ask our educator here at the shelter what is the vision for the girls who are staying here at the shelter. Where do you see us going in years to come as we are here?

Educator: For us it's important for you girls to be independent and that you are strong to handle future problems. So that you can be able to stand on your feet and do things for yourself.
Researcher: I have been listening when each one of you were talking about your dreams and I have been wondering if you are aware that you must work for your dreams and other people like the staff at The shelter can support you to reach your dreams. It was important that we share these dreams but the other important part is what you are doing to achieve these dreams yourself.
Educator: My dreams and wishes for these girls are the opposite of what they wish for themselves. Because when they have to go to school I have to force them. These girls become angry to me so that they do not go to school. They do not want to be independent and leave the shelter. They want to stay here forever.

The educator points out that even if though her dream for the girls is to see them being independent and to deal with the future she feels disappointed due to the girls' lack of co-operation and commitment towards their future goals. The educator gave each of the girls feedback with regard to her wish for the future and also her observation and experiences about their commitment. The educator's main concern is that the girls are not attending schools; they are too busy with other activities in the house, such as dancing, which distracted them from studying. The educator points out that the shelter is not suitable for some of the girls due to peer pressure: they negatively influence each other and her opinion is that it is for some of the girls' best interest to go home so that they can complete their studies.
Educator: I will now give each of you my vision as your educator. I will start with you H. I was prepared to take H to school, after I have made all the arrangements she ran away from the shelter and she went back and stay in the streets. I gave up.
H: I would like to speak to the Educator about going back to school next year.
Educator: With regard to F, I wish she can pass at school and complete her studies but I always wish she can go back home and complete her studies there.

She is easily influenced ─ that is the reason I feel she can go home so that she can focus.
Educator: With regard to C, when I came here, I found C as a responsible person. I think she can also help the house mother. She has an adult mind. My wish is that she can study hard. She is studying less and she is doing matric. Either she is outside or busy. She has a vision of not staying at the shelter as she also wants to get a job and become independent. I wish her the best.
C: I agree with what she said that I am studying less and I want to start working hard.
Educator: I met A in January. She was a cool sweet girl but she had friends. I think there were three if I am not mistaken. When I tell them to do things my way, they will tell me the other way of doing things. She will also tell me she wants to go to a special school because there she will not fail. What makes me sad about her is that she likes being absent from school for no reason. She is always behind with her school work. I have now learnt that I must not put my heart to these girls because they fail me. C is also changing. These days she is committed and it seems as if she is enjoying school.
C: I am hopeful.

Van Servellen (1984) mentions that inherent to individuals is the capacity to seek gratification of needs through communication. The individual's need to communicate is in itself basic to sustenance. Blocks in communication are felt as threats to security and result in anxiety reactions of varying proportions. Ineffective communication between the girls and the educator at the shelter was influencing the progress of the girls. The educator has been reading nonverbal messages of the girls not being interested which led her to losing hope and interest. At the end of her feedback session the girls responded positively and they also accepted responsibility for some of the negative messages they had communicated to her, as depicted in the following excerpts:
C: I think it's important what I heard today. And I also want to tell her that even though sometimes when she talks to us we do not seem to listen. She must know

that I personally think about what she said on my own and try to see and understand what she was saying. I am therefore asking her for my sake to keep on telling me when I am wrong. Even though sometimes I will be arguing with her because I sometimes want to defend myself.
A: Thank you. I promise to work harder. Thank you for your courage and support. Talk to me when there are problems.
B: I think we need to realize that we cannot stay here forever.
D: I think it's true that we girls at the shelter need to realize that even if you have a beautiful dream for your future but you are lazy to go to school, you will not achieve your dream. You also need to reach out for your dream.

Durkin (1981) believes that living open systems have permeable boundaries which the system is inherently capable of opening or closing. Each system is able to exchange energy and information with other systems and with the environment. It can close its boundaries to shut out input which is in excess of or inharmonious with its inner state in order to maintain its stability or identity. T can also open its boundaries to import energy and information, and process it for the purpose of change and growth by restructuring itself. The group as a system allowed the educator to join the group and to give feedback. This was important as the group and individuals in the group received feedback which was helpful for growth. In the process of giving feedback to the girls the educator regained her sense of hope when the girls became receptive to her feedback and their willingness to work with her. This was a reciprocal process where the educator and the girls moved from feelings of hopelessness to feelings of hope by finding meaning as they gave and received feedback.

5.2.8 Communication

Van Servellen (1984) explains that when members are sending and receiving messages, it is possible that they will be misunderstood or will misunderstand others because their messages may be interpreted in several ways. He suggests

that it is important for group members to be made aware of the fact that messages they send might not be the same messages received by others in the group. This is what happened during one of the group sessions as the girls were complaining about visiting their family. G's response to others was received as being insensitive and rude and this led to escalations in the group as the more they responded to her comments she defensively responded back as she also experienced the group members as attacking her. The researcher had to reflect to her the discrepancies between her intentions and the impact her message had on those who had received her message. The interaction in the session was helpful for the researcher to bring awareness to the group regarding their dysfunctional communication amongst each other and its relationship to some of the presenting problems, such as disrespect, discussed in the group. Van Servellen (1984, p. 123) commented that "in essence the group therapist acts as a model communicator and builds up members' self-esteem as she helps them establish more effective modes of communication."

Researcher: Which family do you visit most?
A: It's difficult because they say different things at different times. Sometimes they say you will visit after a month or after two months.
G: If they do not have money what must they do?
B: You are saying that because your mother comes here everyday. It's wrong what you are saying.
C: Look, B does not go home even during holidays. It's painful for her. The staff changes every time and keep B here. Your mother sleeps here, that is the reason you are saying that.
G: I am not the one who says your mother must not come.
The group became angry at G and started screaming at her while she is also retaliating.
Researcher: I am not happy about what has just happened. You will complain about being disrespected by each other. But you all contribute. Even if you are angry, you can express how you feel without shouting and pushing each other.

D: I think I want to say to G what you said it's painful because our parents are far. It's not out of choice.
Researcher: G, do you realize the statement that you have made has hurt others and leaving them with the feeling you do not understand them? Was that your intention?
G: I apologies for my comment. It was not my intention to hurt you.
Researcher: G has apologized. Are you willing to accept her apology and also to apologise to her as you have been screaming at her?
Group: We apologise.
A: I want to say something to G that what she said to B is not right. She has hurt B.
E: You just feel better temporarily because you are fighting back.
F: I think you also need to be able to swallow your pride and apologise.
Researcher: The other important thing you need to learn is that sometimes you will say something innocently but it hurt the other people you are talking to. You can however be able to talk to each other and resolve the misunderstanding.

Van Servellen (1984) argues that dysfunctional communication is a result of failure in learning to communicate properly, as well as the inability of the communicator to accept the responsibility of communicating with others.

5.2.9 Summary of the themes

The girls in the group have been abused which has resulted in feelings of mistrust toward the external world. Although they had difficulty to trust each other with sharing experiences from home they were able to trust each other with sharing their experiences at the shelter.

The girls in the group also shared their difficulty with regard to connection and disconnection to their family and the shelter. Their difficulty with regard to connection and disconnection to their family of origin complicates their search for

their identity. This further creates a sense of being alienated and isolated. They are also emotionally overwhelmed. They also experience stigmatization from the community. They pointed out insecurity on two levels, the physical level where they feel unsafe and on the emotional level where they feel inferior to others. The girls and the educator expressed a sense of hope after they received their feedback and derived meanings.

5.3 Feedback and reflections

According to General Systems Theory the parts of living systems are in dynamic interaction. Donigian and Malnati (1997) mention that GST group therapists are more concerned with the interaction formed by the relationship of the past. Using GST as a frame of reference the researcher acknowledges that during the group sessions her interaction with the girls was reciprocal interaction. This means that she has impacted on them as much as they have impacted on her. It was therefore important for the researcher to allow the girls in the group to reflect on the group sessions so that they could give the researcher feedback. The feedback from the girls was important as it was in line with the aim of the study to create a space where the girls can have a voice with regard to the experiences at the shelter including being in the group. Feedback from the girls helped the researcher to reflect on the process of group therapy and to evaluate if it was in line with her aims of the study.

Researcher: Thank you for allowing me to come to your personal spaces. To share with me your experiences during the past sessions we had together. I would like us to use this session just to reflect on your experiences of the group.
C: It was cool.
Researcher: Help me to understand how cool it was.
C: It was something we wanted because it was for us. It was not like other groups we had before.

A: I think it was different because you allowed us to speak about what we felt comfortable to speak about. It was not like you forced us to speak about certain things.

B: I think it was going to be good if you also had the opportunity or time to speak to all of us individually. We need somebody like you who we can trust.

D: The thing was that it was helpful because through the discussions we learnt positive things we can do. It was not only about complaining. And you also made us aware that we need each other here instead of just fighting and creating more problems for each other.

G: It was different because sometimes people come here and ask us personal things about our lives and then we do not see them again.

Researcher: What was not helpful during these sessions?

F: I think we need a different environment from the shelter. It was going to be a neutral place because we had disturbances at times.

G: The fact that people were not good at each other at times.

A: I think for now it will be good to speak more about my personal problems related to my family.

G: The thing is it is easy for me to talk to you. You were kind and warm to us.

I: The problem is that we do not get somebody to talk to about our personal problems.

B: You are still fine. Because we know you. We have seen that you can understand us. You respected us as we have been talking to you.

A: I will prefer you because we trusted you so far.

Researcher: I think we need time and plan this to see how many people need individual sessions so that I can see if I will be able to help you. I would not like to promise you something I could not do.

F: We need just to speak to you for once.

J: I think you gave us time to talk and to listen. It was nice for us. I do not have any problems.

Researcher: I would like to thank you for being able to share your experiences with me. I have learnt a lot from you. I got to understand your difficulties and it made me to look at life differently.

The group therapist's goal was to create a warm, empathetic, and therapeutic context where each of the girls could be able to have a voice about their individual experiences. From the feedback the girls experienced the researcher as a group therapist who was warm, understanding, as well as being client-centered where the focus was on their experiences and feelings on the here-and-now. The girls also experienced empathy and respect from the researcher where they developed trust as they mentioned that they were not forced to share experiences when they felt uncomfortable to do so.

The group therapist also aimed to interface with the girls' reality in order to co-create a therapeutic context where new-meaning could emerge and also for the girls to understand each other and also to use the group as a platform for support. D made the following comment during the feedback session which showed that through the group sessions a new reality was co-created between the researcher and the girls.

D: *The thing for me was that it was helpful because through the discussions we learnt positive things we can do. It was not only about complaining. And you also made us aware that we need each other here instead of just fighting and creating more problems for each other.*

5. 4 Researcher's reflection

Authors such as Durkin (1981), Donigian and Malnati, (1997), and Agazarian and Peters (1981) have the same view of the group process within a systemic framework: that group therapy occurs because of the interactive processes between the leader, the individual members and the group as a whole. This makes it essential that all three of these elements are considered in relation to one

another and to realize that their interdependent nature means that a change in one element will affect a change in other two. My experience of the group was that during the first sessions the girls had difficulty with trusting the researcher based on their previous experiences with researchers who were intrusive to their experiences. Even though this provoked a lot of anxiety on the researcher thinking that it would negatively impact on the study, she became aware of the process and realizes that the group sessions were not about what she wanted to hear but what they were willing to share. This was helpful because it made a shift in the interaction.

The girls' stories about their experiences were a learning opportunity for the researcher as it made her to look at her beliefs about shelters. While preparing for the group sessions she also understood some of the difficulties which the girls experienced with the system, especially when it came to communication. Yalom (1995) mentioned that in the group therapy setting, the understanding of process becomes more complex – we search not only for the process behind a simple statement but for the process behind a sequence of statements made by the group members.

The fact that the sessions were held at the shelter at times was not helpful due to interruptions. It was also observed that sometimes the girls would not freely express themselves when it came to matters relating to staff members. On the other hand this was however helpful as the researcher was able to observe the girls in they own natural environment.

Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Implications of the study

In doing group work with a group of 10 girls staying in a shelter, a context was created where the girls could tell their stories. White (1995) emphasizes that there is no single story in life, as there is no story that is free from ambiguity and contradiction. It is living through the ambiguity that further meaning making occurs, and sub-stories unfold. It is within the telling and living of the multi-storied process of life, that therapists / researchers can bring forth and thicken (Geertz, 1978) possible alternative stories that do not support or sustain the problems presenting in people's lives.

Within new stories, people create different opportunities to live out new self-images. Consequently new possibilities arise, and new futures become possible. These assumptions fit well with the aims of this research, as I explored experiences of girls staying in a shelter and tried to derive meanings that they have about their lives. I also endevoured to offer a space where alternative meanings and ways of being could be explored. White (1995) points out that in telling stories, and in the process of interpretation we derive meanings that have real effects on our behaviours and decisions we make in our lives.

From the girls' experiences in the shelter the study shed some light on the difficulties of belonging in the "multiple environment" such as the shelter which include the extended family, family of origin, justice system, police and the welfare. In the shelter, the various members are often at odds with other members which also create problems. The perception of the girls in the group was that staff members are having a coalition against them. The girls themselves had strained relationship amongst themselves.

Group therapy with this group of adolescent girls staying in a shelter proved to be effective as it created a space where the girls felt respected and they were able to share their experiences on the here-and-now. It also seemed to be helpful as it created a space where their voices could be heard. It further helped the girls at the shelter to strengthen their individual adaptive capacity and relationships with each other. The group context seemed to be a safe space where the girls could give and receive feedback. The feedback they received in the group related to respectful interactions served to foster their sense of self-worth.

It also emerged from the themes of the study that abuse in a young girl has a negative impact especially when a girl has been removed from her home. All the themes derived from the experiences of the girls in the shelter, seem to be related to their earlier experiences of abuse. The girls in the group have learned from their traumatic experiences to mistrust their external world. Through the research process it became clear that despite the experiences, they have the ability to assess the context and decide if it can be trusted. Furthermore the girls' participation in the group proved that they are able to trust and engage in a relationship where they experience trust, warmth, and respect. The context that was created for this group of girls afforded them the opportunity of experiencing a therapeutic relationship which contributed positively to their developing sense of identity.

The girls expressed feelings of alienation and isolation as a result of how they treat each other in the house. On another level the girls felt alienated by staff members when they treat them differently. They also pointed out that they are emotionally vulnerable and have fear of exposing themselves to others.

The literature on the lasting effects of child abuse, (for example Ferguson & Mullen, 1999; Trolley, 1995) concurs with the experiences of the girls in the study as they have noted that the children who have been maltreated tend to have some degree of impairment in the development of a cohesive, integrated sense of identity. Adolescent females who have been abused are like a blender of emotions

waiting for the “next button” to be pushed. During the group process there was some evidence of some level of maturity when dealing with emotionally charging situations. The ability to cope with emotions was supported by how they handled confrontations in the group ─ there were no reports of suicide ideation or attempts by the girls in the group, even during difficult situations.

The girls felt dehumanized, disrespected and discriminated against by being labelled and stigmatized as prostitutes or street kids at school and in other social contexts. The girls also experienced insecurity on both physical level (feeling unsafe) and on an emotional level (feeling inferior). The girls in the group have reconstructed their narratives and found meanings in the group. During the session in which the educator participated, the telling and interpretation of their stories derived hope in them about the future.

During the group sessions they pointed out that they abuse each other physically and emotionally. Physical and emotional abuse was due to the inability of being respectful and tolerant of each other. This was important for the girls to realise that they are not only victims of the circumstances as they also play a role in some of the problems they are experiencing in the shelter. They became aware of the impact they have while interacting with others in the shelter. The experiences of these new ways of perceiving and expressing themselves brought a belief in the possibilities for their futures. This information was important to the girls in the group in the sense that it empowered them and removed the complaining victim mentality. Furthermore the girls in the group acknowledged that they need each other’s help and support to be able to deal effectively with their adjustment problems at the shelter.

The group provided the platform where they could learn to respect each other’s opinion and experiences. It further helped them to connect emotionally as they could listen and identify with each other’s experiences at the shelter. The context of the group was such that the girls in the group were not only affirmed by the

therapist, but also validated by each other. The therapeutic benefit for the group was evident in the girls beginning to show respect of each other.

6.2 Limitations of the study

With this study being exploratory in nature, it is important to mention that only the foundations have been laid for further exploration of continuously evolving of meaning and experiences of girls staying in shelters. This acknowledges shortcomings of the study. These include that the study included a small number of girls who had their own unique experiences and the fact that they come from a shelter which also had its own organizational structure. One has to be cautious in generalizing the results to other groups of girls staying in other shelters. The study aimed to explore the experiences of girls in this particular shelter and would therefore not claim that the findings are facts which can be generalized in other contexts.

6.3 Recommendations

During the process of research with the girls in the shelter it became clear that the girls are not receiving sufficient psychological services to deal with their past and present traumatic experiences due to lack of access to free services. Networking between institutions such as university departments such as social work and psychology can be helpful in providing counselling services to the girls and strengthening relationships between various members by facilitating groups.

A further study can be recommended to look at the experiences of parents and others involved, such as house mothers. It could be worthwhile to explore their views of the experiences of girls staying in a shelter.

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