



**College of Law and Management Studies  
School of Law**

**Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in  
eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Interdisciplinary Masters' Programme in Child Care and Protection (Law  
and Social Work)**

**2021**

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## **Declaration- Plagiarism**

I, Alphonse Paulin Niyodusenga, declare that the research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from any other source unless acknowledged.

Signed

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## **Acknowledgements**

I express my reflective appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Maud Mthembu for her ongoing assistance throughout this research. Her support was not only academic but also social and moral, which inspired me to strive and stay focused during the study period.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my research participants (church leaders) who took time off from their busy schedule to contribute to the study.

I would like to thank Nomabelo Mvambo-Dandala, Director of Diakonia Council of Churches, Nokulunga Khumalo, Diakonia Council of Churches Programs Coordinator, and Bridget Phillips, KwaZulu Natal healing of memories workshops Coordinator for assisting me with every bit information I needed for this study and for further helping me in gathering my sample for the study.

My gratitude goes to my family, particularly my wife Olivia Niyodusenga, my son Nathan Niyodusenga and my daughter Isabella Niyodusenga for moral guidance, financial support, and prayers throughout the study period.

My gratitude and appreciation to Sharon Gene-Dalgleish, Gloria Hage, and Margaret Dostal Fell for their moral and financial support.

Above all, I give glory to God for giving me strength, wisdom and the resources throughout the study.

## **Abstract**

Child abuse is considered as a societal problem. Globally, studies have shown a high rate of child abuse in communities. However, very little is known in social science research about the response of religious leaders towards child abuse. This study aimed to understand the response of religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.

The study used the ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework to understand the extent of child abuse as a societal problem influenced by different environmental factors and church leaders' experiences in managing and dealing with child abuse cases.

This qualitative study included twelve church leaders from different denominations selected through a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews, which were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data.

The study findings showed that child abuse is a pandemic in communities. The socio-economic circumstances such as substance abuse, parental/caregiver mental health, and cultural beliefs are key contributors to the abuse of children. The participants reported sexual and emotional abuse as the highest cases they deal with in communities.

Despite South African legislation that protects and promotes children's rights, the participants reported that many child abuse cases are not reported to authorities. Lack of knowledge about the reporting procedures, the child's safety after reporting, and the safety of the church leaders were reported as major challenges in reporting child abuse cases.

Findings revealed that church leaders play a critical role in managing child abuse cases. They offer social, spiritual, and child and family support. Some of the churches' leaders provide ongoing life skills programs for youth to help them cope with everyday challenges.

The findings highlight the religious community's critical challenges in fulfilling the mandate of the Children's Act of mandatory reporting of child abuse cases in communities. These challenges impact child protection responses. Despite these challenges, the religious sector offers a wide range of preventive and family interventions in communities that strengthen children's support.

This study concludes that church leaders' responses towards child abuse are essential to ensure the well-being of child abuse victims and families.

Keywords: religious leaders, child abuse, child.

## **List of Acronyms**

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACRC	African Charter on the Rights of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the rights of the child
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
CBE	Catholic Board of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
ISPCAN	International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
RPIRCK	Religious for Peace Inter-Religious Council of Kenya
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

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# **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

An estimated three hundred million children worldwide are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse (Chowdhury, Islam and Mia, 2014). In addition, Wessells (2015) argues that in humanitarian settings, children face a myriad of risks such as separation from caregivers, family violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, disabilities, violence in schools and communities, early marriage, justice-related issues, living and working on the streets, dangerous labour, trafficking, HIV and AIDS, and the inability to have their basic needs met. Children are never fully safe from adults, despite noble-sounding statements describing children as pure as flowers, innocent angels, the future of nations, etc. Rather, the extent of violence against children has increased over time (Chowdhury, Islam and Mia 2014).

Binford (2015) argues that although South Africa established itself as a leader in the international community recognizing children's rights through the 1924 Geneva Declaration and the 1959 Declaration, however, the rise of apartheid policies after World War II led to a widespread failure to respect those same rights domestically. For example, Janssen, Van Dijk, Al Malki and Van As (2013) argue that during the apartheid era in the Black and Indian communities, child-maltreatment was often dismissed as a domestic matter. Furthermore, Binford (2015) asserts that the apartheid regime's brutality during the Soweto uprising is cited by some as the death knell for apartheid, as even those countries that had tolerated the government's violations of the civil rights of adults could not rationally defend the killing of innocent school children. Children as young as eleven years were detained for attending a funeral to express their grief (Binford, 2015). Moreover, the Apartheid Internal Security Act allowed authorities not to inform relatives of the detention of a family member. This legislation violated children's family rights. Children were left behind without parental support, which contributed to hunger and a lack of essential resources.

South Africa has a history of strong, proud, and vocal children who demanded the recognition of their rights under apartheid and during the transition to democracy (Binford, 2015). In 1992, over 200 South African children met in the Western Cape at the International Summit on the Rights of Children to address the violations of their rights and discuss the problems they faced following apartheid. Their discussions led to the drafting of the Children's Charter of South Africa, which

concluded that children excluded in the nation's transition to constitutional democracy and that children's rights were not on the agendas of either the government or any of the political parties (Binford, 2015).

Consequently, the Republic of South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in June 1995 without a single reservation and later on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted in 1996 with provisions to protect children from all forms of abuse (Binford, 2015).

Janssen, Van Dijk, Al Malki and Van As (2013) add that besides the government's legislative framework, civil society organizations have been actively bringing attention to the rights of the child. For example, there have been annual activities in South Africa during Child Protection Week to raise awareness of children's rights.

This chapter presents the background of the study, the role of the religious leaders in addressing child abuse, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, theoretical framework, research design, research methodology, the significance of the study, study assumptions, limitations of the study, definitions of concepts, structure of the dissertation and conclusion.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

Child abuse is widespread nationally and internationally. Child abuse became a public issue in the early 1970s (Howe, 2005). Steelman (1976) argues that child abuse and neglect are not recent phenomena but can be traced back to man's cultural and religious history. Dinehart and Kenny (2015) concur with Steelman (1976) that child maltreatment is an enormous global problem with serious impacts on victims' physical and mental health, well-being, and development throughout their lives. Bethea (1999) is correct when stating that child abuse or maltreatment includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and general, medical, and educational neglect.

Given that child abuse is a global societal problem, it has received international attention as an issue that affects children worldwide. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 ensured that everyone understood that the rights it enumerated supplemented children's core rights as human beings (Binford, 2015). For example, article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or

punishment.” In addition, children's rights were recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. For example, Article 19 of the UNCRC emphasizes that the state’s mandate to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse from anyone with parental responsibilities. The protection of children against abuse is articulated in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Article 16 of the ACRWC states that children should be protected from all forms of torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse (Siljeur, 2017).

South Africa’s approach to child abuse strengthens how the above international instruments have attempted to resolve issues related to child abuse. In addition, the increase of child abuse within South African communities has inevitably added pressure on the government to provide a legislative framework that would ensure access to justice for children affected. For example, South Africa’s 1996 Constitution, Section 28, focuses specifically on the rights of children. Binford (2015) argues that South Africa's Constitution is worded in such a way that it affirmatively obligates the nation to protect children from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation as well as exploitative labour practices. Furthermore, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 is a comprehensive piece of legislation that affords children the necessary care, protection, and assistance to ensure that they can develop to their full potential (Sibanda and Lombard, 2015).

Child abuse requires a multifaceted approach where access to justice, a safe environment, child protection systems and structural factors that expose children to abuse are dealt with. In light of this, improving the legislative framework in isolation from other factors that intersect to create child vulnerability will be unfruitful. It is therefore imperative that interventions from stakeholders and multidisciplinary systems are well coordinated to report and respond effectively to child abuse in society. Dixon (2005) cites that when multidisciplinary agencies fail to coordinate a child abuse response, cases are often compromised and children can be further harmed by the very system that exists to protect them. The article 110 of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 requires professional sectors, including religious leaders, to report any child abuse, neglect or maltreatment that is suspected on reasonable grounds to a designated child protection organisation, police officials or the provincial department of social development.

### **1.3 The role of the religious sector in addressing child abuse**

Although child protection was traditionally seen as the police and magistrates' roles, other sectors also play a vital role (Wessells, 2015). Le Roux, Kramm, Scott, Sandilands, Loots, Olivier, Arango, and O'Sullivan (2016) argue that religious communities are uniquely positioned to prevent and respond to violence against women and children. For example, at the conference on Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities: Child Dignity in the Digital World (19-20 November 2018) in Abu Dhabi, interfaith communities argue that that religious leaders have the power to make a huge difference in the fight against child abuse because about eighty-five per cent of the world claims to believe in a religion and that puts religious leaders in a unique position to be part of the solution. With their extraordinary moral authority, religious leaders can influence thinking, foster dialogue, and set priorities for members of their communities.

The religious community is also involved in advocacy activities that address children's rights. Wessells (2015) argues that communities include valuable protection resources such as religious leaders who respond to and prevent harm to children. The 2006 Religions for Peace World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, with almost one thousand religious leaders from various world religions, adopted the 'Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children' (the Kyoto Declaration). The Kyoto Declaration outlines ways in which religious communities can eliminate violence against children in line with the recommendations from the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against children (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

In South Africa, the church as a change reformation agency could be the driver for a transformative agenda in enhancing the reformation by addressing the socio-economic needs in the new democratic dispensation (van Wyk, 2017). For example, the Catholic Board of Education (CBE) has developed a Child Safeguarding policy for use in all Catholic Schools to make sure that the welfare and rights of children are promoted and protected and that children are not harmed, exploited and abused (Catholic Institute of Education, January 2018). In addition, UNICEF and the World Council of Churches report (March 2017) affirms the role of churches in addressing children's needs by encouraging church leaders to be at the forefront of offering care and protection to those who are vulnerable within communities. The World Council of Churches and UNICEF established the programme "Churches Commitment to Children to encourage church leaders to examine the different aspects of child protection and ways in which they can contribute to a healthy

and life-giving environment for children to flourish (UNICEF and World Council of Churches report, March 2017). Furthermore, the Diakonia Council of Churches has been running the social justice season, which runs in August to September yearly to encourage church leaders to reflect on social justice issues from the Christian faith perspective and be inspired for social action. Nomabelu, the Director of Diakonia Council of Churches stated that church leaders need to reclaim the South African dream and speak out against the injustices perpetrated on the poor (Diakonia Council of Church Annual Report 2013).

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem**

Child abuse is a common problem in South African communities. Richter and Dawes (2008) argue that children's abuse and maltreatment is shockingly high in South Africa. A recent study on Child Abuse Tracking (CAT) in South Africa by the Children's Institute indicates that between 20 – 34% of children experience some form of contact violence before the age of 18, whilst 62% of children report sexual abuse and 16% of children report emotional abuse (Children's Institute Annual Report 2016). Despite these statistics, Richter and Dawes (2008) conclude that it is difficult to establish the number of child abuse cases in South Africa. Children's Institute concurs with Richter and Dawes (2008) that the child protection system in South Africa is under-resourced and that social workers are failing to manage their foster care cases (Children's Institute Annual Report 2016).

In the greater child protection context, Richter and Dawes (2008) argue that the South African government has committed itself to preserve and uphold children's rights. Several legislations relating to children's rights have been passed and civil society, including the religious sector, is visibly active in calling attention to children's abuse and violence perpetrated against children (Richter and Dawes, 2008).

Despite the protection intended by civil society and the legislative system to safeguard children's rights, child abuse continues to be perpetrated against a large number of children every day in South Africa communities (Richter and Dawes, 2008). In consideration of these challenges, the researcher primary aim is to understand the responses of religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal. The religious community has a role in child protection, yet little is known about what this sector offers and their experiences of working in child protection

space. Therefore, it is clear that there is a need to engage with child protection systems, including the religious sector.

### **1.5 Research questions**

In order to achieve the study's objectives, the study answers the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of religious leaders about the nature, extent and causes of child abuse in South Africa?
2. How do religious leaders respond to child abuse as a societal problem?
3. What extent do religious leaders understand their legal and moral obligations towards child abuse?
4. How do religious leaders address and manage child abuse cases?

### **1.6 Research objectives**

The specific objectives are:

1. To understand religious leaders' perceptions about the nature, extent and causes of child abuse in South Africa.
2. To explore the response of religious leaders towards child abuse.
3. To examine the extent to which religious leaders manage and address child abuse within the communities they serve.
4. To examine the extent to which religious leaders understand the South African legislative provisions applicable in child abuse cases.

### **1.7 Theoretical framework**

In this study, the researcher was guided by the theoretical framework, namely; ecological theory. The ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that the religious leaders can draw up in dealing with child abuse cases. Therefore, in exploring the responses of religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, the researcher applied the above mentioned theory. Boston and Broad (2007) argue that ecological theory highlights that every event or phenomenon must be seen as part of a whole and that it can only properly be understood with reference to every other part of the larger system. In addition, Ryan (2001) asserts that the theory focuses on the continual interactions between families, groups, communities and their

environment. The application of ecological theory is crucial as child abuse does not happen in isolation but it is surrounded by a broader social structure interconnected with other social domains and environments. The ecological theory consists of four environmental levels of the microsystem, exosystem, mesosystem and macrosystem (Ryan, 2001).

In the context of child abuse, the response from church leaders can be guided with one or more ecological theory environment levels that influence human behaviour. According to Ryan (2001), (i) the microsystem of the abused child consists of the child and the people in the child's immediate social environment such as family and friends. It involves personal relationships with family members, classmates, teachers and caregivers; (ii) the exosystem is the social context in which the child lives including the neighbourhood, the school and professionals responders to child abuse (in this case religious leaders are included); (iii) the macrosystem is composed of the child's cultural patterns and values, specifically the child's dominant beliefs and ideas, as well as political and economic systems; iv) the mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. For example, the connection between the child's teacher and his/her parents or between the child's church and his/her neighbourhood.

One of the strengths of this theory is that it allows tackling numerous environment factors and numerous persons in different interaction, relationships, roles, actions and processes (Härkönen, 2001). In line with this theory, the individual behaviours are largely determined by environment with which the person interacts. This theory does not consider the person's psychological and cognitive determinants of behaviour, the role of personal choice and use of agency in determining behaviour.

Based on this information, for child abuse to be addressed, reported and prevented, the ecological systems theory is suitable for this study because of its flexibility to the understanding of the interconnection factors that influence and contribute to child abuse. In responding to child abuse, church leaders are required to take into consideration ecological environmental levels in order to analyse and intervene in child abuse cases effectively. The theory assisted to understand and determine the influence that various ecological system levels play regarding their effects on child behaviours, social interactions and family interactions.



## **1.8 Research methodology**

### **1.8.1 Research design**

The research design refers to the conceptual framework within which the research is conducted. A research design ensures that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible (De Vaus, 2001).

This study used a descriptive design. According to Mouton and Marais (1998), a descriptive study paints a detailed picture of a social situation or relationship. This design is relevant for this study because, according to Blaikie (2003), a descriptive study is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. In this case, the study described the responses of religious leaders towards child abuse cases.

### **1.8.2 Research methodology**

In order to explore the responses of religious leaders towards sexual abuse in eThekweni Municipality, a qualitative methodological framework was used. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is multi-method in focus and involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. They added that a qualitative researcher studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

In this study, the researcher conducted interviews using an unstructured interview schedule. This permitted the researcher an opportunity of capturing and interpreting both verbal and non-verbal information.

## **1.9 Significance of the study**

Although child abuse has received much attention among scholars and researchers, the problem remains widespread in South Africa. According to Hendricks (2014), children are subjected to a full spectrum of abuse including verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Children who face abuse often suffer both physical and mental injuries and are at risk of abuse in the future (Gran and Gaddie, 2002).

It is also argued that most of the studies have been focusing on successful responses from private and government services towards child abuse, thus studies have proven to be deficient by

excluding religious sector initiatives. In order to break the cycle of child abuse, the civil society including the religious sector needs to take up the responsibility as part of their core activities or programmes. It is therefore in this context that the study aims to explore the responses of religious leaders towards child abuse to ensure the well-being, care, protection and safety of children within communities.

It is also hoped that the study questions themselves will stimulate interests among religious leaders to take their legal and moral obligations on child abuse further. As a result of this study, it is hoped to see greater collaboration and support among religious leaders and sub-systems within communities to find effective solutions to dealing with child abuse problems in South Africa.

It is further hoped that the study will strengthen the capacity building interventions for religious communities and referral systems in dealing with child abuse cases. This study will also generate findings to better understanding the role of church leaders in dealing with child abuse in South Africa since there is limited literature in this field.

#### **1.10 Study assumptions**

Assumptions about this study are as follows:

1. Religious leaders in eThekweni Municipality are representative of religious leaders in KwaZulu Natal.
2. Religious leaders currently hold a leadership position within their dominations.
3. Religious leaders have been involved in child abuse and child protection initiatives for at least a year.
4. Religious leaders understand their legal and moral obligations towards child abuse.

#### **1.11 Limitations of the study**

The study was limited to the religious leaders who currently hold leadership positions and who have dealt with child abuse and protection cases for at least a year. The views of religious leaders who do not hold these leadership positions were not included in the research.

The religious community included in this study was only from Christian religious groups, those affiliated to the Diakonia Council of Churches and the Institute for Healing of Memories were included in this study.

All participants who met the research criteria were males.

### **1.12 Definitions of concepts**

The main concepts that are featured frequently in this dissertation are discussed below:

*i) Child:* According to the South African Constitution of 1996, section 28 (3), a child is a person younger than 18 years.

*ii) Child abuse:* The South African Constitution (1996) defines child abuse “as any form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child” (a person under 18 years of age). This includes any act or inaction that has the potential risk to harm the child or cause an infringement of a child’s rights in terms of Section 28 of the South African Constitution. According to the World Health Organization (2002), child abuse or maltreatment includes all forms of ill-treatment, whether psychological, physical or emotional, experienced by a child, including sexual abuse, negligent or neglectful treatment, and exploitation in any form (Goldberg and Lekoba, 2010).

*iii) Sexual abuse:* The World Health Organisation (2002), defines sexual abuse as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, he or she is unable to give consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. It may include but is not limited to (i) the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; (ii) the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; and (iii) the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (Goldberg and Lekoba, 2010).

*iv) Physical abuse:* Physical abuse is defined as physical injuries to a child caused by punches or kicks, shakes or smacks, burns or scalds, suffocating, bites or poisons (Howe, 2005). In addition, physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child (Balan, 2017).

*v) Emotional abuse:* Radford, Corral, Bradley, Fisher, Bassett, Howat, and Collishaw (2011) define emotional abuse as the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. There may be acts towards the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Acts include restrictions, patterns of belittling,

denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other non-physical forms of hostile.

*vi) Child neglect:* A persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or developmental needs. Neglect includes failing to provide for a child's health, education, emotional development, nutrition, clothing, shelter, safety, and safe living conditions, and includes the exclusion of the child from the home and abandonment (Radford, Corral, Bradley, Fisher, Bassett, Howat and Collishaw, 2011).

### **1.13 Structure of the dissertation**

**Chapter 1:** In Chapter 1 of this study, the background and the context, statement of the problem, research questions, research aims and objectives, theoretical framework, research methodology, the significance of the study and limitations of the study are provided. In addition, the concepts used are clarified for better understanding of the context of the study.

**Chapter 2:** This is the literature review chapter covering the following major segments that relate to the objectives of the study: Child abuse in the South African context, child abuse in the context of religious beliefs and practices, the roles of the religious leaders in response to child abuse, the religious sector's response to child abuse advocacy, factors that influence the religious sector response to child abuse advocacy, challenges or barriers of the religious sector in child abuse advocacy, church leaders interventions in dealing with child abuse, and the legal framework including the legal responsibilities of religious leaders in response to child abuse.

**Chapter 3:** This is the research methodology chapter covering the research approach and design, population and sampling method, the data collection approach, the data collection process, recording of data, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations.

**Chapter 4:** This chapter presents the research key findings based on the collected data.

**Chapter 5:** This chapter focuses on discussing each specific objective and draws recommendations and conclusions. The chapter will also identify possible areas for future research.

## **1.14 Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter was to outline the background and introduction to this study. The chapter introduced the research study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, research design, research methodology, the significance of the study, study assumptions, limitations of the study and definitions of concepts. The chapter also provided a structure of the dissertation. In the next chapter, the reviewed literature is discussed.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Child abuse, one of society's social ills, is a global problem. Different nationalities and social groups vary considerably in the way in which they perceive and address the issue (Richter and Dawes, 2008). Weisberg (1978) observe that child abuse first became a visible social problem and a matter of intense public concern in Western industrialised countries in the eighteenth century. It is important to note that prior to this, children had been hurt, killed, injured and exploited by others well before this period.

Protecting children from all forms of maltreatment and neglect is everybody responsibility. Churches, communities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government institutions play a critical role in protecting children. Yet in many countries around the world, there is little or no local or national government capacity and commitment to protect children and, as a result, children's rights are violated daily (International Save the Children Alliance Annual Review 2008).

Child protection traces its earliest roots to efforts initiated by communities of faith. In the greatest child protection context, O'Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) point that many faith communities are equipped with an ideal structure for the inclusion of children in a caring community, such as rituals for welcoming children and programming for youth to participate in these communities. As such, the churches serve as a potentially natural starting point for an expansion of child protection efforts.

Despite the churches' efforts to protect children, the interventions churches provide to respond to child abuse are largely ignored in social science research.

For purposes of this research, greater attention is given to relevant literature on child abuse in the context of the religious sector. The chapter will explore the current trends of child abuse globally and in South Africa, consequences of child abuse on children, child abuse in the context of religious beliefs and policies, child sexual abuse and physical abuse in the religious sector, the role of religious leaders in response to child abuse, the religious sector's response to child abuse advocacy and factors that influence the religious sector's response to child abuse advocacy, challenges and barriers of church leaders to address child abuse, the church leaders interventions

to child abuse, mandate of religious leaders to report child abuse, and the legal framework related to child abuse at the international and national level.

## **2.2 Child abuse context globally and in South Africa**

Child abuse is a worldwide problem. Katzenstein and Fontes (2017) argue that child abuse is acknowledged as a vast worldwide problem with wide-ranging negative effects on victims, their families and society as a whole. For example, the United States' Department of Health and Human Services reported that over 686,000 child abuse cases were reported in 2012 (Kleinman, 2015). In addition, O'Donnell, Scott and Stanley (2008) state that between 1999 and 2004, child abuse notifications doubled in Australia. Furthermore, Famuyiwa (1997) argues that concern for victims of child abuse in Africa was expressed by the African Network of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN, 1986), which gave five main presentations of child abuse: child labour, street wandering, sexual abuse, child battering, and abandonment. For example, the report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and Save the Children United Kingdom in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone revealed alarming levels of child sexual abuse and exploitation of refugees' children (Lalor, 2004). Lalor (2004) concludes that the children most vulnerable to child abuse are those without the care of their parents, children in child-headed households, orphaned children, children in foster care, children living with extended family members, and children living with just one parent.

In South Africa, there has been an increase in the prevalence of child abuse in South Africa in the past few decades. Child abuse and neglect is a serious and escalating problem for all children in South Africa (Pierce and Bozalek, 2004) as they are abused by their families, at school, on the streets, in churches and in statutory care, and a designated place for child protection (Richter and Dawes, 2008). Hendricks (2014) asserts that the period between 2012 and 2013, 495 540 cases of crimes against children were reported. He adds that these cases are under-reported and the statistic is estimated to be at least nine times higher than the actual number. Richter and Dawes (2008) argue that it is difficult to establish the size of 'the problem' of child abuse in South Africa, partly because it is an omnibus category, it is illicit and therefore often hidden, and there are complexities and variation in definition, community understanding and reporting levels.

However, organisations such as Childline have resources that allow children to initiate disclosure report that children are raising the abuse themselves. For example, 3428 calls were received from children reporting physical abuse in 2008 on their crisis line. Furthermore, Van As and Millar (2012) argue that in South Africa it is estimated that at least 6 500 children aged 1 - 14 years die each year as a result of unintentional injuries, often physical or sexual abuse; this rate is 10 times higher than that in European countries.

Richter and Dawes (2008) state that it is difficult to determine the extent of child abuse within South Africa communities. For example, in disadvantaged communities where poverty and lack of resources are very high, physical abuse of children often goes unnoticed especially when such abuse occurs in homes and it is seen as a form of discipline.

## **2.4 Consequences of child abuse on children**

The consequences of child abuse vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage. Currie and Spatz Widom (2010) argue that child abuse has major consequences to child health and well-being. There is increasing evidence that child abuse increases a child's risk of negative consequences across multiple domains of functioning and development time points, including psychiatric, social, behavioural, academic, and interpersonal functioning (Currie and Spatz Widom, 2010). In addition, Norman, Byambaa, De, Butchart, Scott and Vos (2012) state that child abuse has huge consequences on children's health, sometimes the impact is immediate and direct (injuries and deaths), but, more often, it is long term, affecting emotional development and overall health. Al Odhayani, Watson and Watson (2013) concur that the consequences of child abuse might not manifest until later in life.

Several studies have reported that maltreated children are at an increased risk of lower levels of educational achievement and intellectual performance as well as higher rates of truancy, school expulsion, and grade retention and repetition (Currie and Spatz Widom, 2010). Leeb, Lewis and Zolotor (2011) argue that child abuse affects all aspects of the lives of those victimized including poor physical health, reduced cognitive ability and educational attainment, and impaired psychosocial functioning and mental health. For example, teens who were abused as children are more likely to experience depression and they are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviour and perpetrate violence (Tajima, Herrenkohl, Moylan, and Derr, 2011).



Children who suffer physical and emotional abuse may manifest a variety of external and internal injuries that can be life-threatening (Leeb, Lewis and Zolotor, 2011). For example, during 2007, an estimated 1760 children died as a result of child abuse in the United States of America (Currie and Spatz Widom, 2010). Howe (2005) adds that physically abused children can show a variety of problems including aggressiveness, poor social skills and an inability to establish trust with others, low motivation, reluctance to initiate action, poor problem-solving capacity, poor performance in schools, and behavioural violence at the late stage. For example, the recent studies on the effects of child abuse proved that adults who have experienced childhood physical abuse were more likely to raise families in which there is violence (Howe, 2005). Briere and Elliott (1994) argue that chronic irritability, unexpected or uncontrollable feelings of anger, and difficulties associated with the expression of anger have been reported by child victims. Such feelings can become internalized as self-loathing and depression or be externalized and result in the perpetration of abuse against others (Briere and Elliott, 1994).

Jonzon (2006) argues that child sexual abuse is known as a risk factor for ill-health and has the potential to induce tremendous long-term psychological symptoms of depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, sexual problems, obsessions, dissociation and post-traumatic stress responses. In addition, Finkelhor and Browne (1985) state that sexually abused children can experience betrayal not only at the hands of offenders but also from family members who are not abusing them. For Finkelhor and Browne (1985), the children experience stigmatization due to the negative connotations such as shame and guilt that are communicated to the child around the experiences and that become incorporated into the child's self-image. Briere and Elliott (1994) conclude that recent studies indicate that a wide range of psychological and interpersonal problems are more prevalent among those who have been sexually abused than among individuals with no such experiences.

Spirituality and religiosity were found to negatively affect the victims in most studies of child abuse. Galea (2008) argues that child abuse is related to both religious and spiritual injury and distress but also to increased frequency of prayer and spiritual experience. In addition, Russel (2018) concurs with Galea (2008) that the victims of abuse do not only suffer from the physical and psychological impact of their victimization, but also the spiritual repercussions. Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) conclude that child abuse not only violates a child's physical and

emotional integrity, but it also violates a child's spiritual integrity, especially when child abuse is perpetrated in the name of religion or tradition.

It is clear that child abuse has lasting consequences on the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of children. Norman, Byambaa, De, Butchart, Scott and Vos (2012) state that a lack of understanding child abuse consequences and a burden on society has hampered investment in prevention policies and programs. In order to effectively respond to the child abuse problem, the World Health Organization (2006) report on the prevention of child maltreatment recommended expanding the scientific evidence for the consequences and preventability of child abuse (Norman, Byambaa, De, Butchart, Scott and Vos, 2012).

## **2.5 Child abuse in the context of religious beliefs and practices**

Religious beliefs and practices are inseparable from other contributing factors to child abuse and neglect (Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira, 2016). Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman and Qin (1995) argue that religious beliefs are another route through which children become victims of religious ideology. The study by Bottoms, Nielsen, Murray and Filipas (2004) with nearly 650 members of the Christian Reformed Church revealed that while church attendance was inversely related to reported perpetration of child abuse, the majority of members believed the church does little to prevent abuse when Christians too often use the Bible to justify abuse and that church leaders are not prepared to help members of their churches who are victims of abuse.

Respect for religious beliefs is a constitutional right but if it interferes with the best interest of the child principle, it could constitute child abuse. For example, in Zimbabwe, members of the apostolic communities, especially among religious objectors or ultra-conservative groups do not allow their children to be immunized or their sick to be treated using modern medication (Muguranyanga, 2011 in Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira, 2016). Adding to the child abuse in the context of religious beliefs, Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman and Qin (1995) state that religious groups most noted for shunning modern medicine include Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not believe in blood transfusion, and Christian Scientists, who favour prayer over other medical procedures.

Based on the examples above, it is evident that some of the religious beliefs and practices inadvertently violate children's health rights. Health care is one of the children's basic needs yet

parents' religious beliefs may undermine children's best interests. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) Article 24(1), "States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to health care services." In addition, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC 1999), Article 14(1), "Every child shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health." Furthermore, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa no 108 of 1996, section 28(c) says that every child has the right to health care services."

Children's Act no 38 of 2005, Chapter 3 (2) (a) states that parents have the responsibility to care for the child. In addition, the Children's Act no 38 of 2005-chapter 2 (9), the UNCRC (1989) article (3), the ACRWC (1999) article 4 (1) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Section 28 (2) provide that the best interests of the child are paramount and must always be considered when deciding matters pertaining to children. Therefore, parents have a legal obligation to refrain from actions that may harm the child regardless of their religious beliefs and practices for the interest of the child.

### **2.5.1 Child sexual abuse in the religious sector**

Child sexual abuse is a form of abuse commonly reported in South African communities. Many countries including South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1999). The article 19 (1) of the UNCRC provides that, "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." Article 27 of the ACRWC provides that, "States Parties should ensure that the child is protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In addition, the South Africa Government established the local legislation such as the Children's Act 38 of 2005, Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 and Section 28 of the South Africa Constitution to protect children from maltreatment, neglect and sexual abuse. As Amstrong (1998) in Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira (2016) puts it, the challenge facing signatories of the UNCRC is the protection of the child from sexual abuse which has its origins in the cultural and social context of individual countries. It is therefore difficult to monitor the enforcement of

these laws because the majority of children are in the legal custody of their families and family life is considered to be private (Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira, 2016).

A substantial number of religious leaders have been reported for child sexual abuse both in South Africa and abroad. Duncan (2015) contents that perpetrators of child abuse can be members of churches or church leaders and are able to take advantage of this anomaly. She adds that it's not that churches teach people to abuse, but that those who tend to abuse will find environments where they can practice abusive behaviour and a church can be that environment (Duncan, 2015). For example, in October 2018, the Bishop of Trinity Apostolic Church in South Africa was sentenced to life in prison after he was found guilty of raping a teenage girl (The Citizen, 24 October 2018). In addition, a religious leader from Durban allegedly repeatedly raped four girls, all members of his church between 2015 and 2018 (SABC News, 17 November 2018). These incidences have galvanized a group of influential faith leaders to call for immediate and decisive action to protect children from sexual abuse. For example, Dino Gabriel, the current Anglican Bishop of Natal strongly criticized the alleged involvement of senior members of the clergy in perpetuating gender-based violence against women and children (Siljeur, 2017). Dixon (2013) in Siljeur (2017) adds that the Archbishop of Durban, Cardinal Napier, has taken an approach in dealing with accused clergy and the victims of child sexual abuse. The Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Cardinal Napier advised in an interview with the BBC in May 2013 that the alleged cases of child sexual abuse were handled internally by the church and not referred to the police. Siljeur (2017) argues that in July 2014, Pope Francis emphasized in his meeting with sexual abuse survivors that bishops have an obligation to ensure the protection of children and that they will be held accountable. Pope Francis said, "There is no place in the Church's ministry for those who commit these abuses, and I commit myself not to tolerate harm done to a minor by an individual, whether a cleric or not. All bishops must carry out their pastoral ministry with the utmost care in order to help foster the protection of minors, and they will be held accountable (Siljeur, 2017).

On the other hand, child marriages have increased in Africa (including South Africa) for the last few years, a practice that cuts across cultures and religions. Nour (2009) argues that marriages in which a child under the age of 18 years old is involved occurs worldwide, but are mainly seen in Africa. He adds that child marriage is a silent and yet widespread practice. In recent studies on child abuse, the statistics from 2003 in South Africa shows that 6% of girls in South Africa are

married before the age of 18 years and 1% are married under the age of 15 (Watkins, 2016). Masonga and Shokane (2016) state that men in African Initiated Churches (AIC) in Limpopo are allowed to practice polygamy based on their beliefs and religion. Furthermore, the majority of school-going girls in Marange, Zimbabwe marry older men from their church, the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect, which is infamous for following the practice of polygamy (Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira, 2016).

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 18 December 1979, article 16 (a) provides that men and women of full age have the same right to marry and found a family. It further provides in article 16 (b) that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending parties. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), Article 21 (2) provides that “Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.” In a study by Sibanda (2011) on child marriage in Zimbabwe, one member of the apostolic church said that most of the church leaders hide behind prophecies and they abuse their positions as prophets to handpick girls for the elderly men in the church. The imposition of marriage for children affects their right to a childhood and their fundamental rights are compromised. It is, therefore, the obligation of the church leaders to protect the best interest of the child by protecting and addressing the rights of children and their overall well-being to the best of their capabilities.

### **2.5.2 Child physical abuse in the religious sector**

Physical abuse affects many children each year nationally and internationally. However, physical abuse is also occurring within the context of religious beliefs. As Greven (1991) in Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman and Qin (1995) argue that encouragement for violence and physically abusive child-rearing techniques can be traced to the Biblical passages such as “He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. And “Whoever spares the rod hates their children” (Proverbs 13: 24). Thus, corporal punishment is accepted by different churches as a way of disciplining and bringing up the child and it is not seen as a way of degrading and humiliating children even though it may cause physical harm and emotional abuse (Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman and Qin, 1995).

In the study of parenting attitudes and discipline practices, Thompson, Christiansen, Jackson, Wyatt, Colman, Peterson, Wilcox and Buckendahl, (1999) observe the connection between religion and beliefs in corporal punishment, and how certain religious beliefs and tenets foster and justify child abuse often using skewed religious texts. Even though the UNCRC, Children's Act 38 of 2005 and the South Africa Constitution specifically prohibit child maltreatment including corporal punishment yet religious conservatives still act in disobedience of these child protection legislations in honour of their religious beliefs and practices (Thompson, Christiansen, Jackson, Wyatt, Colman, Peterson, Wilcox and Buckendahl, 1999).

The recent article on Corporal Punishment in the Home Officially Banned in South Africa by Quintin Coetzee (September 19, 2019) asserts that corporal punishment as part of the judicial system has been banned since the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act came into effect in 1997. The same has been banned in schools since the South African Schools Act of 1996. However, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2019, the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that the common law defence of 'reasonable and moderate chastisement' was unconstitutional, effectively banning all corporal punishment of children including prohibiting parents from spanking their children at home as a form of discipline (Relocation Africa Group, 19 September 2019).

Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches is correct when stating that "the use of violence by parents when children irritate or frustrate them, teaches children that one is supposed to act violently against what one dislikes that is the very fountain of the endemic culture of violence in our society. In the name of the loving Jesus of Nazareth, we say NO to violence against children" (Sowetan, 5 December 2018).

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu concurs with the Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana and says that

Progress towards abolishing corporal punishment is being made, but millions of the world's children still suffer from humiliating acts of violence and these violations of their rights as human beings can have serious lifelong effects. Violence begets violence and we shall reap a whirlwind. Children can be disciplined without violence that instils fear and misery. If we want a peaceful and compassionate world, we need to build communities of trust where children are respected, where home and school are safe places to be and where discipline is taught by example (Church Network for Non-Violence report, May 2015).

Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) note that in 2011, a hundred influential religious leaders from various faiths met at a conference in Qom, Iran, supported by UNICEF in collaboration with the Iranian Judiciary and Centre for Human Rights Studies at Mofid University, Qom. Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) add that religious leaders declared the role of religious leaders in confronting corporal punishment of children as:

All religious leaders and their followers to make efforts, based on religious teachings, to utilize their capabilities to build the culture of respecting children's dignity and the principle of the best interests of the child, and to confront violence against children, particularly violence in the form of corporal punishment in the home and educational settings.

The above examples clearly show that despite the negative publication about religious leaders' maltreatment towards children, there have been positive initiatives where religious leaders have been raising their voices to end all forms of violence against children which have endeavoured to uphold the rights of children.

## **2.6 The role of the religious leaders in response to child abuse**

Religious leaders have a critical responsibility to deal with child abuse in society. Churches leaders are the most trusted and respected in their communities because of the role in which they play in shaping attitudes and behaviours of their community members. Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) assert that religious leaders have the power to help people across the entire spectrum of society to understand that violence against children is a human rights violation. Magezi (2017) concurs with Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) saying that one critical player in community responses are faith-based organisations (FBOs), particularly churches. This may include raising awareness, speaking openly about child abuse, providing spiritual and social support to child abuse victims and those families affected through mediation.

Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) argue that religious communities can reference the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as the framework for ensuring that children's human rights are protected and enshrined within their own legal and normative frameworks, as well as those of society at large. Furthermore, religious communities can promote awareness and education to enable children and adults to become more conversant with the concepts of children's

rights and can translate the ideals of the Convention into a spiritual and religious context (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

The section below will discuss the religious sector's response to child abuse advocacy and challenges or barriers encountered in child abuse advocacy.

### **2.6.1 The religious sector's response to child abuse advocacy**

According to Boylan and Dalrymple (2011), advocacy is a regular feature of human interactions in which anyone may either need advocacy support or act as an advocate. Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) assert that church leaders can be powerful children's advocates because they can raise awareness about the effects of violence against children and they can work towards child abuse prevention by putting into action the shared values of compassion, love, non-violence and justice. Advocacy requires a group of people with the same mission and vision. It is therefore very critical for church leaders to have a shared understanding of child abuse to promote and break the cycle of child abuse in communities.

Botha (2010) point out that within the South Africa context, faith-based organisations play a critical role in the lives of children in many of the households, not only because of the services they provide but because they frequently facilitate access and negotiate barriers on behalf of children to state services. For example, during 2007, the South African Council of Churches, an umbrella organisation representing over 16 million Christians of 26 denominations in South Africa, supported by Save the Children, produced a position paper and a submission to the Portfolio Committee of Social Development. The paper explained the religious arguments against corporal punishment:

The common law does not tolerate violence against women, the aged or any adult for the matter. Neither does the common law distinguish between levels of violence of whatever intensity on whatever part of the body and with whatever implement the beating was meted out. Likewise, we should not entertain the thought of accepting any level of violence that involves children (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

Church leaders must recognize that children are more vulnerable in communities. Failure to protect children undermines the biblical obligation to protect vulnerable children.



Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) argue that the Kyoto Religious for Peace World Assembly declaration in 2006 outlines ways religious communities can work to eliminate violence against children in line with the recommendations from the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children. Religious leaders committed themselves to eliminate violence against children:

We must acknowledge that our religious communities have not fully upheld their obligations to protect our children from violence. Through omission, denial, and silence, we have at times tolerated, perpetuated and ignored the reality of violence against children in the home, families, institutions, and communities, and not actively confronted the suffering that this violence causes. Even as we have not fully lived up to our responsibilities in this regard, we believe that religious communities must be part of the solution to eradicating violence against children, and we commit ourselves to take leadership in our religious communities and the broader society (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

Harder and Haynie (2012) observe that most church leaders support the implementation of child protection guidelines presented at Kyoto conference but to monitor the congregations who have adopted and implanted these guidelines in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is difficult.

Violence against children remains pervasive in Ethiopia where children regularly face humiliating physical punishment and psychological abuse at home, in schools and the community at large (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010). The national religious group, for example, was created in Ethiopia in 2008 to address corporal punishment and the harmful cultural practices against children which were the female genital mutilation/cutting, especially amongst men. The group reinforces its message through media interventions and outreach to the population at large, promoting clear and consistent information to ensure the full rights of children consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional agreements (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

In the greater child abuse advocacy context, Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) assert that in Kenya, Religious for Peace Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (RPIRCK) condemned the rising incidents of sexual and other forms of violence against children. In a powerful statement, the Council called on all Kenyans to act and protect children from all forms of violence and abuse,

stating that acts of violence hamper children's growth and deny them the opportunity to develop into healthy and wholesome adults (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010). For example, religion plays a big part in Tarime district, Tanzania in the fight against female genital mutilation or cutting practice as most churches advocate against the practice and refer to it as satanic (African Union, 2015).

From the above, it is evident that the religious sector played and can continue to play a significant role in addressing child abuse, strengthening and mending relationships in families and communities.

### **2.6.2 The applicable principles in child abuse advocacy**

Professionals in child care, including church leaders, must ensure that the best interest of a child is a key consideration in all matters concerning the child (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2011). In addition, professionals (including the church leaders) working with children must ensure that children are not discriminated against in decision-making processes. It can be argued that the best interest principle is a check to ensure that professional decision-makers carry out their responsibilities for the benefit of the child (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2011).

The South Africa Children's Act 38 of 2005, Chapter 2 (9), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 3(1) and the ACRWC, article 4 (1) provide that the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration. Therefore, church leaders should understand and adhere to the Children's Act and other relevant legislation relating to children. Duncan (2015) asserts that church leaders can equip themselves with the knowledge to respond to children's rights or neglect to do so and risk inflicting harm on those who come to them for help.

Mathews and Benvenuti (2014) argue that violence against children not only impacts children and families but also impacts an entire society. Therefore, church leaders must ensure a child-safe church environment. Erasmus and Mans (2005) assert that Christian communities of whatever size, shape or wealth must stand against the sexual exploitation of children within churches spheres of influence. It is clear that a holistic approach and partnership is required to advocate the end of violence against children. Matthews and Benvenuti (2014) argue that ecological theory is critical to a better understanding of the dynamic interplay between the child and social context such as how the family, school, church and community influence the child's development. Building on

this theory, church leaders are committed to advocating with local and national authorities for effective prevention of violence against children and adolescents.

### **2.6.3 Challenges in child abuse response from the religious sector**

Hamilton (2008) in Duncan (2015) advises that in most denominational churches, conversations around abuse are still taboo despite the heightened media attention around child abuse disclosures. Trothen (2012) in Duncan (2015) concurs that the wider Christian church has tended to equate sexuality with sin and silence any broader conversation regarding sexuality as taboo. Harder and Haynie (2012) agree that many church leaders avoid in dealing with child abuse cases because of the taboo nature of discussing sexual abuse in public.

Lack of education and understanding about the concept of child abuse and the related legislation is the biggest challenge for the church leaders. The study by Harder and Haynie (2012) shows that most of the church leaders interviewed agreed that education addressing the scope and nature of child abuse in community and church was needed to understand the concept and the nature of child abuse. In the context of South Africa, the majority of the church leaders, especially in rural communities use their local language in their services. The fact that the majority of relevant legislation related to children are written in English and the content is based on the Western context, creates a barrier for some church leaders to understand the child protection policies fully in order to advocate child abuse issues effectively. Harder and Haynie (2012) concur that lack of education among church leaders and congregational resistance were common responses as to why churches had not yet adopted child protection policies and procedures. Furthermore, many church leaders admitted that they tend to avoid dealing with child abuse cases because of a lack of skills and training in the field of abuse prevention and fear of alienating other church members, especially in cases of family abuse (Harder and Haynie, 2012).

Church leaders have a limited collaboration with other institutions in dealing with child abuse cases. O Neil et al (2010) in Harder and Haynie (2012) assert that a lack of trust and the misconception between churches and social service agencies prevent large scale collaborations from taking place. Church leaders, social service providers, and other community members must collaborate if they are to keep children safe and create communities committed to the healthy development of children (O'Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder, 2010).

The scale of child abuse in South Africa is immense as I highlighted in chapter 2, page 18 and it requires the proper coordination and collaboration in order to address it. It is therefore very critical for church leaders and the existing systems on the ground to work together. Garland and Chamiec-Case (2005) in O'Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) said that President George W. Bush recognized the need for comprehensive integration of services in an April 2007 proclamation stating that, "Family members, educators, public officials, faith-based and community organisations all play important roles in helping to ensure that children are safe and can grow surrounded by love and stability.

The call by the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa on the 25 November 2020 during the International 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, advocated for all stakeholders, including church leaders, to work together to eradicate gender-based violence in all its forms, including sexual harassment in the workplace, at places of learning, and places of worship (The Presidency, 25 November 2020).

Cultural beliefs, values and norms within communities contribute to the challenges that religious leaders face in dealing with child abuse. Richter, Richter, Dawes and Higson-Smith (2004) argue that cultural issues are relevant to child sexual abuse in three major ways: how cultural beliefs and attitudes contribute to family climates in which children can be abused; how cultural organization prohibits or hinders disclosure; and how culture plays a role in seeking or accepting social service or mental health assistance. Raman and Hodes (2012) concur with Richter, Richter, Dawes and Higson-Smith (2004) and say that while the influence of culture on child-rearing and child development is acknowledged, the nexus between children at risk of abuse and neglect and dealing appropriately with culturally diverse populations is more challenging. For example, *ukuthwala* is the practice of abducting young girls and forcing them into marriage, often with the consent of their parents. The practice is illegal and harmful to the wellbeing of young girls. Gaanakgomo (2019) asserts that the South Africa Children's Act 38 of 2005 and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have passed a law that protects children from harmful practices, but the '*Ukuthwala*' is still evident in some parts of the country. For the interest of the child, religious leaders are well-resourced to sensitively challenge harmful practices against children (Religions for Peace and UNICEF, 2010).

## **2.7 Church leaders' interventions in dealing with child abuse**

### **2.7.1 Church leaders' intervention on child abuse victims and families**

Many churches members see church leaders as the foundations of guidance and support, especially in dealing with children. The church leaders are to develop and implement early interventions that support families and children after receiving the child abuse report. Louw (2007) in Manda (2013) argue that the experience of trauma affects all the people involved including the support systems. Manda (2013) concurs that the family of the survivor of child abuse may also go through some type of trauma which would be expressed in the form of fear, horror, and feelings of hopelessness to assist the person involved in the trauma.

Goldman, Salus, Wolcott and Kennedy (2003) are correct saying that child abuse interventions cover a broad spectrum of services such as parent education and home visitation for audiences ranging from the general public to individual who has abused or neglected a child. O Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) concur that survivors of child abuse and neglect and their families often need public and private services, including medical care, counselling, child protection services, special education, and substance abuse treatment.

Spiritual leaders can play important roles in supporting families and protecting children by providing counselling and spiritual leadership to their congregation and families (Goldman, Salus, Wolcott and Kennedy, 2003). Vieth, Tchividjian, Walker and Knodel (2012) argue that survivors of child abuse often experience conflicting spiritual experiences after the abuse occurs. Some child abuse survivors turn to God for help in coping with and making spiritual and emotional meaning of the abuse while also questioning how God could allow the abuse to occur in the first place. For example, in Ghana, where domestic violence against children and women remains a serious social ill, congregants often feel safe and comfortable to disclose their most private secrets to their religious leaders, including the often-painful secret that they are experiencing abuse in their homes (Davies and Dreyer, 2014).

It is evident that church leaders play a critical role by offering counselling and spiritual support to the child abuse victims to prevent re-victimization. Davies and Dreyer (2014) conclude that as a response to child abuse by the religious sector, church leaders should focus on aspects of faith and spirituality that are central to the frame of reference of people of faith.

### **2.7.2 Church leaders' non-formal and formal collaboration in responding to child abuse**

Wessells (2015) argues that communities frequently have endogenous mechanisms that act locally, without facilitation or guidance from Non-Governmental Organizations or the government. For example, community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) are local-level groups or processes that respond to violations against children operate at grassroots levels and work to prevent risks to children (Wessells, 2015). It is very critical for the church leaders to recognize their boundaries of expertise and utilize the referral systems and the existing structures that are available such as shelters, sexual abuse centres and rehabilitation centres (Duncan, 2015). Chireshe, Chireshe and Mudhovozi (2009) argue that church leaders are to work with other institutions and churches in dealing with child abuse cases. For example, in Southern Africa, where large numbers of children had been orphaned by HIV and AIDS, faith-based groups organized supports for orphans (Wessells, 2015). Wessells (2015) concurs that because such action comes from the community itself, it generates high levels of felt responsibility and collective ownership.

In addition, church leaders are to engage with police officers, child protection officials or church protocols to investigate the child abuse case, the nature of the case and the strength of evidence. For example, in the BBC radio journalist interview on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, Cardinal Napier indicated that when he dealt with cases in which priests have sexually abused children, he followed a protocol developed by the Church itself. He insisted that each case was referred to the Doctrine of the Faith office and the Pope (BBC, 16 March 2013).

Furthermore, Chireshe, Chireshe and Mudhovozi (2009) assert that depending on the nature of the child abuse case, the church leaders might involve doctors to offer medical support to the child abuse victim. A doctor in the area of child abuse is required to institute a medical examination within 48 hours from the time of abuse (Chireshe, Chireshe and Mudhovozi, 2009). Furthermore, Chireshe, Chireshe and Mudhovozi (2009) add that Non-Governmental Organizations, schools and the Department of Social Welfare provide crisis intervention and long-term counselling services to the child abuse victims and their families, and facilitate the necessary referral procedures in order to reduce both the short and long-term consequences.

For example, in exploring church leaders' response to child abuse in communities, the Institute for Healing of Memories initiated the community healing dialogues in Umbumbulu community, KwaZulu Natal to discuss issues related to child abuse in the community. The church leaders

reported that they work with other existing partners and stakeholders in the community in dealing with child abuse cases (Institute for Healing of Memories annual report, 2017). Lapsley and Karakashian (2012) argue that through sharing unique yet interconnected stories, victims of child abuse move towards individual healing and collective understanding. Manda (2013) agrees with Lapsley and Karakashian (2012) that the sharing of feelings and emotions prevents repression and displacement into other child abuse symptoms such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

## **2.8 The mandatory reporting of child abuse by religious leaders**

In South Africa, children's rights in line with international conventions were developed in post-1994. The Children's Act No 38 of 2005, Section 110 (1) states that:

[a]ny correctional official, dentist, immigration official, labour inspector, legal practitioner, medical practitioner, midwife, minister of religion, nurse, occupational therapist, psychologist, religious leaders, social service professional, social worker, speech therapist, teacher, traditional health practitioner, traditional healer, or member of staff or volunteer worker at a partial care facility, drop-in centre and youth care centre to report when they suspect that a child has been abused in a manner causing physical injury, sexually abused and deliberately neglected.

Hendricks (2014) argues that the amendment of section 110(b) of Act 38 of 2005 stipulates that suspected child abuse must be reported to child protection organisations, the provincial Department of Social Development or the police. He adds that Section 110 of the Children's Amendment Act implies that reporting (using the reporting form 22) of the suspicion of abuse must be done as soon as the suspicion is formed on reasonable grounds and the reporting has to be processed in good faith.

Reid, Reddock and Nickenig (2014) argue that the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, Section 54 (1) provides that "a person who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a child must report such knowledge immediately to a police official." Section 54 (1) (b) states that "a person who fails to report such knowledge is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both a fine and imprisonment." Child sexual abuse is prohibited by law, and it is mandatory for any parent, guardian, temporary custodian, or health provider with

reasonable grounds for suspicion to report sexual abuse activities involving persons under the age of 16.

It is therefore clear that church leaders or anyone who is involved with children in one capacity or the other have a moral and legal obligation to report any case of suspected child abuse.

The religious leaders are aware of their legal obligation to report child abuse cases, but they find it difficult to fulfil this responsibility (O'Neil, Gabel, Huckins and Harder, 2010). For example, during the interview with a BBC radio journalist on child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, Cardinal Napier said:

For instances in our country, in South Africa, there was no way I, as bishop could have accused somebody and reported the case and made a case with the police. It would have to be the victim himself/herself who would have to make the case against the person and only then could the justice system kick in (BBC, 16 March 2013).

Irrespective of the type of child abuse case, in an interview with the Stephen Nolan programme on BBC adds that in terms of section 42 of the Criminal Procedure Act, any private person is legally entitled without a warrant to report any person “whom he reasonably suspects of having committed any sexual offence against a child (BBC, 16 March 2013). For the interest of the child as it stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa section 28(2), Children's Act no 38 of 2005, UNCRC article 3(1) and ACRWC article 4(1), Cardinal Napier had the legal right to report the offending priests at the moment that he was told by someone about the sexual abuse by the priests.

Dalton (2012) argues that the seal of confession in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, obligates priests to keep secret all matters that have been relayed to them to obtain absolution. However, despite the seal, in the article by Nicole Winfield asserts that Pope Francis issued a law mandating that every priest or member of a religious order who knows of a case of clerical sexual abuse or who has good reason to believe that such abuse took place must report that abuse to authorities (AP May 9, 2019).



## **2.9 Legal framework related to child abuse**

### **2.9.1 International legislation**

Wessells (2015) concurs that the primary components of child protection systems include laws and policies. Religions for Peace and UNICEF (2010) argue that the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a universal standard for children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most comprehensive legal instrument for the protection of the rights of the child and has so far been ratified more widely than any other human rights instrument. In addition, Hendricks (2014) adds that the United Nations and its signatories acknowledge that children are a vulnerable group and provides some guidelines on how children and their rights should be protected by signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 19 of the Convention obliges State Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

On the other hand, Siljeur (2017) argues that Article 16 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) re-enforces the importance of the safety and the security of the child:

States Parties to the present Charter to take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of the child.

As Siljeur (2017) concludes, the CRC and ACRWC contain comprehensive provisions for the protection of the child in general and specifically relating to child abuse. He adds that the frameworks on the religious sector for the safeguarding of children and South African legislation are explored based on this international understanding.

### **2.9.2 South African legislation**

Janssen, van Dijk, Malki and van As (2013) argue that after the first democratic elections in 1994, the South Africa government introduced a safe environment for children. For example, the South African government adopted the resolutions as contained in the United Nations Convention on the

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1996 and later of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. They also argue that a protocol for reporting child abuse and neglect was developed by the Institute for Child and Family Development and adopted by the post-apartheid government.

Section 28 (1) (d) of the South African Constitution holds that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse and/or degradation (Hendricks, 2014). Section 28(e) states that every child has the right to be protected from exploitation labour practices, and section 28(f) re-enforces that every child has the right not to be required or permitted to perform work or services that (i) are inappropriate for a person of that child's age; or (ii) place at risk the child's wellbeing, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development (Hendricks, 2014).

Jamieson, Sambu and Mathews (2017) cite the Children's Act no 38 of 2005, section 110(1) specifically deals with reporting an abused or neglected child and a child in need of care and protection. They argue that this section compels certain professional sectors including religious leaders to report any child abuse, neglect or maltreatment that is suspected on reasonable grounds to a designated child protection organisation, the provincial department of social development or a police official. If the reporting is done in good faith and substantiated to the relevant authorities, the professionals responsible will not be held liable to civil claims as a result of their reporting. The Act further stipulates that the Department of Social Development must assess and further manage the situation in the best interests of the child (Jamieson, Sambu and Mathews, 2017).

In the greater child protection context, Janssen, van Dijk, Malki and van As, (2013) assert that the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, section 54(1) compels a person who knows or who has a suspicion of any form of sexual abuse against a child or mentally challenged individual to report it to a police official. Jamieson, Sambu and Mathews (2017) add that if such reporting is done in good faith, in terms of section 54(2) (c), the person reporting cannot be held liable in criminal or civil proceedings.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a review of the literature on child abuse globally and in South Africa and the role of religious leaders in dealing with child abuse cases. It was revealed that despite available legislation to protect children in South Africa, children continue to be abused and molested daily.

Religious leaders can play a critical role in addressing the violence against children and in this way, their interventions greatly advance efforts to promote and protect the rights of children. The chapter also discussed the religious leaders mandatory reporting of child abuse and challenges many religious leaders encountered in reporting and dealing with child abuse cases.

Moreover, in this chapter, it was stated that child abuse has a negative effect on children's development and wellbeing, as well as the families and communities that are directly or indirectly affected. In order to break the cycle of violence against children in South Africa and globally, child abuse as a societal problem needs to be addressed effectively and the holistic intervention is to be a priority for policymakers and all stakeholders including religious leaders.

The following chapter discusses the methodology employed to conduct this study.

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Daniel, Kumar and Omar (2018) define research methodology as the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the selection and use of methods to the desired outcomes. This chapter discusses the research approach, research design and sampling method used in this study, including the data collection and analysis applied to explain the data behaviour. The chapter also specifies the trustworthiness of the data, limitations and the ethical guidelines reflected through the study.

### **3.2 Research approach and design**

To answer the key objectives of the study, a qualitative research design was used to gain more in-depth insight from the church leaders about their response towards child abuse in Durban, South Africa. According to Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2019), qualitative research is concerned with understanding the processes and the social and cultural contexts which shape various behavioural patterns. Qualitative research strives to create a coherent story as it is seen through the eyes of those who are part of that story, to understand and represent their experiences and actions as they encounter, engage with, and live through situations (Wagner, Kawulich and Garner, 2019). In line with Wagner's argument, this qualitative method was suitable for this study.

Boeije (2010) argues that the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. Furthermore, Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007) strengthen this notion that qualitative research takes place in the natural setting which enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants.

### **3.2 Research design**

Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner (2019) argue that a research design tells you how you are going to conduct your research, for example, which methodology is appropriate. Akhtar (2016) concurs with Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner (2019) that the research design stands for advanced planning of the methods to be adopted for collecting the relevant data and the techniques to be used in the analysis, keeping in view the objectives of the research.

Qualitative research was used in this study. Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) argue that the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide elaborate textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It offers information about the human side of the studied phenomenon, that is, the often contractor behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals.

An exploratory-descriptive research design was used as it intended to give the specific details of the studied phenomenon. An exploratory research is used to gain a richer understanding of unknown phenomenon in the area of the research study (Klopper, 2008). In addition, Hunter, McCallum and Howes (2019) define exploratory research as a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life. However, Akhtar (2016) asserts that descriptive design is used to identify and obtain information on characteristics of a particular issue in a community, group or for people. Mouton and Marais (1998) concur with Akhtar (2016) that descriptive research paints a detailed picture of a social situation or relationship. Therefore, in this research, an exploratory-descriptive research design was relevant to produce a new understanding of the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse.

### **3.3 Population and recruitment of the participants**

The first task in sampling is to identify and define precisely the population to be sampled (Burns 2000). A population is an entire group of people or objects or events which all have at least one characteristic in common and must be explicitly and unambiguously defined (Burns, 2000). Blaikie (2003) states that a population is an aggregate of all units or cases that conform to some designated set of criteria. Furthermore, a population is any group of individuals who have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher (Best, 1989).

A sample of this study included 12 church leaders from different denominations affiliated to the Diakonia Council of Churches and non-affiliated church leaders connected to the Institute for Healing of Memories.

The Diakonia Council of Churches is an ecumenical, inter-church agency, working with churches and church organisations in the pursuit of a more just society. In partnership with the church leaders, the organization plays a transformative role by enabling people to take responsibility for

their lives and to promote prophetic action related to social justice issues. Diakonia Council of Churches believes that churches are life-affirming communities, where people are empowered by their faith to overcome the despair around them. Churches have a unique contribution to make to the struggle against injustice and societal issues.

The main task of Diakonia has always been to help people in churches to get involved in issues of injustice and human rights violation. For example, in the 70s and 80s, the Diakonia Council of Churches led protests against the forced removals of people from Clairwood, Pinetown and St Wendolin. They started a petition for church leaders to sign, hold services, and take part in the marches and meetings that culminated in the lifting of the threat of forced removal. In addition, the Diakonia Council of Churches mobilized support for those held in detention without trial and organized church services protesting against those killed in prison in the 80s.

Since 1994 until today, the Diakonia Council of Churches continues to encourage eThekweni church leaders to be involved in the issues that affect communities including violence against children and to work with the church leaders and church structures to address the high levels of domestic violence against children, women, and other violations of basic human rights. For example, on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017, the Diakonia Council of Churches invited church leaders from different denominations to march against all forms of abuse of children and women as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. The Memorandum was handed to the eThekweni mayor's office, the National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa and South African Police Service (Diakonia Council of Churches Annual Report 2017).

Diakonia Council of Churches was selected as a recruitment site for several reasons. Firstly, Diakonia has historical interventions in addressing human rights and the rights of children through church leaders. Secondly, church leaders from different denominations are affiliated to the Diakonia Council of Churches.

In addition to recruiting from Diakonia, the Institute for Healing Memories was the second recruitment site. The Institute for Healing of Memories seeks to contribute to lasting individual and collective healing that makes possible a more peaceful and just future. Since the 1990s, the Institute has facilitated workshops and events that enable people from different racial, religious, and social backgrounds to reach a better understanding of themselves and each other. The Institute believes that when personal stories are heard and acknowledged, individuals feel healed and

empowered, and their dignity is restored. At the same time, bridges can be built across communities, and a common path forged based on mutual understanding and shared values.

The Institute, therefore, provides a creative and experiential outlet for participants to overcome feelings such as anger, hatred, prejudice, forgiveness, and guilt as the first step on their journey to psychological, emotional, and spiritual healing and wholeness. The Institute has worked with church leaders to organize participants from their churches and communities to attend the Healing of Memories workshops. Frequently, the participants include children who have experienced different forms of abuse. Lapsley and Karakashian (2012) reported findings that indicate that the workshops conducted by the Institute benefit abused children. The workshops unlock their feelings to help them to deal with the feelings of being abused.

I was therefore motivated to select church leaders who have been organizing children to attend the Healing of Memories workshops in the eThekweni Municipality. Through the Institute, I identified other interventions church leaders offered to child abuse victims.

### **3.4 Sampling method**

The sample for this study was drawn from the population using a sampling process. In line with qualitative research, the researcher selected a small and manageable subset of the population. Marshall (1996) defines sampling as a systematic process of selecting participants for a research project. In addition, Oppong (2013) concurs with Marshall (1996) and notes that sampling is a process of selecting subjects to take part in a research investigation on the ground that they provide information considered relevant to the research problem.

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to recruit the participants. Davies (2007) asserts that purposive sampling invites the researcher to identify and target individuals who are believed to be typical of the population being studied, or perhaps to interview all individuals within a subpopulation that are deemed to be typical of the whole. In addition, Marshall (1996) argues that purposive sampling allows the researcher to select the most productive sample to answer the research question. Therefore, this method allowed for the recruitment of church leaders who met the research criteria and who were willing to be interviewed. Furthermore, Boeije (2010) concludes that in purposive sampling, the sample is intentionally selected according to the needs of the study.

The sample consisted of twelve religious' leaders from the following denominations: Methodist Church, Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, Gospel Church of Christ International, Apostolic Faith Mission, All Nations Ministries, Lutheran Church, El Shaddai Community Church, United Reformed Church and Fraternal Church.

The purposive criteria of inclusion for the study include:

- a) A person who currently holds a leadership position within his/her denomination.
- b) A church leader who has been involved in child abuse and/or child protection for at least one year.

The recruitment process was conducted with the religious leaders affiliated with the Diakonia Council of Churches. In the same manner, non-affiliated religious leaders who are connected to the Institute for Healing of Memories were recruited. Permission was requested from the Diakonia Council of Churches and the Institute for Healing of Memories to utilize their existing records to access church leaders who met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

A list containing the contact details of the religious leaders was sought from the Diakonia Council of Churches. In addition, the list of non-affiliated religious leaders was provided by the Institute. Umlazi community, one of the biggest townships in eThekweni Municipality was identified as one of the sites where recruitment was going to start for two reasons: Firstly, the list obtained from the Diakonia Council of Churches indicated a significant representation of religious leaders from Umlazi community. Secondly, the Umlazi community is one of the communities in eThekweni with the highest cases of child-headed households and sexual abuse. In the recent article on sexual abuse cases on the rise in KZN, the Prince Mshiyeni Hospital in Umlazi community alone received about 200 cases of child sexual abuse every month in 2016 (Daily News, 2 June 2016).

However, on recruitment, the majority of religious leaders from Umlazi community reported that they were not involved in child abuse cases and child protection work. Three church leaders from Umlazi community met the inclusion criteria of the study. The researcher decided to call other church leaders from the lists who did not reside and work in the Umlazi community to reach a sufficient number. In total, nine church leaders were recruited; one from Lamontville community, one from Durban Central community, one from Gamalakhe community, two from Bhongweni community, one from Umzimkulu community, one from Wentworth community, one from



KwaMashu community, and one from Dambuza community. Therefore, three leaders were from Umlazi community and nine were from other communities as stated above.

In line with the sampling criteria stated earlier, the church leaders involved in child abuse and child protection work at least for a period of one year were included in the sample. The recruitment focused on church leaders from Christian churches because of the nature of the Diakonia Council of Churches work with Christian faith churches. Furthermore, the Institute for Healing of Memories is not a faith-based organization; however, only Christian leaders have been organising the Healing of Memories workshops for child abuse victims. Therefore, three participants were affiliated with the Catholic Church, one participant was affiliated with the Methodist Church, one participant was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, one participant was affiliated with the Gospel Church of Christ International, one participant was affiliated with the Apostolic Faith Mission, one participant was affiliated with All Nations Ministries, one participant was affiliated with the Lutheran Church, one participant was affiliated with El Shaddai Community Church, one participant was affiliated with the United Reformed Church and one participant was affiliated with the Fraternal Church.

### **3.5 Data collection approach**

Since this is a qualitative study, the researcher intended to understand the responses of church leaders towards child abuse. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data for this study, guided by an interview schedule. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) argue that the semi-structured interview method helps to clarify concepts and problems. Furthermore, it allows for the establishment of a list of possible answers or solutions which, in turn, facilitates the construction of more highly structured interviews. Adding to the benefits of the semi-structured interviews, Dane (1990) concurs with Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) that semi-structured interviews encourage the respondent to discuss a topic but provides little or no guidance and very few direct questions.

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researcher investigated how the church leaders dealt with child abuse cases in their work. Elliot (2005) in Manda (2013) asserts that texts on the use of qualitative interviewing in social research routinely begin from the premise that semi-structured and in-depth, interviews provide the ideal method for discovering more about individuals' lives and intimate experiences. In addition, Bell (2003) in Manda (2013) state that

interviewing allows participants to make explicit, certain feelings, beliefs and opinions which might otherwise have been left unsaid and/or passed unnoticed.

### **3.6 The data collection process**

The researcher interviewed twelve church leaders selected from the population. The researcher conducted all the interviews in English because all the participants were fluent in English. The average duration for each interview was 1 hour 30 minutes. Four interviews took two hours as these participants needed more time to share their experiences and challenges that they face in dealing with child abuse and protection cases within their churches and communities. Although two hours was quite long for these interviews, it allowed the researcher to obtain rich and detailed data.

The interviews were face to face which allowed the participants to relax and be comfortable during the interview process. The face to face interviews allowed the researcher to explain the research topic and questions fully to participants and to capture verbal and non-verbal data such as body language. Bell (2003) in Manda (2013) argues that face to face interviews provides a greater capacity for the correction of misunderstanding by respondents however, Wagner, Kawulich, and Garner (2019) correctly state that face to face interviews are a way to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information and the researcher can clear up any misunderstandings of particular questions during the interview process.

The interviewing location for the interviews was chosen by the participants. The space was safe and quiet for the participants and the researcher. Herzog (2012) states that the place of the interview should be convenient to the participants, private, yet if at all possible, familiar to him/her. She added that it should be one in which the participants feel comfortable and secure. In this respect, all the interviews were conducted in church offices where church leaders normally perform their daily religious responsibilities.

Therefore, participants felt safe and comfortable. The times to conduct the interviews were proposed by the participants in line with their availability.

During data collection, most religious leaders concluded that the research topic was important for the church to know about. Some of the leaders requested the researcher to make a presentation to their entire congregation. The researcher presented the study objectives as well as its relevance. These presentations were conducted before the interviews. For example, the religious leader of the

Lutheran Church in Lamontville invited the researcher to speak to the congregation about the research during the church services on Sunday morning. The researcher was given 15 minutes to talk about the research topic, objectives, and research questions. After the presentation, the congregation requested support in organising a workshop on child abuse once the research is completed and another workshop to present the findings. In addition, the Lutheran Church leader in Lamontville requested another presentation of the research to the youth and lay ministers within his church. The enthusiasm from the religious leaders to learn more and understand the role of the church in child protection was exciting and encouraged me as a researcher. Moreover, the responses from the religious leaders indicated that this study was important to them as a religious community.

### **3.7 Recording of data**

Stuckey (2014) asserts that data obtained from qualitative interviews are usually recorded, transcribed and then inspected for evident themes. Since semi-structured interviews often contain open-ended questions, discussions may diverge from the interview guide therefore, it is generally best to audio record the interviews and later transcribed for analysis (Stuckey, 2014)).

During the interviews process, an audio recorder was used to capture the conversation effectively. Since the use of the recorder is an ethical consideration, the researcher asked for the participants' permission to record the interview beforehand. The participants could opt for the recorder to be switched off during the interview. It is important to highlight that none of the participants requested that the recorder be turned off. Field notes were written after each interview to document the researcher's observations, thoughts, and reflections about the meeting.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is defined as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase the understanding and credibility of the data. The end product of the analysis enables the presentation of what you have discovered to others (Boeije, 2010). He adds that the analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is essential and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007) argue that data analysis involves

preparing the data, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used thematic analysis. Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017) argue that thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. Through focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of a collection of shared meanings and experiences. The thematic method is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun, 2017).

### 3.8.1 Steps of thematic analysis

The following steps were used to analyse data based on Maguine and Delahunt (2017).

Table 1: Steps to Thematic Analysis

Step	Activity	Description of the process
1	Familiarizing myself with my data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading transcripts and noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Organizing data and coding interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data set, collating relevant data to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Review themes	Gathering all data relevant to each theme; reading the data associated with each theme and considered whether there is a clear alignment between the theme and the data associated with it.
5	Define themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall descriptive topics; gathering clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	Providing an analytic narrative, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts,

		relating back the analysis to the research questions and literature.
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### **3.9 The trustworthiness of the study**

#### **3.9.1 Credibility**

Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Anney, 2014). Krefting (1991) asserts that credibility establishes how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants and the context in which the study was undertaken. He adds that a qualitative study is credible when it represents such accurate descriptions or interpretation of human experience that people who also share that experience would immediately recognize the descriptions. Furthermore, Krefting (1991) argues that the reframing of questions, repetition of questions, or expansion of questions on different occasions are ways in which to increase credibility. Krefting (1991) concludes that to ensure the credibility of this study, firstly, purposive sampling was used to select the sample. In such way, the researcher selected the most appropriate participants for the study. Secondly, the researcher conducted the field interviews and the data was transcribed word for word. Thirdly, the researcher emailed transcripts to participants who checked them to make sure that the researcher captured all that was discussed during the interview process.

Through the interviews with participants, the researcher established rapport and he reminded them about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity. As a result, participants trusted the researcher and were able to share their experiences confidently.

#### **3.9.2 Transferability**

Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2007) argue that transferability refers to whether or not findings can be applied outside the context of the study situation. In addition, Anney (2014) states that transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents. The researcher created a safe environment that allowed participants to express their experiences in dealing with child abuse cases freely. By exploiting the theoretical approach guiding the study, the research findings can be transferred and applied to other

contexts and populations. Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016) conclude that transferability refers to the degree to which the phenomenon or findings described in one study are applicable or useful to theory, practice, and future research.

### **3.9.3 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing someone outside the research to follow, audit and critique the research process (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman, 2016). To ensure dependability and consistency, an in-depth semi-structured interview technique was used for collecting data. The researcher ensured that the study procedures were documented and could be checked and examined by someone outside of the study.

### **3.9.4 Confirmability**

Hamberg, Johansson, Lindgren and Westman (1994) argue that confirmability means that the evaluation of the neutrality of a research study is moved from the researcher as a subject, and instead is focused on the data and the interpretation of the data. Confirmability requires the researcher to fully reveal the data he/she is basing his/her interpretations on or at least make those data available so that other researchers can examine them and confirm, reject or modify the original interpretations (Hamberg, Johansson, Lindgren and Westman, 1994). Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016) argue that to achieve confirmability, researchers must demonstrate that the results are clearly linked to the conclusions in a way that can be followed and, as a process, replicated. To ensure confirmability, the researcher transcribed the interviews and made use of additional notes that were taken during the data collection. The researcher also saved recorded data and utilized relevant literature to analyse and interpret data.

### **3.9.5 Ethical considerations**

The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009). Boeije (2010) argues that those who are researched have the right to know that they are being researched, and they should actively give their consent. Ferreira and Serpa (2018) add that ethics should not be perceived as a constraint, but rather as a dynamic procedure aimed to guide and support the responsible exercise of professional judgment and, thus enhance the quality of research. The researcher informed each interviewee that his/her

name and contact details will be kept confidential. Ferreira and Serpa (2018) emphasise that whenever possible and relevant, to ensure that research participants may consciously accept their role, and there must be a guarantee that they have been informed beforehand about the research and its present and future implications e.g. during the research process and in the product of its dissemination.

### **3.9.6 Voluntary participation and informed consent**

The researcher requested the interviewees' voluntary consent to participate in the research. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from being part of the research at any stage of the study. The informed consent form was signed by each interviewee. Boeije (2010) asserts that one important general ethical requirement for the research's introduction to the field is informed consent. The researcher has an obligation to fully outline the nature of the data collection and the purpose for which the data will be used to the people or community being studied in a style and language that they can understand (Boeije, 2010). Appendix 2 is an example of the format that was used in order for participants to give consent. All participants understood the contents of informed consent and the nature of the study before they signed to voluntarily participate in the study.

### **3.9.7 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Baez (2002) argue that confidentiality creates a sense of safety and allows participants to feel comfortable sharing private feelings and thoughts. Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2006) advise that the notion of confidentiality is underpinned by the principle of respect for autonomy and is taken to mean that identifiable information about individuals collected during the process of research will not be disclosed without permission. They add that the concept of confidentiality is closely connected with anonymity in that anonymity is one way in which confidentiality is operationalised. The researcher, therefore, followed the ethical standards throughout the interviews process to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the data analysis. It was explained to all interviewees that they could withdraw at any point during the interview processes which would not result in any negative relationship.

Whelan (2007) defines anonymity as the degree to which the identity of a message source is unknown and unspecified. The researcher did not use the participants' real names. Each participant

was given a pseudonym name. The researcher explained to the participant that any information that might identify him personally will not be included in the research.

In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, Wiles, Crow, Heath and Charles (2006) suggest the following:

- Not discussing the issues arising from an individual interview with others in ways that might identify an individual.
- Anonymizing individuals and/or places in the dissemination of the study to protect their identity.
- To ensure that the names of participants are not disclosed by those who have access to the data such as the research team and the research data and records must be kept in a safe environment.

### **3.9.8 Protection from harm**

Child abuse is a very sensitive issue, therefore, sharing experience in dealing with child abuse cases may cause distress. During the interviews process, the researcher tried to minimize harm by focusing on participants' experiences in dealing with child abuse and protection cases rather than focusing on child abuse victims' stories. In addition, the data collection method did not cause any form of harm to the participants. Furthermore, the researcher had arranged for counselling support available to them should they need it.



### **3.9.9 Authorization from gatekeepers**

The researcher obtained permission from the Diakonia Council of Churches and the Institute for Healing of Memories to conduct the research. Appendix 3 and 4 displays the gatekeepers' letters. The researcher presented the gatekeeper letters to each interviewee as his permission to conduct the research. The purpose of the research was fully explained to each interviewee at the beginning of each interview.

### **3.9.10 Ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu Natal**

The researcher obtained a certificate of Ethical Clearance from UKZN's Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the methodology employed by this study. The research design, sampling method, data collection and data analysis were discussed. The chapter also described the processes by which data was collected, transcribed and translated into findings. The limitations of the study were highlighted. Finally, the chapter outlined the ethical guidelines that the study adhered to. In the following chapter, attention will be on the discussion of the main themes that emerged from data.

## Chapter 4: Responses of the religious leaders towards child abuse

### Presentation and discussion of findings

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this exploratory study was to understand the response of religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal. This chapter presents the findings of the study as aligned with the research questions and research objectives set at the beginning of the study.

#### 4.2 Demographic profile of participants

The table below presents the profiles of the participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants. The participants were from the following communities: Umlazi community, Durban Central community, Gamalakhe community, Bhongweni community, Umzimkulu community, Wentworth community, KwaMashu community and Dambuza community.

*Table 4.1. Demographic details of participants*

Name	Gender	Congregation	Affiliation	Community
Rev. Bonginkosi	Male	Methodist Church	Diakonia Council of Churches	Umlazi
Rev. Mandla	Male	Catholic Church	Diakonia Council of Churches	Umlazi
Elder Funani	Male	Catholic Church	Diakonia Council of Churches	Durban Central
Rev. Linda	Male	Presbyterian Church	Diakonia Council of Churches	Lamontville

Bishop Lwandle	Male	Original Gospel Church of Christ International	Diakonia Council of Churches	Umlazi
Rev. Lungelo	Male	Apostolic Faith Mission	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Gamalakhe
Rev Dumisani	Male	All Nations Ministries	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Bhongweni
Rev Fanyana	Male	Lutheran Church	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Umzimkulu
Elder Nkanyezi	Male	Catholic Church	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Wentworth
Pastor Siyanda	Male	El Shaddai Community Church	The Institute for Healing of Memories	KwaMashu
Rev Nkosiyo	Male	United Reformed Church	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Dambuza
Rev. Mthunzi	Male	Fraternal Church	The Institute for Healing of Memories	Bhongweni

Table 4.1 presents the biographical information of the 12 participants who participated in the semi-structured interviews. Although it was unintentional, the participants were all males, which reflects the scarcity of female religious leaders. On average, the participants had at least a two-year history of being involved in child abuse cases in their communities. In addition, the participants had been living in their respective communities for a long time and had become knowledgeable about the status of child abuse in communities.

## 4.2 Presentation and discussion of findings

Themes and sub-themes are used to present the main findings. In this chapter, eight main themes were presented.

**Table 4.2 presents the main themes and sub-themes**

Theme	Sub-theme
4.2.1 Church leaders' understanding of child abuse.	
4.2.2 Child abuse as a pandemic	
4.2.3 Church leaders' understanding of factors contributing to child abuse	4.2.3.1 The culture of silence in addressing and reporting child abuse cases.  4.2.3.2 Socio-economic circumstances.  4.2.3.3 Parental/caregiver stress mental health.  4.2.3.4 Substance abuse (alcohol and use of drugs).  4.2.3.5 Harmful cultural practices specifically forced marriage- Ukuthwala.
4.2.4 Understanding church leaders' moral and legal obligation in reporting child abuse cases	
4.2 Understanding church leaders' challenges or barriers in reporting child abuse cases	4.2.5.1 Lack of knowledge on the reporting procedures.  4.2.5.2 Limited knowledge and understanding the context of child abuse.  4.2.5.3 Church leaders' safety and the safety of the child after reporting.
4.2.6 Church leaders' implementing the South Africa legislation that relates to child abuse	

4.2.7 The experience of church leaders' in dealing and managing child abuse cases	
4.2.8 Church leaders' experience on the effects of child abuse.	
4.2.9 Conclusion	

#### **4.2.1 Church leaders' understanding of child abuse.**

The participants demonstrated a good understanding of child abuse and its meaning. A range of responses included: (i) any form of maltreatment of the child that causes harm on the child physically, emotionally, psychologically and child sexual abuse, (ii) any form of maltreatment of the child by an adult as a form of disciplining the child which may cause damage to the child emotionally, physically and psychologically, (iii) taking away the rights of the child and treating the child without dignity including harassment which may cause harm and damage to the child emotionally, physically and psychologically. Below are some of the narratives:

*My understanding of child abuse is any form of maltreatment of the child that may cause pain and harm on the child physically, emotionally and psychologically. Child abuse also includes sexual abuse. Neglecting the child is also child abuse meaning not taking care of the child by the parents, caregivers, teachers and church leaders (Participant D).*

*It is the maltreatment of the child that may cause pain and harm on the child emotionally, physically and psychologically (Participant J)*

To respond and intervene in child abuse cases, the church leaders are expected to understand the definition and the meaning of child abuse. The study found that church leaders have a general understanding of child abuse. Moreover, their knowledge of child abuse is consistent with the definition by the Children's Act no 38 of 2005, chapter 1, 1(b) where child abuse is defined as:

[a]ny form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child and includes (i) assaulting a child or inflicting any other form of deliberate injury to a child; (ii) sexually abusing a child or allowing a child to be sexually abused; (iii) bullying by another child; (iv) a labour practice that exploits a child or (v) exposing or subjecting a child to behaviour that may harm the child psychologically or emotionally.

#### 4.2.2 Child abuse as a pandemic

The study utilizes the ecological theory of child development to understand the extent of child abuse as a societal problem and contextual factors that contribute to child abuse. The narratives from the participants indicated that child abuse is seen as a pandemic in society and their communities. The narratives further suggest that child abuse was a problem even in churches, as indicated by these participants:

*Child abuse is a big challenge in our communities and churches. The violence against children has been increased in our society and every day many children experience abuses in my community. The challenge is that many children abuse cases are not known, especially when the abuse is within families. I come across with child abuse cases daily (Participant A).*

The following responses were further expressed by three church leaders during the interview:

*Child is a big problem in my community Wentworth, it is shocking. Some parents do not even know about the rights of children because there has never been any awareness to educate the community about the rights of the children. It is a serious problem in our society (Participant E).*

*Child abuse is a massive problem in my community KwaMashu. I come across with at least four or five child abuse cases every week. These cases are including emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Child abuse is overwhelming and many cases are not even reported (Participant C).*

*Child abuse is very high in my community Dambuza. Children are abused emotionally, physically and psychologically every day and child abuse have been normalized in our society. Child abuse is a big problem and it continues to increase within communities and churches. I come across with at least three child abuse cases every week just around my area, not for the entire community. (Participant I).*

*Child abuse is a big problem in our communities. The challenge is that many children are also neglected. For example, the number of homeless children has been increased in the Durban area and they face abuse every day physically, emotionally and*

*psychologically. I can testify the abuse of children in our churches and communities (Participant K).*

The above responses show that child abuse is a critical problem in communities and churches. All the church leaders agreed that child abuse is a problem in their communities, including churches, who acknowledged the increase. Pierce and Bozalek (2004) concur that child abuse is a serious and escalating problem for all children in South Africa. Moreover, the abuse and maltreatment of children is shockingly high in South African communities (Richter and Dawes, 2008; Hanson and Patel, 2010).

The findings indicated that physical and emotional abuse is the common form of abuse in most communities, and these cases are often not reported. The South African Police Child Protection Unit (SAPCPU) acknowledges that many child abuse cases are poorly reported (Pierce and Bozalek, 2004). Hendricks (2014) also argues that child abuse cases are usually under-reported in South Africa. Despite this, the church leaders agreed that the child abuse cases reported to them are still on the increase.

#### **4.2.3 Church leaders' understanding factors contributing to child abuse**

The literature identifies parenting stress and trauma, substance abuse (alcohol and drugs), poverty, personal history of physical or emotional abuse as a child, teenage parents, and domestic violence as critical factors that contribute to child abuse. From the interviews conducted, the church leaders identified factors they considered to be contributing to child abuse in their communities and churches. The following factors were identified: i) a culture of silence in addressing and reporting child abuse cases, (ii) socio-economic circumstances, (iii) parental/caregiver mental health, (iv) substance abuse and (v) harmful cultural practices specifically forced marriage- Ukuthwala.

##### ***4.2.3.1 The culture of silence in addressing and reporting child abuse cases***

Child abuse is a silent social problem and kept a secret as it happens. Singh, Parsekar and Nair (2014) concur that the silence in reporting child abuse is due to the fear of indignity, denial from the community, social stigma, not being able to trust authorities, and the gap in communication between parents and children about this issue. Masehela and Pillay (2014) argue that in the past, incidents of child sexual abuse regularly occurred but were kept a secret. Accordingly, perpetrators

took advantage of the silence and continued abusing children sexually, while the victims had no grounds on which to object or report the abuse.

Similarly, church leaders reported the silence and the secret nature associated with disclosing and reporting the abuse to authorities, which contributes to ongoing child abuse within communities and churches. Often the silence and secrecy are on reporting and disclosing child sexual abuse.

Church leaders reported the following during the interview:

*There is a silence to report child abuse cases in communities and churches, especially when it is related to sexual abuse. Often, the church or the family or the community is aware of the child abuse that is going on; however, nobody reports it to authorities. When children abuse cases are not reported then the society tends to accept and normalize what is happening because nobody is talking about it. This allows the perpetrators to continue to abuse children (Respondent A).*

*Child abuse is silenced by money when it is done by a wealthy perpetrator. For example, I dealt with the case when a businessman raped a school learner in the Wentworth community. I was shocked to hear that the parents received the money from the perpetrator to drop off the case. The case was silenced and not reported. The community and the church should stand up and address the culture of silence in our society not to report child abuse. (Participant D).*

Russell (2018) concurs that in religious communities, topics about sex are even more taboo, and individuals who engage in sexual activities outside of marriage are denounced. This conspiracy of silence mutes' child victims and emboldens offenders. In addition, Duncan (2015) argues that the subject of abuse is still taboo in many church systems because sex is a taboo subject, neither the victim nor abuser can get the help they need. Furthermore, Terry, Smith, Schuth, Kelly, Vollman and Massey (2011) concludes that the prevalence of sexual abuse of minors by priests is unclear. This is mostly the result of under-reporting and/or the delay in reporting offences.

According to Hendricks (2014), South African citizens or other persons living in South Africa must report child abuse to authorities when they suspect that a child has been abused. Failure to do so will result in a punishable offence. Hendricks (2014) highlights that the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007, Section 54(1) compels all persons living in South



Africa who are entitled to the rights promised by the Constitution in terms of Section (3) who are aware of the sexual exploitation of children to report the offence to the police. Failure to do so may result in criminal prosecution.

#### ***4.2.3.2 Socio-economic circumstances***

The participants reported poverty as one of the factors that put children at risk of neglect and abuse. Paxson and Waldfogel (1999) concur that it has been noted in child abuse literature that poor children who have unemployed fathers or mothers are more likely to be maltreated. In addition, Wessells (2015) argues that poverty frequently contributes to child protection risks and also erodes protective factors at multiple levels. All the respondents in the study described that many of the child abuse cases that they had been involved in came from low-income families.

One of the church leaders reported the following:

*Poverty is a major factor that is contributing to child abuse in my community Gamalakhe. For example, I involved in a child abuse case with a young girl of 16 years' old who was abusing her child boy of two years old. When I responded to the case and she told me that she can't leave the relationship because the boyfriend is the breadwinner of her and the child. The child is neglected (Participant B).*

This was further expressed by another church leader during the interview:

*Due to the impact of HIV/Aids in communities, many grandparents are forced to take care of children without any sustainable income. Often these children experience different forms of abuse and neglect because of financial stress and frustration that the parents are subjected to (Participant L).*

The findings should not be interpreted to mean that families who experience poverty abuse children; instead, it implies that poverty exposes children to risks and vulnerabilities associated with abuse. The literature indicates that there is a correlation between socioeconomic circumstances and child abuse. Bywaters, Bunting, Davidson, Hanratty, Mason, McCartan and Steils (2016) concurs that the greater the economic hardship, the greater the likelihood and severity of child abuse. It is, therefore critical for church leaders to look beyond poverty and address the risks exposed by poverty to children. This may include mental health, access to resources, and access to basic needs.

#### **4.2.3.3 Parental/caregiver stress mental health**

In line with the ecological theory, the most prominent role players who interact with children include the parents/caregivers as part of the microsystem. Ryan (2001) refers to the reciprocal effect between the child and the parents as bi-directional influences. Wessells (2015) concurs that although parents may not label their activities as child protection, they do much to protect children by ordinary activities such as shielding infants from harm, and teaching children good behavior. The literature indicates that maternal stress contributes to poor parenting. The participants' perceived psychological trauma is one of the factors that contribute to child abuse in communities and churches. Le Roux (2000) argues that families with a high potential for conflict are characterized by a lack of family connectedness and disorganization. The result of this is that the child who finds himself/herself in such a family becomes exceptionally vulnerable to abuse. In addition, Spinets and Rigger in Le Roux (2000) emphasize that parents who abuse their children themselves have a history of abuse.

The participants reported the following:

*The individual psychological trauma may lead to child abuse if it is not dealt with. For example, I involved in a child abuse case with one of the refugee families in my church. I found out that the man was a soldier in his home country and he went through very heavy traumatic experiences and he has never dealt with them as his healing process. He was carrying anger and trauma for many years which resulted in him to abuse his children (Participant H).*

Johnson (1990) argues that psychological trauma could be a source of stress and depression, which, in some cases, leads to the physical and emotional abuse of the child. In the article on Child Protection Week: What causes parents to abuse their children by Badisa News, 2 May 2015, Ronel van Zyl, Director of Social Services at Badisa concurs that parents who struggle with emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression are less able to cope with the stresses of parenting. People with these disorders have difficulty caring for themselves and are even less able to care for children (Badisa News, 2 May 2015).

The report from the evaluation study on the impact of the healing of memories workshops on participants reported:

*My husband abused me for many years until I left him. Because of the trauma that I went through, I was abusing my children physically and emotionally. When I attended the healing of memories workshops, I managed to deal with my psychological problems (anger and depression) and then I stopped abusing my children (The Institute for Healing of Memories Evaluation report, October 2007).*

This reflects the negative impact of mental health on parenting.

#### **4.2.3.4 Substance abuse (alcohol and use of drugs)**

Wessells (2015) argues that families often harm children through family violence or sexual abuse. The church leaders reported substance abuse such as drugs and alcohol as two of the factors that contribute to child abuse in communities.

One of the church leaders, for instance, said:

*Alcohol and use drugs in families contribute to child abuse in communities. Children are abused physically, emotionally and sexually because of alcohol and drugs. For example, I have the case of child abuse that I am dealing now in Durban Centre. Both parents are alcoholic and drug users. They have been neglecting and abusing their children through violent and aggressive behaviours. (Participant A).*

Another church leader reported the following:

*Many children are abused because their parents are alcoholics and drug users. For example, I am dealing with the child abuse case in the Umlazi community. The parents use the money to buy drugs instead of taking care of the child. The child had to drop from school because the parents are not doing anything to support the child. The child is neglected as a result of alcohol and use of drugs (Participant L).*

The church leaders agreed that alcohol and use of drugs is a major problem in communities which leads to violence and neglect against children. This clearly shows a strong connection between alcohol and child abuse in communities. Ronel van Zyl (2 May 2015) illustrates that parents who engage in substance abuse are almost three times more likely to abuse their children physically and emotionally (Badisa News, 2 May 2015).

#### ***4.2.3.5 Harmful cultural practices specifically forced marriage- Ukuthwala***

Wessells (2015) concurs that communities use harmful practices to abuse children. Another interesting argument that came up during the interview is forced marriage, Ukuthwala is the harmful cultural practice that leads to child abuse in communities. In line with the ecological theory, the macrosystem holds the overarching environmental beliefs, resources and customs of the specific culture or community that has the potential to shape conditions and processes in microsystems (Ryan, 2001). The ecological systems perspectives recognize that child discipline practices are linked to environmental systems outside of the family.

The church leaders reported that forced marriage is still practiced within communities and churches.

*Forced marriage is still happening in some of the communities in KwaZulu Natal and it is a violation of the rights of children. For example, I came across with a child forced marriage case in Umlazi. It is difficult to deal with forced marriage case because families do not allow church leaders to engage with them. me. However, forced marriage is part of child abuse because the rights of the child are violated (Participant D).*

As seen in the above statement, the church leaders felt that the culture of forced marriage is a human rights violation and a harmful cultural practice described as child abuse. The study found that the forced marriage practice is also happening in the church. One of the church leaders said,

*A church member family forced her daughter of 16 years old to get married to the old man and the case was reported to me. I could see that the child was emotionally and psychologically affected. Even though my primary objective is to protect the child, I found it very difficult to deal with the case because of the families' agreement (Participant J).*

Richter, Richter, Dawes and Higson-Smith (2004) argue that more children suffer from abuse or maltreatment in the name of culture. Furthermore, Kheswa and Hoho (2014) argue that no culture is above the law as cultural rights are protected subject to the South Africa Constitution. Although Section 31 of the Constitution recognizes the cultural rights of communities and groups, such rights should not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any of the provisions of the Bill of Rights.

Therefore, girls should not be deprived of any economic, social and personal freedom by being forced into child marriages (Kheswa and Hoho, 2014).

#### **4.2.4 Understanding the church leaders' moral and legal obligation in reporting child abuse cases**

One of the objectives of this study was to explore whether church leaders understand their duty to report child abuse incidences. The findings indicated that church leaders fully understood their moral and legal obligations. Considering that most of the participants had attended training on child protection within their churches, they knew their obligations in line with the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007).

During the interview, the church leaders reported the following:

*I have the responsibility as it is stated in the South Africa constitution and Catholic Church constitution to protect children and to report child abuse to authorities. It is also the Lord's recommendation for me to protect the children. The Catholic Church manual that I follow requires all the priests and church leaders to report child abuse (Participant A).*

*It is my legal obligation as a church leader to report child abuse cases and to protect the children in the church and the community. Even if the child abuse has been committed by one of the church leaders or priests or one of my church members, I have to report it because it is my moral obligation to protect children (Participant B).*

*It is my duty as the church leader to report the child abuse. For me, if it is sexual abuse, I call the police immediately. I don't keep quiet when it is child abuse (Participant D).*

*It is my obligation as the church leader to protect the children within the church and the community. I must report child abuse when I have all evidence that the abuse has occurred. (Participant E).*

Hendricks (2014) argues that Section 110 of the South Africa Children's Act No 38 of 2005 compels certain professional sectors, including the church leaders, to report any child abuse, neglect or maltreatment that is suspected on reasonable grounds to a designated child protection

organization, the provincial department of social development or a police official. In addition, Section 54 of the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act compels a person who knows or who has a reasonable belief or suspicion of any form of sexual abuse against a child or mentally challenged individual to report it to a police official (Hendricks, 2014).

#### **4.2.5 Understanding church leaders' challenges or barriers in reporting child abuse cases**

In this theme, the researcher aimed at understanding the challenges and obstacles that the church leaders encounter in reporting these cases. The church leaders reported a number of challenges that they face in reporting child abuse cases. These challenges were: (i) lack of knowledge about reporting procedures, (ii) limited knowledge and understanding the context of child abuse details, and (iii) church leaders' safety and the safety of the child after reporting.

##### ***4.2.5.1 Lack of knowledge on the reporting procedures***

The church leaders reported the lack of knowledge and understanding about procedures in reporting the child abuse cases to authorities. During the interview, the church leaders said the following:

*The challenge in reporting child abuse cases is that the churches do not have guidelines or reporting procedures to follow when I am reporting child abuse cases to authorities. Most of the time, I call the social worker (Participant B).*

*The challenge is that many church leaders do not understand the legislation and laws that relate to child abuse in South Africa. Therefore, they do not have knowledge and understanding of the procedures to follow in reporting child abuse cases. (Participant D).*

*The Catholic Church has developed its child protection guidelines; however, the implementation of these guidelines is still a challenge within the church because there is a limited platform to educate the priests and church leaders about these guidelines. (Participant A).*

Similarly, Katzenstein and Fontes (2017) argue that although most child care providers receive mandatory child abuse training, they are often unsure of reporting guidelines and laws. Therefore, knowledge about the duty may not necessarily imply that active reporting will occur each time an

incident of child abuse is observed. Hendricks (2014) concurs that among the barriers reported in international literature is the misunderstanding of the child abuse reporting legislation and process.

#### **4.2.5.2 Limited knowledge and understanding of the context of child abuse into details**

Earlier, the participants reported that they had a good understanding of the definition of child abuse. However, according to the findings, this is not the case for many. The participants reported that in general, the limited knowledge and understanding of the context of child abuse contributes to barriers in reporting child abuse. One of the church leaders reported that, *“Lack of understanding the background of child abuse by the church leaders are still a challenge in reporting child abuse (Participant A).”*

Another church leader reported:

*Lack of understanding the framework of child abuse in details and the rights of children is a major problem in many churches. When the church leaders do not know the rights of children, when the child abuse happens within the church and the community, they do not know what to do because they do not understand the definition of child abuse (Participant E).*

The study found that although these participants had a good understanding of sexual abuse, the majority of church leaders in communities and especially in rural areas, do not have insightful knowledge of the definition of child abuse. However, this is not limited to religious communities only and includes other professionals such as teachers. According to Crosson-Tower (2003), several studies indicate that many educators are not entirely clear what the indicators of child abuse and neglect are or how to report suspected maltreatment. Hendricks (2014) concurs that among the barriers reported in literature are lack of knowledge regarding child abuse. Among the most commonly identified reasons for professionals such as church leaders and educators not reporting abuse is inadequate training in the indicators of child abuse leading to a lack of awareness of probable abusive situations (Davies, Matthews and Read, 2014).

#### ***4.2.5.3 Church leaders' safety and the safety of the child after reporting***

Ryan (2001) argues that the exosystem does interact with other systems or individuals within the microsystem and may therefore indirectly affect the child. In line with the ecological theory, the fact that the church leaders are aware of their obligation and regulation, the decision to report the child abuse case is affected by their environment and situations in their environment. Therefore, the extent of reporting child abuse is clearly influenced by the risk and safety factors associated with the microsystems, exosystems and macrosystems. Sinanan (2011) argues that the analysis of how factors that are embedded with different systems interact and play a part in the behaviours of reporting child abuse cases is essential.

The findings reflected that the participants were concerned about their safety and that of the children after reporting a child abuse case. This was reported as one of the barriers to reporting child abuse.

One of the church leaders reported:

*The challenge is that when I report the child abuse case, I don't have the power to control and manage the safety of the child especially when the case involves the child sexual abuse. My safety is another challenge in reporting child abuse (Participant F).*

Another church leader reported the following during the interview:

*When the child abuse is reported, the social worker comes and take the child away from the family. This may cause more harm and damage to the family members and also destroy the healthy relationship between the church leader and the family. Even once the child is taken away by the social worker, there is no educational platform for the family and community about child abuse (Participant K).*

Davies, Matthews and Read (2014) concur that the most identified reason for professionals not reporting the child abuse cases is the fear of negative consequences for reporters and concerns about the possible negative impact and blame on the child for disclosing the abuse. Naidoo (2000) argues that professionals do not often report cases of child abuse due to fear of getting involved, fear of confrontations from angry parents, and fear of legal involvement.



#### **4.2.6 Church leaders' implementing the South Africa legislation that relates to child abuse**

In line with the ecological theory, individuals and their behaviour are influenced by systems outside their immediate environment and the legislative system is one of these important systems. In this theme, the researcher aims at understanding the level of the church leaders in implementing the South Africa legislation that relates to children and child abuse in dealing with child abuse cases. The study found that in general, the majority of the church leaders are still struggling to implement the South Africa legislation such as Children's Act No 38 of 2005 and Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 in dealing with child abuse cases.

The church leaders reported the following during the interview:

*The Catholic Church developed the internal child protection policy document and I normally depend on this document. I am aware of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 and the South Africa Constitution section 28 that deals with the children, however, I don't implement them fully in dealing with child abuse cases in communities (Participant A).*

*I haven't been part of the full training on the legislation and laws that relate to children in South Africa. Therefore, I don't implement fully this legislation. And many church leaders, especially in rural areas do not even know about this legislation, which is difficult for them to involve in child abuse cases. (Participant C).*

The UNICEF annual report (2012) states that the impact on vulnerable children depends on the extent to which the legislation and policies are implemented. The challenge now is to establish the coordinating mechanisms among all stakeholders, including religious leaders, to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the policies, legislation and related programmes to fulfil the implied commitment to a better society characterized by the happiness of the country's children (UNICEF annual report, 2012).

#### **4.2.7 The experience of church leaders in dealing and managing child abuse cases**

Church leaders are among child protection systems. In line with ecological theory, Wessells (2015) argues that children are frequently protected by non-formal actors such as families, communities,

and leaders such as elders, teachers or religious leaders. At this theme, the researcher aims at understanding the church leaders' experiences in dealing with and managing child abuse cases within communities and churches. In addition, the researcher was interested in capturing key examples of child cases that the church leaders had managed in the past. In dealing with and managing child abuse cases, the ecological theory states levels of the social systems that affect the child's functioning daily. Ryan (2001) argues that the exosystem contains the relationships and influences between systems in the microsystem, for example, the interaction between the school and parents as well as broader societal structures, such as the justice system. The exosystem is the broader social context in which the child lives, including the neighbourhood, the school, professional responders to child abuse, and the media. The microsystem of the abused child consists of the child as well as people in the child's immediate social environment (family, friends, and peers).

In line with the ecological theory, the church leaders are to direct their intervention at one or more of the ecological systems that influence child development. Collings (2015) argues that in recent years several authors have argued that an ecological, or multisystem, perspective is indicated in order to more comprehensively address the problem of child abuse.

One of the respondents reported the following during the interview:

*Dealing with child abuse cases require a deep understanding of the meaning of child abuse, understanding the context of communities, forms of child abuse and general impact of child abuse on the victims. Each case is unique; therefore, it is a draining experience. Most of the child abuse cases that I have been dealing and managing are mainly emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect. For example, there is a case that I dealt with in 2019 when the child of 14 years old was abused by the father physically and emotionally. I engaged with the father and I offered counselling sessions with him and the boy separately. I also offered spiritual support, talking about forgiveness, prayers and visiting the family regularly. I called the social worker to intervene as well because of my limited skills. I also reported the case to the boy's school and I had a meeting with the principal. (Participant A).*

*My experience in dealing with child abuse cases is painful to see what the children are going through in our society. It is difficult to deal with and manage the amount of child abuse cases that I come across effectively. Collaboration is the key and most of the time, I have to call the Social Worker to intervene. My experience is also frustrating in terms of following up child abuse cases with justice systems. On the other hand, it encourages me to see the impact of my intervention on victims' lives and families through counselling sessions and spiritual support. I also refer the victims and families to the healing of memories workshop to deal with their psychological trauma. Managing and dealing with child abuse cases requires working in partnership with existing systems in order to make an impact on the victims. (Participant B).*

*Managing and dealing with child abuse cases is an emotional experience. It requires to have a strong spiritual relationship with God. It also requires discipline and personal self-care on daily basis. It is also frustrating because I have to deal with many cases due to the increase of child abuse in communities. It requires the commitment to protect the children from any form of violence. For example, I managed and dealt with child sexual abuse case in the Umlazi community. The child was psychologically damaged and she was not even performing well in school. I reported the case to the police immediately and the man was arrested. I offered counselling and spiritual support to the victims including the process of forgiveness. The victims also attended the trauma healing of memories workshops to deal with their trauma. I asked the youth department in my church to support the child (victim of abuse) to be part of workshops on self-esteem, vision and goals and anger management (Participants L).*

The study has shown that church leaders are uniquely positioned to deal with and manage child abuse cases. The majority of church leaders acknowledged that managing and dealing with child abuse cases is a great responsibility. Church leaders took ownership by using their expertise and time to support the victims of child abuse. Wessells (2015) concurs that the level of community ownership is higher when people identified the work as “ours” and took responsibility for its effectiveness.

The findings of the study have shown that the majority of church leaders offer pastoral counselling sessions as the first primary psychological support to child abuse victims. Pillay (2017) illustrates

that church leaders counselling focuses on aspects of faith and spirituality that are central to the frame of reference of people of faith. Through the counselling sessions, the church leaders make use of biblical themes and spiritual devices such as prayer (Pillay, 2017). It is interesting to note that in addition to one on one pastoral counselling, the church leaders sent the victims to the healing of memories workshops that provide the victims with the opportunity to understand the problem by sharing their stories and by identifying emotions that have led to disturbances (Lapsley and Karakashian, 2012).

The study also found that the church leaders provided spiritual support to victims in dealing with and managing child abuse cases. Vieth and Singer (2019) argue that a number of studies suggest that spiritual support is particularly important to vulnerable children. Furthermore, Manda (2013) states that spiritual support helps the victims of abuse to find meaning, purpose, and hope which may nurture individuals in their suffering. It is important to note that one of the very important elements that the church leaders included in spiritual support is the journey of forgiveness. Russell (2018) concludes that spiritual leaders can help child abuse victims move toward forgiveness of their perpetrator if possible, however, forgiveness should be approached as a process, not an immediate obligation.

The study has shown that the church leaders offered prayers to the child abuse victims and families to ensure the individual healing and spiritual revival in the process of managing and dealing with child abuse cases. O'Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) concurs that prayer has the potential to strengthen healthy families, heal victims and reform abusers.

On the other hand, the study found that the church leaders provided social support such as food parcels as a response to poverty in affected families, as reflected above by one of the participants. Some of the church leaders have ongoing life skills programs in their churches that benefits the affected family as reflected by the participants. Manda (2013) argues that social support is very critical for helping the individual cope after a trauma has occurred. It is necessary to identify potential sources of support and facilitate support from others e.g. family and friends (Manda, 2013).

Child protection systems strengthening requires a comprehensive approach that resists the deep divisions between sectors that permeate the humanitarian architecture (Wessels, 2015). In

assessing the experience of church leaders in dealing with and managing child abuse cases, it is interesting to note that the church leaders agreed that partnerships are very critical to ensure the well-being of child abuse victims and their families. O'Neill, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) concurs that in dealing with child abuse cases, collaboration is the only way to ensure that children receive the swift response they deserve in times of crisis and parents receive the regular support they need to raise healthy families.

#### **4.2.8 Church leaders' experiences on the effects of child abuse**

When a child experiences abuse, there is an impact on his/her psychological development. In line with the ecological theory, a child's development and behaviour are influenced by environmental factors, negatively or positively. Therefore, after the incident of abuse, the child may present with notable long-lasting effects. With this theme, the researcher aimed to understand the views of the church leaders about the impact that child abuse has on an individual, community, at the church level. Steyn and van Rensburg (2014) in line with the ecological theory argue that the effect of child abuse in one system will have a widespread effect in the other system. Most of the church leaders reported several child abuse effects that they come across in managing and dealing with child abuse cases within communities and churches.

The church leaders reported the following during the interview:

*The impact of child abuse is huge in communities for example, there is an ongoing cycle of domestic violence and child abuse which often result in families breaking (Participant B).*

*Children who experience any form of abuse suffer from psychological trauma. When I am dealing with them, I could see signs such as anger, frustration, not able to concentrate and angry with God. The effect could manifest in different forms such as poor performance in schools, involve in sexual activity at an early age, low self-esteem and use of drugs and alcohol (Participant D).*

*I have seen the impact of child abuse on spiritual growth where the victim is angry with God, he/she stops coming to church activities, he/she does not want to receive any spiritual support, he/she loses faith and trust of the church (Participant F).*

The findings reflect that the participants believe the abuse impacts children's development and psychological well-being. An expanding body of research identifies abused children as being at risk of delayed development, as well as short and long-term social and psychological maladjustment (Cooper, 2000).

Moylan, Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl and Russo (2010) argue that abused children can exhibit a variety of psychological problems, including anxiety and depression. Physically, abused children can show a variety of problems, including aggressiveness, poor social skills and an inability to establish trust others, low motivation, reluctance to initiate action, poor problem-solving capacity, language development can also be delayed and poor performance in schools (Howe, 2005). Furthermore, Finkelhor and Browne (1985) argue that sexually abused children can experience betrayal not only at the hands of offenders but also on the part of family members who are not abusing them. Psychological, behavioural and emotional problems are the most frequently reported effects of sexual abuse (Cooper, 2000).

Moreover, the study found that child abuse has a huge impact on the community. Fagan (1997) argues that today's abused children will be among tomorrow's most dangerous criminals. The effects of child abuse will not be only on children who suffer from abuse, but also on society in terms of violent crime, breaking families, various addictions and the cycle of child abuse in the community.

Furthermore, the study found that child abuse has an impact on the religious sector. Wolfe, Jaffe, Jette and Poisson (2003) argue that when a religious leader or a member of the religious order perpetrates child abuse, it is often found that the victim's belief in or perception of God, spiritual practices, attendance at religious services, and trust in religious representatives is negatively affected. The victims may feel that God failed to protect them and may fear further abuse if they return to the church. This sense of betrayal can cause a crisis of faith that may destroy a victim's

comfort with and belief in important religious rituals and symbols he/she abandons entirely (Wolfe, Jaffe, Jette and Poisson,2003).

#### **4.2.9 Conclusion**

As discussed in Chapter 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of twelve church leaders from various municipalities. While they were of diverse backgrounds, all of them had been living in communities, and they had been involved in child abuse cases. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis, and findings were presented in Chapter 4, along with eight themes and nine sub-themes.

The themes were explored, including (i) Church leaders' understanding of child abuse, (ii) Child abuse as a pandemic, (iii) church leaders' understanding factors contributing to child abuse, (iv) understanding church leaders' moral and legal obligation in reporting child abuse cases, (v) understanding church leaders' challenges or barriers to reporting child abuse cases, (vi) church leaders' implementing the South Africa legislation that relates to child abuse, (vii) the experience of church leaders in dealing with and managing child abuse cases, and (viii) church leaders' experience on the effects of child abuse. The sub-themes included: (i) The culture of silence in addressing and reporting child abuse cases, (ii) socio-economic circumstances, (iii) parental/caregiver stress mental health, (iv) substance abuse (alcohol and use of drugs), (v) harmful cultural practices, specifically forced marriage-*Ukuthwala*, (vi) lack of knowledge on the reporting procedures, (viii) limited knowledge and understanding the context of child abuse into details, and (ix) church leaders' safety and the safety of the child after reporting.

The findings revealed that child abuse is a reality in eThekweni Municipality and church leaders are a crucial source of social support in child abuse management. It is therefore inevitable that most of the child abuse victims' support, be spiritual support, social support, psychological support or other support, comes from the church leaders. Given the scale of child abuse and the potential of the church leaders to deal with child abuse cases, there are resilient foundation partnerships in communities that strengthen churches, families and communities and prevent child abuse.

In the next chapter, the study's recommendation and conclusion are presented.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, recommendations and conclusions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overall summary of the study, draws overall conclusions and makes recommendations. Child abuse is considered a societal problem in South Africa; however, the role of church leaders has been ignored in previous studies. The overall aim of this study was to draw attention to the responses of church leaders in dealing with child abuse cases. The research attempted to explain the perceptions of religious leaders about the nature, extent and cause of child abuse, religious leaders' experience in responding to child abuse as a societal problem and the religious leaders' role in addressing and managing child abuse cases in KwaZulu-Natal.

The researcher used a qualitative research method to explore the church leaders' experiences in dealing with child abuse cases. One of the advantages of qualitative research is that it offers space for in depth-information. The researcher adopted ecological theory to guide the study. Given the complexity of child abuse in communities, this ecological approach allowed the researcher to obtain a better understanding of responses of church leaders in dealing with child abuse cases and to measure contextual factors of the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystem that influence child abuse. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide and the interviews were audio-recorded and he made a detailed transcript following each interview. After transcribing the data, the researcher analysed it using thematic analysis. All participants were living in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

### **5.2 Overall summary**

This study was meant to gain insight and further understanding into the responses of the religious leaders towards child abuse. The findings indicate that child abuse is a critical issue within communities and churches in eThekweni Municipality. The study found that dealing with this crisis requires great responsibilities and commitment from the church leaders. The findings in Chapter



4 provide details regarding church leaders' experiences in dealing with and managing child abuse cases.

In relation to a review of the literature as discussed in Chapter two, the findings indicated the complexity in understanding and addressing child abuse within churches and communities. Both the literature and findings state that parents and caregivers may not be the root of the child abuse problem but other factors that might influence child abuse such as socio-economic circumstances, harmful cultural practices and parents or caregivers' mental health.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was recognized as the critical framework that provides a better understanding of the complexities of child abuse and the interrelatedness of factors at different system levels that influence child abuse in eThekweni Municipality. Belsky (1980) concurs that Bronfenbrenner's division of ecological space into the microsystem, exosystem and macrosystems offers a mechanism for simultaneously considering (a) what takes place in the context of the immediate household (microsystem), (b) forces at work in the larger social systems in which the family is embedded (exosystem), and (c) overriding cultural beliefs and values that influence the microsystem and exosystems (macrosystem).

### **5.3 Main conclusions: Summary of findings and recommendations**

The research presents the summary of findings and recommendation based on the empirical findings presented in the previous two chapters. Based on the objectives set out for this study, it is hoped that the recommendations add value to the body of knowledge for improving church leaders' interventions towards child abuse cases at microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem level. Härkönen (2001) argues that microsystem is made up by developing child's closest surroundings like home, the day care group, the children in the courtyard, classmates at schools and close relatives. In addition, the mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes that taking place between two or more setting containing the developing the child such as the relations between home and schools. Furthermore, macrosystem holds inside it the cultural values, traditions, laws, and government institutions.

Therefore, in the context of this study, microsystem level includes the structures that the child maintains direct contacts such as families, relatives and day care groups; mesosystem level includes churches, schools, community structures, police stations and local referral supports; and

macrosystem level includes dioceses, church conferences, children legislation, cultural values, traditions and government institutions.

### **5.3.1 Religious leaders' perceptions about the nature, extent and causes of child abuse in South Africa.**

The first objective of the study was to understand the religious leaders' perceptions about the nature, extent and causes of child abuse in South Africa. The findings indicated that child abuse is a pandemic in society including churches. The majority of church leaders recognized that child abuse is a problem in communities and churches. It was clear from the study that there is an increase in child abuse in communities and physical and emotional abuse are the common forms of abuse in most communities. The church leaders who participated in the study explained that many cases are not even reported to authorities. The findings of the study also revealed the main factors that contribute to child abuse in South Africa are a culture of silence in addressing and reporting child abuse, socio-economic circumstances, parental/caregiver mental health, substance abuse (alcohol and use of the drug) and harmful cultural practices specifically forced marriage-*Ukuthwala*.

#### **5.3.1.1 Recommendations**

At microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem level:

The researcher is on the opinion that the church leaders need more education and training regarding the extent, nature and dynamics of the child abuse problem and the harm done by cultural practices within communities. The training will help the churches to recognise the signs and symptoms of child abuse and respond appropriately.

### **5.3.2 Church leaders' moral and legal obligation in reporting child abuse cases**

The second objective of the study was to understand church leaders' moral and legal obligation to report child abuse cases. The findings of the study reflect that church leaders understood their legal obligation to protect and care for children in communities and churches. Although church leaders understood their obligation, it was clear that they face a number of challenges in reporting child abuse cases including church leaders' safety and the safety of the child after reporting, limited knowledge in understanding the contexts child abuse, and lack of knowledge in the reporting procedures. Therefore, in line with ecological theory, reporting child abuse cases by the church

leaders is not an individual choice or a choice that is influenced by knowledge of what is correct and appropriate. The South African Constitution, Section 28(2) provides that the child's best interest be of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. The Children's Act no 38 of 2005 outlines a number of factors that should be considered when implementing the best interest of the child namely; (i) the nature of the relationship between the child and any other caregiver or person relevant in those circumstances; (ii) the child's age, maturity and stage of development, gender, background and any other relevant characteristic of the child; (iii) the child's physical and emotional security and his or her intellectual, emotional, social and cultural development; (iv) the need to protect the child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by subjecting the child to maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exploitation and degradation or exposing the child to violence or exploitation or other harmful behaviour; and (v) deciding which action would avoid or minimize further legal or administrative proceedings in relation to the child (Siljeur,2017). Although this study did not cover the best interest of the child, it is common knowledge that the best interest of the child should be taken into consideration in all issues affecting the child.

#### ***5.3.2.1 Recommendations***

At mesosystem and macrosystem level:

1. The findings indicate the complexities associated with intervening in child abuse cases and that knowledge about the legal and moral obligation is inadequate to promote action from community members, including church leaders. More protection should be offered to individuals who act on behalf of the children and the safety measures must be in place.
2. Support systems for individuals, church leaders and professionals who act on behalf of children must be strengthened and be accessible

#### **5.3.3 The response of religious leaders towards child abuse.**

The third objective of the study was to explore the response of religious leaders towards child abuse. Church leaders play a critical role in managing child abuse cases. The study found that many church leaders offered counselling sessions as the first primary intervention to child abuse victims and families. It was also clear that church leaders provide spiritual support to victims to

help them cope with the impact of the abuse. This includes prayers to the victims and families to ensure the individual healing and spiritual revival.

Furthermore, during this study, participants indicated that they provide ongoing life skills programs in their churches to the affected victims and families. This is consistent with what was also stipulated by O'Neil, Gabel, Huckins and Harder (2010) that churches are often a trusted place in communities and are in one of the best positions to respond to child protection. These findings furthermore support what was indicated by Makhubele, Mutema, Chimbera and Mabvurira (2016), that parents can have the same post-traumatic responses and may need on-going support. The study also found that sometimes dealing with child abuse cases affects church leaders emotionally. Counsellors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities (Thomas and Morris, 2017)

#### ***5.3.3.1 Recommendations***

At mesosystem and macrosystem level:

The potential of church leaders to impact their churches and communities is great. However, for the church leaders to respond to child abuse effectively, they need to understand the dynamics of child abuse and the impact of child abuse on victims, families, communities and churches. The researcher recommends church leaders work closely with social workers and other social service practitioners. The researcher also recommends that church leaders be provided with ongoing debriefing and self-care sessions to help them to cope with the demands in communities.

#### **5.3.4 The extent to which religious leaders manage and address child abuse within the communities they serve.**

The fourth objective was to examine the extent to which religious leaders manage and address child abuse within the communities they serve. The study found that many church leaders count on partnerships to ensure the well-being of child abuse victims and their families. This is very much in line with the United Nations report which strongly recommends the establishment of multi-disciplinary rehabilitation measures to prevent and combat child abuse with the support of law enforcement and child-friendly procedures (Galea, 2008).

### **5.3.4.1 Recommendations**

#### *5.3.4.1.1 The need for greater and strong partnerships and networking*

At mesosystem and macrosystem level:

Even though the church leaders are the first responders of child abuse in communities and churches, they cannot carry the work alone. Networking and collaborative work is suitable for church leaders to improve their responses toward child abuse. Church leaders should build relationships among themselves, community structures, government institutions, Non-Profit Organizations and law enforcement which will give greater capacity in addressing child abuse cases and the barriers to reporting child abuse in churches and communities.

#### *5.3.4.1.2 Recommendation for improvement of legislation and policies in South Africa that relates to children and abuse*

At mesosystem and macrosystem level:

The researcher is of the opinion that church leaders do not have a full understanding of the South Africa legislations and policies that are relevant to child abuse, specifically the Children's Act no 38 of 2007 and Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007. The researcher suggests that church leaders undergo training on the above legislation

#### *5.3.4.1.3 Recommendation for further research*

This dissertation only viewed the response of religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.

- Further studies include a qualitative and quantitative research study on measuring the effectiveness of church leaders' response in dealing with and managing child abuse in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.
- The researcher recommends a broader view be taken to include the perspectives of beneficiaries of interventions.
- The researcher recommends a larger sample.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

Church leaders have trusted relationships and linkages with their communities at microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem level. Often, families reach out to them in times of trauma and

bereavement at microsystem level. They carry authority and credibility, therefore they can add value and bring change to address and prevent child abuse in communities. Factors such as socio-economic circumstances, parent mental health and substance abuse were found to be key issues that deeply influence child abuse in communities at microsystem level. Furthermore, psychological impact such as anxiety disorders, depression, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and unwanted pregnancy were commonly mentioned by participants as a direct or indirect consequence of past sexual and physical abuse in girls.

The findings further indicated that the response of church leaders towards child abuse and protection is very critical at microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem level. For this intervention to be desirable and durable, it is essential to strengthening the collaborative relationships in dealing with and managing child abuse cases and improve child abuse victims and families' well-being on a broad scale. Furthermore, building the capacity to manage child abuse cases by church leaders will strengthen the response to child abuse cases as well as all forms of violence against children in communities at all levels.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Interview questionnaire

1. Demographic profile of respondents:
  - (a) Gender: Male:----- Female: -----
  - (b) Religion/domination: \_\_\_\_\_
  - (c) How long have you been a religious leader? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How do you understand the definition of child abuse?
3. Can you tell me the status of child abuse in your community/church? (How big the problem of child abuse is in your community/church?)
4. What are the factors contributing to child abuse in your community/church?
5. How did you come to know about child abuse as a religious leader? Who normally reports such matters?
6. How often have you come across child abuse cases?
7. What forms of child abuse have you had to deal with?
8. Please explain your experience in responding to child abuse as a societal problem?
9. Are you aware of any legislation in SA that relates to children and abuse?
10. Do you think it is your duty as the religious leader to respond when someone reports possible child abuse?
11. In South Africa, the Prevention of Family Violence Act, 1993 (Act No. 133 of 1993), Domestic Violence Act, 1998 (Act No. 116 of 1998), the Child Care Act, 1983 (Act No. 74 of 1983), Children's Act no 38 of 2005 and Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, Section 54 (1) state the obligation of all caregivers and professionals (including religious leaders) to report any ill-treatment of children to police officials, representatives of children's courts and social workers. How do you apply these legislations in responding and reporting child abuse cases?
12. What challenges are you facing as a religious leader in addressing and responding to child abuse in your church/community?
13. From your experience working with cases of child abuse in your community/church, what are the effects of child abuse on victims as well as the entire community?

14. What are some of the child protection systems or intervention programmes in your church as well as in your community that support victims of child abuse? (Inter- systems referrals).
15. Please add anything else that you would like to tell me about your response towards child abuse.

## **Appendix 2 – Participant information sheet**

### **Participant information sheet**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

My name is Alphonse Paulin Niyodusenga. I am doing a study entitled “Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.”

Purpose of the study

I am doing this study as part of my degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for a Master in Child Care and Protection Degree (Law and Social Work).

I am inviting you to be part of this study because you have been involved in dealing with child abuse and protection cases and you will have an opportunity to express views which will help understand your experience in dealing with child abuse and protection cases. Please provide accurate information so that I can get a clear picture of your experiences.

The findings will be useful for making recommendations and suggestions for the improvements and developing future interventions related to child abuse.

Your participation will be to answer the questions openly and honestly. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed for an hour. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient to you.

There will be no payment for the study. Participation is voluntary but if you feel you cannot participate in the study, you are free not to and there will be no negative consequences.

After the completion of the study, you will receive a copy of the full document. I will also organize a seminar for all church leaders who participated in my study to receive the feedback.

### **Confidentiality**

I assure you that all the information, views and suggestions collected from the interview will be respected, treated confidentially, and used for the purpose of the study only.

Your name will not be written in the document. I do not expect that you will come to any harm as a result of participating in this study. If there are some questions that you are not able or comfortable to answer, please let me know. You may also decide not to proceed with the interview at any time.

If you have any question, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Alphonse Paulin Niyodusenga

Email: [alphonsepaulin@gmail.com](mailto:alphonsepaulin@gmail.com)

Cell: 073 692 5825

OR

Supervisor Dr. Maud Mthembu

Telephone: 031 260 2358

Email: mthembum4@ukzn.ac.za

### **Participant Consent Form**

Please complete the following information to show your agreement to participate in the study:

“Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality.”

I..... on  
(date).....signature.....

hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I consent to participate in the research study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I..... (Full name) agree  
to an audio recording device being used in the interview process with Mr. Alphonse Niyodusenga for his study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **Appendix 3 – Permission to conduct research: Diakonia Council of Churches**

13 April 2018

Mr Alphonse Niyodusenga

KwaZulu-Natal Regional Manager

Institute for Healing of Memories

20 Diakonia Avenue

Diakonia Centre Durban, 4001

Dear Mr Niyodusenga

#### **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at Diakonia Council of Churches provided that ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

“Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.”

It is noted that you will constitute your sample by conducting interviews with religious leaders who are part of member churches of Diakonia Council of Churches in eThekweni Municipality.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/ interview schedule: Ethical Clearance number; research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor; consent form; and this gatekeeper letter from Diakonia Council of Churches.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

Nomabelu Mvambo-Dandala

Executive Director

#### **Appendix 4- Permission to conduct research: The Institute for Healing of Memories**

20 November 2019

Mr Alphonse P. Niyodusenga

Student Number: 217079725

University of KwaZulu Natal

Dear Mr Niyodusenga

#### **Permission to conduct research**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct your research with the church leaders who are affiliated with the Institute for Healing of Memories in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.

We note the title of your research project is:

“Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality, KwaZulu Natal.”

Please ensure that the following appears on your interviews schedule:

- Ethical Clearance letter from the University.
- Research title and details of the research.
- Consent form and
- This gatekeeper letter from the Institute for Healing of Memories.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. Michael Lapsley

Director

## Appendix 5 – Ethical Clearance Certificate



**23 September 2021**

**Mr Alphonse Pauline Niyodusenga (217079725) School of Law Howard College**

**Dear Mr Niyodusenga,**

**Protocol reference number:** HSS/0507/019M

**Project title:** The exploratory study to understand the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in Umlazi community, Durban.

**Amended title:** Exploring the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in eThekweni Municipality.

### **Approval Notification – Amendment Application**

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 15 September 2021 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

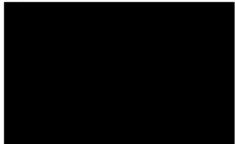
**Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)**

/dd

cc Supervisor: Dr Maud Mthembu

cc Academic Leader Research: Prof Donrich Thaldar

cc School Administrator: Ms Robynne Louw

---

**Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building Postal Address:  
Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000**

**Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587**

**Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>**

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**



14 November 2019

Mr Alphonse Pauline Niyodusenga (217079725)  
School of Law  
Howard College

Dear Mr Niyodusenga,

**Protocol reference number : HSS/0507/019M**

**Project title:** The exploratory study to understand the response of the religious leaders towards child abuse in Umlazi community, Durban

**Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol**

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 13 November 2019 to our letter of 22 October 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

**This approval is valid for one year from 14 November 2019.**

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours faithfully

.....  
**Professor Urmilla Bob**  
**University Dean of Research**

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Maud Mthembu  
cc Academic Leader Research: Prof Donrich Thaldar  
cc School Administrator: Ms Robynne Louw

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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