

**Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse**

By

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Dissertation

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTERS**

in

**SOCIAL WORK**

in the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
(SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES)

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO**

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**2019**

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation titled, ***“Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse”*** is my own original work, and that I have not previously submitted it at any university for a degree. All the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....  
Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel

.....  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my family which did not give up on me throughout this challenging journey that made us spend limited time together.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the almighty God for giving me strengths and wisdom throughout this study. I would also like to forward my sincere gratitude to the following individuals who significantly contributed both directly and indirectly to my journey:

- Both my supervisor and co-supervisor, Dr SF Rapholo and Professor JC Makhubele for their indispensable guidance, support, and patience.
- Chief Manenzhe Takalani Ellon for his motivation and permission to conduct my study within his community.
- My mother Ramphabana Thidziambi Sarah for your endless support and understanding my frustrations.
- Mr Shirilele Tinyiko Albert and Mixo Machebe for their time and contributions.
- Ramphabana Peter, Mualusi Tshilidzi Doctor, Mulungafhala Tshifhiwa Victoria, and Ramphabana Rialivhuwa Charlotte for being on my side.
- My colleagues for supporting and encouraging me during my study.
- Dr J Kubayi for language edition.
- Finally, the Venda speaking caregivers who participated in this study.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Child sexual abuse is a social and health issue that occurs across cultures globally. The central concern to it is disclosure. Children and their caregivers do not easily disclose or report child sexual abuse due to a variety of influences. This study was qualitative in nature and its aim was to explore the influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who possess intensive knowledge of Venda culture. Data was collected from fifteen (15) participants through the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews which were guided by an interview schedule with open ended questions. This study has used both ecological and socio-cultural theories to zoom into the nature of child sexual abuse and socio-cultural practices which have an influence in disclosing this social and health phenomenon in Venda.

The findings show that Venda speaking caregivers have contradictory knowledge with regard to what constitutes child sexual abuse. Traditionally, caregivers are assigned the duty of taking care of children, therefore, it becomes difficult to draw a line between abuse and traditional duty. Forceful sexual intercourse, pornography and sexual grooming, and sexual violence were acknowledged as child sexual abuse. The findings of this study have shown that disclosure of child sexual is dependent on the social and cultural contexts within which people live. It was found that disclosure hardly occurs because of fear of bringing shame into the family name and its dignity. The findings also show that socialisation of children inevitably brings social gender-role expectations that make it difficult for male children to disclose their sexual abuse experiences for fear of being perceived to be more feminine than masculine. Children learn from initiation schools to be strong and brave. This makes it difficult for disclosure of child sexual abuse to take place.

Cultural norms of secrecy inhabits disclosure to take place amongst the Venda speaking people because of fear of being reprimanded. The findings have shown that disclosure hardly takes place because of lack of child-parent open discussion about sex related matters. Child-perpetrator relationship was found to determine

disclosure. It is difficult to disclose intra-familial child sexual abuse for fear of dividing the family. The study also revealed that because of the patriarchal system, the majority of women do not disclose child sexual abuse because they are afraid of losing financial support as they mostly depend on their husbands financially. It is therefore recommended that awareness campaigns be continuously conducted with the aim of capacitating the Venda speaking people with in-depth knowledge with regard to child sexual abuse and its disclosure. Caregivers should work to improve relationships with their children. Schools should improve programmes that educate children about sexual matters. Different stakeholders should work together to bring about the environment that enables women to participate in the economic sector so that they can be financially independent. This is because it was found that disclosure of child sexual abuse can be inhibited due to their financial dependency to their husbands. Community dialogues could also be helpful in shifting the mindset associated with gender roles and social expectations.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Children are some of the most vulnerable groups and easy targets of abuse. As a result, they often become victims of sexual abuse, which is a major global health concern to date. Sexual abuse negatively affects the physical and mental health functioning of children, and influences their social and education outcomes (Cashmore & Shackel, 2013). Children face sexual abuse because of cultural values and practices. Such cases are normally unreported to authorities. Reporting to authorities, such as police and health professionals, is rare and considered “an exception rather than a common step in the disclosure process” (Schonbucher, Maier, Mohler-Kuo, Schnyder & Landolt, 2012).

There are many research studies on the causes and impacts of child sexual abuse [CSA] (Fagen, 2005; Wegman & Stetler, 2009; Unger & De Luca, 2014). However, such studies are limited in terms of the influence of socio-cultural practices towards disclosure of CSA in South Africa. According to Attah (2016), many people do not feel comfortable to have discussions around matters of sexuality, let alone experiences of CSA. Many identified CSA perpetrators are trusted people who are known to the families of the survivors (Marshall, Smallbone & Marshall, 2015). Certain cultural issues such as shame, taboos and modesty, virginity, women’s status, honour, respect and patriarchy may silence disclosure (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). To this point, the researcher has developed interest in socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people that influence the disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### **1.2 Operational Definition of the Key Concepts**

#### **1.2.1 Child**

Molusi, Njotini and Mahlobogwane (2011) define a child as a young person who is below puberty or below the legal age of maturity. According to Probation Services Act no.116/1996 (SA, 1996) and Children’s Act no. 38/2005 (SA, 2005), a child means

any person under the age of 18 years. In this study, the definition from Probation Services Act and Children's Act was adopted.

### 1.2.2 Disclosure

According to Alaggia (2004), disclosure is a process wherein a child gradually reports an act of abuse to someone. On the other hand, Lindblad (2007) defines disclosure as situations in which authorities, professionals, parents, caregivers or any other adults encourage a reluctant child to talk about the abuse experienced. In this study, the definition by Alaggia was adopted.

### 1.2.3 Child sexual abuse

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (SA, 2007) defines CSA as an assault of a child, or allowing a child to be sexually abused or assaulted and encouraging, inducing or forcing a child to be used for the sexual gratification of another person. Furthermore, sexual abuse can be described as any action that violates, humiliates or exploits the body or dignity of the victim, and which has an element of a sexual nature (Lawrence & Janse van Rensburg, 2006). However, this study adopted the definition by the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

### 1.2.4 Socio-cultural

According to Page and Nooe (2002), the concept socio-cultural is constituted by two fundamental concepts, namely, social and cultural. The scholars define it as a group of people that have common beliefs and way of doing things. Therefore, in the context of this study, socio-cultural practices signify values, behaviour, and tradition of the Venda speaking people within their society.

### 1.2.5 Culture

Richerson and Boyd (2005) define culture as information capable of affecting an individuals' behaviour acquired from other forms of social transmission. In this study, culture is used to signify shared patterns of conducts and interactions, cognitive constructs, and understandings that differentiate the Venda speaking people from other groups.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Social and cultural values and practices within society impact the likelihood of disclosure of CSA and the steps professionals need to take to support disclosures (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). According to the Department of Justice statistics (2016), for the period April and December 2016, over 10 300 children were victims of sexual offences. The decision to disclose or report CSA is not solitary or individual, rather it is made in the social contexts. It is individuals who perpetrate abuse, and while it is important to comprehend their particular motivations, it is equally important to understand the role of wider socio-cultural forces (Machel, 2001).

The researcher has learnt that in many South African cultures, parents feel ashamed to discuss issues related to sexuality with their children. According to Alaggia and Kirshenbaum (2005), disclosure of CSA is less likely to occur in families that have rigid and fixed patriarchy based gender roles and a tradition of closed and indirect communication. The researcher has further learnt from a Venda culture that because of the respect they have for elders, children often find it inappropriate to talk about their sexual challenges with their parents. Wickham and West (2002) have established that the world of adults does not provide enough opportunity for children to talk about sex with elder people, yet in Western world it is the opposite. In Venda culture, there are channels of communication to be observed within families. For instance, children should share their concerns with their mothers or stepmothers before approaching their fathers, who happen to be the heads of families. To support this, Cawson, Wattam, Brooker and Kelly (2000) found that children do not often communicate their abusive experiences. Cawson et al. (2000) have established that 55% of children share their abusive experience to their friends, 29% communicate the experience to their mothers or stepmothers, and only 11% to their fathers. One of the barriers that parents and significant caregivers of children, professionals and support agencies must overcome is to ensure that children feel safe enough to disclose abuse (Featherstone & Evans, 2004).

Ignorance and lack of knowledge of what sexual abuse is has profound impact on child sexual abuse disclosure. Many cultures with inclusion of Venda culture have traditional rituals that involve touching of genital parts of both female and male

children. Amongst others are *Ngoma ya vhanna* (male initiation school) and *Vhusha* (female initiation school). Initiation schools are places which mark the rite of passage from childhood to adult life (Manabe, 2010). According to Liebling and Shah (2001), it is important to note and appreciate the positive aspects of cultural values, norms and practices, it is also true that sexual predators and others with exploitive motives often use the “cultural context” to disguise practices which oppress and violate women’s and children’s rights.

The way cultures socialise children could determine the likelihood of disclosure. The thoughts that it is unacceptable for males to be victims of sexual abuse are often socio-cultural barriers to disclosure. They are less likely to discuss such experience with someone. Alaggia (2004) argues that boys are afraid to be stigmatised and labelled as a homosexual and/or victim, whereas girls are more likely to fear that they will not be believed. This is the reason why both boys and girls rarely disclose sexual abuse in most African cultures. Moreover, it becomes difficult for male children to disclose sexual abuse which is perpetuated by males because it contradicts their social expectation of being ‘masculine’. These feelings will impact on the motivation of a boy child to disclose abuse.

## **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

### **1.4.1 Aim of the study**

The aim of this research was to explore influences of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### **1.4.2 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To identify socio-cultural practices in Venda that influence disclosure of child sexual abuse.
- To determine how child-parent relationships in Venda contribute towards non-disclosure of child sexual abuse.
- To assess the knowledge of the Venda speaking people on what constitutes child sexual abuse.

## **1.5 Motivation of the Study**

The researcher was motivated to conduct this study after having observed in Venda that children (as they are supposed to be protected) are being sexually abused. For some reasons, the abuse is associated with culture and is not likely reported to legal authorities. According to the researcher, the Venda culture sometimes renders children vulnerable to sexual violence even though that is not culturally regarded as such. Sometimes this is informed by lack of knowledge by the Venda speaking people on what legally constitutes CSA. This has made the researcher to develop a hunch to explore socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people that play a part in causing children to be more vulnerable to CSA.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

According to Fouché and Schurink (2011), research methodology is a process that involves the application of a variety of standardised methods and techniques in pursuit of knowledge. In a nutshell, this study has made use of a qualitative approach.

### **1.6.1 Research approach**

This study has used a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem. According to Maree (2007), the qualitative approach attempts to collect rich descriptive data in respect of a phenomenon or context with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being studied. This research approach helps researchers to collect detailed information that is crucial in interpreting and understanding social phenomena. Terre Blanche, Durkheim and Painter (2006) add that in qualitative research, the researcher collects data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations that are recorded in language, to analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes. According to Creswell (2007), researchers that use the qualitative approach seek to collect data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study. These researchers are rather interested in understanding than explanation, and with observation rather than controlled measurement (Fouché & Schurink, 2011). The qualitative approach has helped the researcher to explore the

socio-cultural practices that influence disclosure of child sexual abuse amongst the Venda speaking people.

### 1.6.2 Research design

Research design is a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research (Babbie & Mouton, 2011), and includes every aspect of a proposed research study, from conceptualisation of the problem to the dissemination of findings (Grinnell, 2001). In this study, exploratory research design was followed with the purpose of exploring fundamental aspects pertinent to the topic of the study. Bless et al. (2006) explain that exploratory research explores a certain phenomenon with the primary aim of formulating more specific research questions. According to Blaikie (2000), exploratory research is conducted to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual. It was important to adopt this design as it helped the researcher to understand disclosure of child sexual abuse from the level of social and cultural contexts of the Venda speaking people.

### 1.6.3 Data collection

According to DePoy and Gilson (2008), the research information is obtained through direct interchange with an individual or a group that is known or expected to possess the knowledge that they seek. The researcher has used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data. This type of interviews was ideal because the study aimed at exploring the knowledge and experience of the participants regarding its topic. Furthermore, they are used to explore the experiences, perceptions and social worlds of the participants (Kelly, 2006). The in-depth interviews used in this study have given the participants the opportunity to talk about their views, feelings, and experiences in relation to the influence of Venda socio-cultural practices towards CSA. The researcher has used an interview schedule to ensure that the interviews remain relevant to the aim of the study. According to Greeff (2011), the in-depth interviews are useful because they enable the participants to explore issues and help the researcher to avoid directing the flow of the comments. The researcher has probed and asked follow-up questions rather than asking leading questions with the aim of obtaining consequential information from the participants.

The researcher has also used skills such as paraphrasing, observation, and sought clarity with the aim of paying attention to the original meaning behind what the participants were saying. Field notes were taken during the interviews, and were later reviewed during the analysis process. According to Fouché and De Vos (2011), field notes are written notes that the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks about during interviewing. These field notes helped the researcher to remember and to explore the content of the interview (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). Furthermore, audiotape recordings were used during the interviews after obtaining consent from the participants. A tape recorder, according to Rubin and Babbie (2005) and Greeff (2005), is useful as it helps the researchers to remain focused and ensure that all data provided by the participants is not missed. The above tools were helpful and made it possible for the researcher to easily concentrate on the interview, and later to transcribe data for analysis.

#### 1.6.4 Data analysis

Bless, Higson and Kagee (2007) state that the process of data analysis begins once the data collection and checking have been done. According to Fouché and De Vos (2011), data analysis process includes organising and creating meaning of the collected data. Schwandt (2007) further describes data analysis as the activity of making sense of, interpreting as well as theorising data. The process of analysing data gives the researchers opportunity to generalise the findings from the smaller sample that represent the larger population. The researcher has made it a point that data was transcribed and subsequently analysed into themes and subthemes. Analysis was done manually with assistance of the Nvivo software, which has helped in managing and organising the data. Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi and Wright (2010), and Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011) identified the following guidelines which were followed in this study to analyse data:

- The initial research was borne in mind.
- All the data was transcribed.
- The correctness of transcripts was ensured by an external person who transcribed the data, and the researcher verified its correctness.
- During transcription, enough space was left on both the left and right margin to allow the researcher to make notes during analysis.

- Where translation was needed, an external person verified the information.
- Topics were coded.

The Tesch's approach of coding data was used by the researcher during analysis to classify data. This approach helped the researcher to divide and classify data into several themes and subthemes. All transcripts were constantly read to ensure that every collected data is correctly captured and organised. The researcher requested an external transcriber to ensure accuracy of the data that was collected. The external transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement. Accuracy of the collected data was determined through discussion with the participants (member checking). Data was transcribed and translated from Tshivenda to English by the researcher with the assistance of the translator who is proficient in both languages.

## **1.7 Population and Sampling Methods**

### **1.7.1 Population of the study**

According to Bless et al. (2007), a study population is a set of procedures that guides the researcher in the process of verifying a hypothesis. Furthermore, Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2005) define population as the study objects consisting of individuals, groups, organisation human products and events or conditions to which they are exposed. McBurney (2001) defines population as the totality of individuals and other sampling units with which the research statement or problem is concerned. Individuals who possess characteristics that the researcher is interested in constitute the population. The population of this study was fifteen (15) Venda speaking caregivers of children in Venda.

### **1.7.2 Sampling methods**

The researcher made use of the purposive sampling technique wherein Venda speaking caregivers were purposefully selected based on the researcher's judgment. This type of sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population that best serve the purpose of the study (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). According to Greeff (2011), participants in purposive sampling are selected based on their relevance to the topic under study. Data was

collected until saturation point was reached. Strydom and Delport (2011) refer to data saturation as collecting data until a sense of closure is attained because new data yield redundant information. Data saturation is when fresh data no longer produces new insights to the research (Charmaz, 2006).

- **Inclusion criteria**

Caregivers of both male and female children who are members of the Venda culture were included in the study. These caregivers of children fell within the age group of 18-65 and they possessed intensive knowledge of Venda culture. These caregivers were members of the Venda culture as the study sought to obtain information from the perspective of Venda people, not necessarily from the victims of the child sexual abuse.

- **Exclusion criteria**

Caregivers who are not members of the Venda culture and those who are below the age 18 were not selected to participate in the study. This was informed by the fact that the study was only targeting caregivers of children who possess intensive knowledge of Venda culture.

## **1.8 Quality Criteria**

According to Schurink et al. (2011) and Botma et al. (2010), trustworthiness has four epistemological standards, namely truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

### **1.8.1 Truth Value (Credibility)**

One of the key criteria addressed by the positivist researchers is that of internal validity, in which they seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Fouché and De Vos (2011) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. In this study, frequent sessions and member checking were used to ensure that the study measured exactly what it intended to measure. Furthermore, this criterion was of help as it provided opportunity to identify flaws and other forms of possible personal biases.

### 1.8.2 Consistency (Dependability)

Dependability signifies replication of the study with inclusion of the same participants, same context, as well as the same methods in a manner in which the findings remain consistent (Fouché and De Vos, 2011). In order to ensure dependability of the study, the researcher accounted on how data was collected (dependable audit), ensured correct coding of the data, and revisited the methodology to see to it that the plans of the study were well administered and executed.

### 1.8.3 Transferability (Applicability)

Here the researcher asks whether the findings of the study can be transferred from a specific situation or case to another. It is important to make sure that the data collected is valid in other contexts and situations (Schurink et al., 2011). The researcher improves transferability by the selection of resources and sampling, saturation of data, and detailed description of the data (Botma et al., 2010; Shenton, 2004). The findings of this study were specific to a small group of people in Vhembe area.

### 1.8.4 Neutrality (Conformability)

According to Shenton (2004), conformability entails that the research process and results are free from prejudice. The researcher ensured that the study's results are objective and are not based on biases, motives and perspectives of the researcher. For the purpose of the study, field notes were used to ensure conformability. Conformability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings (Botma et al., 2010). In order to prevent the researcher's biases, the researcher asked follow up questions from the participants' responses.

## 1.9 Ethical Aspects

Babbie (2014) states that anyone involved in social science research must be aware of the general agreements on what is proper and improper in the conduct of scientific inquiry. Ethics are a set of moral principles suggested by an individual or group and offers rules and behaviour expectations about the current conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents (Strydom, 2011; Gray, 2009). Below are ethical aspects that were considered when conducting this study.

### 1.9.1 Permission to conduct study

The researcher obtained permission to conduct his study from Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) at the University of Limpopo project number **TREC/01/2018: PG** and the chief "*Khosi*" of the Venda speaking people who participated in the study. The researcher presented a brief proposal to the chief with the intention to familiarise him with the proposed study. The brief proposal included the aim, objectives, and potential outcomes of the study to the community as a whole. An agreement was made that the researcher will submit a final copy of the study to the chief.

### 1.9.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are often confused to have the same meaning. However, they are two different concepts that have different meanings. Confidentiality is when the researcher ensures that the identity and records of the research remain unaccessible to people without obtaining permission and consent. No information about the participants was shared with any third party without obtaining consent from the participants. On the other hand, anonymity means that the subjects remain nameless (Lune, 2012). To ensure anonymity, numbers were assigned to describe the participants.

### 1.9.3 Informed consent and voluntary participation

The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study. Informed consent means obtaining consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice free from elements of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation (Lune, 2012). According to Neuman (2011), informed consent is a statement that is usually written that explains aspects of a study to the participants, requesting their voluntary agreement to participate in the study. The researcher explained the details of the study to the participants. Thus, they were not forced to participate in the study. Rather, they were informed from the beginning of the interviews that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time during this study, but through the knowledge of the researcher. According to Rubin and Babbie (2005), participation should always be voluntary and no one should be forced to participate in a study.

#### 1.9.4 Deception of participants

According to Struwig and Stead (2001), deception refers to deliberately misleading the participants and misrepresenting facts or withholding information from them. The researcher requested the participants to be part of the study without deceiving them, and without withholding any information that they were entitled to.

#### 1.9.5 Avoidance of harm

According to Babbie (2007), the fundamental ethics rule of social research is that it must bring no harm to participants. Participants may be subjected to physical or emotional harm because of participating on the research project. In order to avoid possible harm that might have occurred during the interviews, the researcher was prepared to refer the participants to authorised personnel for professional intervention. However, such need did not arise.

#### 1.9.6 Debriefing

It is important to debrief the participants and determine if they need any assistance, counselling, or explanations for questions they have been asked during the course of the interview (Lune, 2012). The researcher was prepared to refer the participants to authorised personnel should the need for that occurred, but such need did not arise during this study. According to King (2010), physical and emotional harm during a research process should be avoided, and referrals for counselling should be done if the need arises.

#### 1.9.7 Release and publication of the findings

The researcher explained to the participants that they will be informed about the findings of the study, and only milestones would be shared in order not to deviate from the principle of confidentiality. According to Bless et al. (2007), participants should be informed about the findings of the study, however in a way that does not offer too many details that could impair the principle of confidentiality. Each participant will be given a copy of the final dissertation so that they can reflect on the outcomes of their participation. The researcher will also harvest articles from this study for publication in international peer reviewed journals subsidised by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

## **1.10 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study may help both caregivers and child protection officers such as social workers, investigative officers and legal courts to have in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural influences of disclosure of CSA in South Africa. The study may also be beneficial to the South African government, practitioners, NGOs, academics and policy makers during the process of developing policies and programmes aimed at protecting children and facilitating CSA disclosure in South Africa and internationally. The South African Council for Social Services Profession may also benefit to recognise forensic social work as an emerging field of specialisation in South Africa in the development of guidelines which will be responsive to the South African child during forensic assessments.

## **1.11 Outline of the Study**

The study is organised as follows:

Chapter 1: General orientation to the study

Chapter 2: An Overview of Child Sexual Abuse

Chapter 3: Qualitative data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Chapter 4: Summary of the major findings, conclusions and recommendations

## **1.12 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the study and the research methodology that was used to explore the influences of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards disclosure of child sexual abuse. The research methodology looked at the research approach, research design, population and sampling methods, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. The significance of the study was as well presented. The next chapter will present the literature review of the study.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **AN OVERVIEW ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global social and health problem that brings negative implications in the development of children. According to Artz, Burton, Ward, Leoschut, Phyfer, Loyd and Le Motte (2016), South Africa has the highest prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and children are equally affected. This assertion is confirmed by Calitz (2011), who points out that the problem of sexual abuse affects both children and women. In this chapter, therefore, the focus will be on child sexual abuse. In addition to this, it has been observed that CSA occurs in a sexual violence environment. In support of this, Abrahams, Devries, Watts, Pallitto, Petzoid, Shamu, and Garcia-Moreno (2014) aver that sexual violence is a global problem which mostly affects women and children because of their subordinate status within societies. Central to CSA is the problem of disclosure. Disclosure of CSA is often determined by social and cultural settings. Caregivers may find it difficult to disclose child sexual abuse because they are afraid of bringing shame into the family. According to Fontes and Plummer (2010), fear of perceived consequences may make many people keep sexual abuse hidden from the authorities.

Cultural influences bring hesitancy on disclosure of abuse and children hardly speak openly about incidents of sexual abuse (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). The way socio-cultural practices influence the disclosure of CSA has not been clearly and fully apprehended scientifically. South Africa has recognised forensic social work in an attempt to deal with CSA. Forensic social work is an emerging field amongst social service professions in South Africa (Mangezi, 2014). Fontes and Plummer (2010) and Tishelman and Geffner (2010) hold that the complex issue of culture and how it interferes with the forensic process has yet to be sufficiently explored. It is therefore imperative to explore social-cultural practices and the extent to which they affect forensic assessments and disclosure of CSA. In light of the above, the researcher

has therefore developed interest to explore socio-cultural practices among the Venda speaking people regarding the disclosure of child sexual abuse.

## **2.2 Background of Child Sexual Abuse in South Africa**

CSA is not new in South Africa and is undoubtedly a traumatic experience to children who are involved (Van Rensburg & Barnard, 2005). According to Rule (2017), children who are sexually abused possess serious psychological, physical and social problems that bring difficulties in their development. It is an undisputable fact that the South African historical background has its own contributions towards the existence of CSA. Historical records indicate that CSA is not a new phenomenon (Tucker & Cheit, 2010). Historically, violence was used to oppress women and children. As a result, people became reliant on violence to express their supremacy and power. Unfortunately, such situations left children completely vulnerable to different forms of abuse. Murove, Forbes, Kean, Wamimbi and Germann (2010) argue that failure to protect children questions the culture of the people, their beliefs, norms and customs.

According to Schmid (2010), the Apartheid regime required services to be provided based on race and the enforcement of racial segregation. In addition, Schmid (2008) states that historically, the majority of child welfare services were developed to help 'white' children only. As a result, black children were subjected to racial discrimination and have failed to receive proper and necessary services. However, political initiatives such as Free the Children Alliance highlight the plight of children and their rights being formally placed on the political agenda (Allsopp, 2005). Many organisations and legislations have been developed with the aim of protecting children in general from different forms of abuse. It is the researcher's observation that notwithstanding the impacts inflicted by the apartheid regime system, democracy has brought fruitful transitions on the issue of children's welfare in South Africa.

## **2.3 The Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse Internationally and In South Africa**

CSA is a worldwide social and health problem that bears several negative impacts on children's development. Its prevalence at international level and in South Africa is presented below.

### **2.3.1 The prevalence of child sexual abuse at international level**

According to Nemajilili (2016), CSA is a global social problem that takes place across all cultures and socio-economic groupings with long negative physical and health consequences. These negative consequences in childhood often bring widespread difficulties in social interaction in the adulthood (Victims of Crime, 2010). The global prevalence of CSA has been estimated at 11.8%, with the rate highest in Africa (34.4%) and lowest (9.2%) in Europe (Stoltenberg, Ijzendoorn, Van Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). The World Health Organization (2010) indicates that in Africa, it is estimated that 24 million girls and 8.6 million boys under the age of 18 years have experienced sexual abuse. The above figures indicate that CSA is a global social problem that is ever-growing within societies. Meinck, Cluver, Boyes and Mhlongo (2015) estimate that between 2%-78% of children in Africa experience sexual abuse in a lifetime. It is however important to note that it could be a challenge to obtain the exact figure on CSA because some cases may not be disclosed or reported due to social and cultural settings within which people are circumscribed. For instance, shame, guilt, embarrassment, social disirablity and fear of reprisal associated with disclosure result to under-reporting (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2005; Yoshihama & Horrocks, 2010).

In Zimbabwe, a National Baseline Survey on Life Experiences of Adolescents (NBSLEA) revealed that 32.5 % of females and 8.9% of males experience sexual violence before they reach the age of 18 years (Zimbabwe Judicial Service Commission, 2012). The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has alluded to the gradual increase in the number of reported CSA cases, and estimate that 100 girls are abused every day (Nyamanhindi, 2015). These figures indicate the prevalence of CSA and that this issue occurs across all genders. However, the figures represent that female children experience sexual abuse more than male children do. The

Council of Europe (2017) argues that the issue of CSA is serious and occurs amongst both sexes. It is the view of the researcher that these figures are not conclusive because cultural backgrounds may fail to render opportunity for male disclosure due to meaning attached to gender roles such as femininity and masculinity. This view has been echoed by Wood and Eagly (2015) that children learn through socialisation to act according to their gender roles.

### 2.3.2 The prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa

The 2013/2014 national crime statistics (SAPS, 2014) of the South African Police Service (SAPS) indicate that 18, 5224 cases of sexual offences against children were reported, and that this is equivalent to 51 cases a day. According to Jewkes, Flood and Lang (2015), South Africa is well-known for high rates of CSA cases, and that is why it is labelled as the “Rape capital of the world”. The Optimus Study conducted in South Africa estimates that 351,214 cases of child sexual abuse occurred in 2015 alone and that at least 332 000 more than the estimated 19 000 cases were reported each year to the SAPS (Artz, Burton, Leoschut, Ward& Lloyd, 2016). In 2016/17, a total number of 49,660 sexual offences with inclusion of children were recorded by the police in South Africa (South African Police Service crime statistics, 2017). Rule (2017) argues that a case that was reported in Limpopo Province where two girls aged eight and eleven were alleged to have been raped by their 44-year-old stepfather indicates the gravity of the CSA in the province. The above statistics indicate the prevalence of CSA and how it continues to grow overtime. It is, however, important to understand that some violence against children remain unreported and unrecorded.

A joint study conducted by the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWCPD) and (UNICEF) United Nations Children’s Fund (2012) established that violence against children often occurs in private settings such as the home of the child. Proudlock (2014) argues that child violence in South Africa takes place in multiple settings, and therefore not readily simple to identify. It is not publicly visible and is likely to be unreported or underreported. The researcher is of the view that statistics can only provide figures of reported cases, but do not indicate contextual factors behind the

committed crimes. It is difficult to detect that a child has been sexually abused because there are often no clear indications unless the child is brave enough to tell someone (Allnock, 2010; Goodyear-Brown, 2012). For the above reasons, it remains a challenge to obtain an exact and comprehensive picture about CSA.

## **2.4 Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse**

The following theoretical frameworks play a crucial role in exploring socio-cultural practices which influence disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### **2.4.1 Ecological perspective**

The ecological perspective was developed by an American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s. This perspective has been appreciated and applied across different fields for over 20 years (Härkönen, 2007). Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) note that Bronfenbrenner's perspective is one amongst most well-known theoretical frameworks across many of disciplines within social sciences. This perspective is interested in understanding individuals' own development within the context of relationship systems in their environment, and has been influential in studies that are concerned in the development of children (Lerner, 2005). Penn (2005) writes that Bronfenbrenner was deeply interested in the surroundings in which children live. It is crucial to always apply a holistic approach in attempting to understand social issues such as child sexual abuse because it is beyond individuals. According to Pooley and Malina (2017), the ecological perspective identifies a relationship between the developing child and the setting or context within which the child is actively involved. Kumar (2017) argues that if the relationships in the immediate microsystem breaks down, it is likely that other systems will experience malfunctions. In other words, if the immediate environments fail to provide support, chances for CSA disclosure to take place are likely to be less.

The ecological perspective is popular in social work because of its ability to acknowledge the complexity of ever progressing relationship between a person and various levels of context. Anderson (2014) adds that the Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective places human development in a historical and environment setting while

taking into consideration the various forms of interaction that impact the individuals and their surrounding systems. According to Pedersen and Revenson (2005), this perspective has been used to understand different forms of child maltreatment. Alaggia (2010) argues that using Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is useful in the process of examining disclosure of CSA. The ecological perspective integrates individual, familial and societal levels to examine child sexual abuse and its disclosure (Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006). In other words, since no single level can comprehensively be insightful in isolation, there is a need to collaborate all the levels within environmental systems. There are four interrelated types of environmental systems that constitute the ecological perspective, namely, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystems.

#### 2.4.1.1 Microsystem

According to Berk (2000), the microsystem is the closest environment to a child that includes the structures with which the child makes direct contact. Bronfenbrenner (1995) defines the microsystem as the pattern of activities and interpersonal relationships experienced by a developing person in an environment which has distinctive attributes of personality, temperament and systems of belief. The influence between the developing person and the structures is reciprocal. The person may influence and be influenced by the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (2002) paid attention to the belief systems of the people around the child because they have a strong impact on the child's development process. For instance, parents' perceptions towards CSA determine their interest and actions to support and protect their children. Parents may believe that exposing children to sex-related issues may stimulate their interest to sexual activities. For instance, parents tend to discourage their children from watching TV programmes that embody sexual education (Clark, 2005). As a result, children may lack sufficient knowledge regarding CSA, and will certainly fail to disclose any experience of sexual abuse that they may encounter (Elayyan, 2007).

#### 2.4.1.2 Mesosystem

This second system incorporates connection that exists within the microsystem (Berk, 2000). Moreover, the mesosystem includes the interaction that occurs

between two or more contexts within which the person actively participates (Lerner, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), this layer describes the way in which different pieces of the microsystem within the child's context work together to ensure desired development. For instance, a collaborative relationship between the family and church can help in facilitating disclosure of child sexual abuse if family members and caregivers learn how to speak about sexual-related issues with the children. McLaughlin, Swartz, Cobbett and Kiragu (2015) argue that caregivers make a mistake of assuming that their children are not old enough to be exposed to information pertinent to sex. Rule (2017) argues that children spend their time in more than a single microsystem. As a result, it is the researcher's view that it is important to have an observation on different areas and environments.

#### 2.4.1.3 Exosystem

Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) describe the exosystem as the next outermost level that includes microsystems within which individuals are involved but not directly embedded. According to Kumar (2017), this system includes individuals and places that are directly not related to the child but have a significant impact on the child. Child protection is dependent on social policies and norms that are developed within the societies. Child sexual abuse often takes place when children's rights are not recognised and social norms against sexual violence are extremely weak (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2015). The larger social system, events, decisions and policies over which the developing person has no influence are well represented by the exosystem layer (Johnson, 2008). Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) argue that institutionalised rules present foundations that shape and structure levels of communication that take place in a culturally defined context. It is important for researchers who are willing to explore the impacts of sociocultural practices towards disclosure of CSA to be mindful of other consequential systems that affect the child even though they do not directly appear in the child's immediate environment such as societal norms and social policies.

#### 2.4.1.4 Macrosystem

According to Saraw (2009), the macrosystem refers to a larger environment under which all systems exist. It is the outermost system which contains beliefs, values and

norms that are aligned to culture of organisations within societies. The macrosystem includes analysis of local and national systems that either promote or condemn child sexual abuse. The societal perceptions on CSA bring about the desire to develop measures that ensure protection of children as a vulnerable group within societies. Sawrikar and Katz (2017) maintain that lower social power of children within societies is a barrier to disclosure of CSA. In a patriarchal system wherein women and children are accorded low social status, it could become difficult for CSA disclosure to take place because of fear to be socially reprimanded. Edberg, Shaikh, Rimal, Rassool and Mthembu (2017) argue that if violence against children is normalised, then there is a dire need to involve different components to break such normalisation. As a result, social-ecological explanations may bring more opportunities for intervention in facilitating earlier disclosures in that several aspects relevant in understanding CSA can be given attention. Fontes and Plummer (2010) argue that disclosure is inhibited by community mindset and societal taboos on sex and stigma attached to victims. The cultural norm that children should always obey elder people may lead children to maintain silence when they experience sexual abuse (Choi, Choo, Choi & Woo, 2015).

Like other perspectives, the ecological perspective has its own inherent flaw such as its inability to provide a set of procedures and assessment processes that need to be followed when using this perspective. However, its strength lies in the fact that it does not separate individuals from their social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, it does not perceive social ills as a result of individuals' pathologies rather than as an indication of malfunction within the systems. Thus, individuals' decisions to report or withhold disclosure of CSA is determined by the level of functionality of systems within their surroundings. Oetzel, Ting-Toomey and Rinderle (2006) argue that the ecological perspective identifies the interwoven relationship amongst individuals and their social and cultural settings. According to Ager (2013), this perspective has gained acceptance as it pays attention to the significant role of other factors beyond the individual and family in understanding complex social issues such as child sexual abuse. The researcher is of the view that the ecological analysis is helpful in exploring the influence of socio-cultural practices towards disclosure of CSA because it acknowledges the disclosure as a result of complex factors that are related to the child (as an individual), family environment, community as well as cultural beliefs.

## 2.4.2 Socio-cultural theory

The socio-cultural theory was developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Russian psychologist, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (Gredler & Shields, 2008). Vygotsky died in 1934 leaving the world without comprehensive understanding and acceptance of the socio-cultural theory that he nearly developed independently (Whiteside, 2007). Following his early death, the socio-cultural theory has been further developed by other followers (Rogoff, 2003). Even though the conceptual concepts are closely related, contributions from other theorists within a system of knowledge in the socio-cultural theory reflect their understanding of the initial phenomena (Bakhurst, 2007). Socio-cultural theory is based on the premise that knowledge is constructed socially through interaction amongst individuals (Bryman, 2001). According to Mishra (2013), Vygotsky's primary belief was that human development is the result of interactions between people and their social environment. Vygotsky's theoretical framework is known for its principal theme that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition.

According to Fernyhough (2008), a central assumption of the Vygotsky's theory is that 'individual' mental functioning originates from social contacts. Papalia (2011) argues that cognitive growth is a collaborative process wherein children learn through social interaction. The way children think and perceive situations around themselves is largely dependent on what is readily available in the immediate environment. Johnson (2009) argues that human cognitive development cannot be observed separately from the social and cultural context from which such development emerges. In other words, it is difficult to disregard the impacts of socio-cultural background on children's cognitive functionality. In addition, according to Edwards (2003), the children's cognitive ability is dependent on their cultural setting.

According to Lee (2015), there are two major tenets of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The first tenet is that cognitive development is mediated by culture and social interaction. The concept of *mediation* suggests that human relations with the world are not direct but "mediated" by physical and symbolic tools (Shabani, 2016). Mediation, according to Vygotsky, refers to the part played by other significant people in children's lives, not only family members. Therefore, children may collect

knowledge of their culture from any people with whom they interact. In other words, children learn from social environments within which they are exposed. Therefore, if it is perceived that disclosure of CSA can bring negative consequences to the child or the family as a whole, it is likely that disclosure will not take place. Children, depending on their developmental stages, are not able to deny the information they learn from people they interact with. Social interaction between two or more people with different levels of skills and knowledge brings learning opportunity to children (Christmas, Kudzai & Josiah, 2013). The second tenet of the socio-cultural theory is the zone of proximal development model (ZPD). The concept of ZPD implies that a less knowledgeable person gets engaged in developmental changes through interaction with people who have a lot of exposure in particular phenomena (Shabani, 2016). Similarly, children are novice and learn from other people about sexual abuse and how it should be handled according to their culture.

According to Weisner (2015), there are multiple behavioural and mental processes involved in the developmental attainment of culture. For instance, the process of enculturation to which exposure to cultural norms allows children to assimilate and internalise accepted behaviour within their culture (Astington, 2004). In addition, learning and development are mediated by culture through the process of socialisation (Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2005). In disclosure of CSA, it could remain a challenge for children to disclose and report their experiences to someone because their culture teaches them to always respect the reputation of the family. Children learn cultural beliefs and norms through socialisation in a way that they later internalise in their higher psychological functions, and it becomes difficult to deviate from what is culturally approved (Vélez-Agosto, Soto-Crespo, Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, Vega-Molina & Coll, 2017).

According to Magnusson and Marecek (2012), it is difficult to understand people without considering the social relationships and cultural systems within their environment. In order to understand disclosure of CSA, it is important to acknowledge the complex cultural interactions that take place amongst families and their environments. The strength of the socio-cultural theory lies in its ability to relate people with their own social and cultural contexts. On the other hand, its shortfall is that it places more attention on the collective than in the individual. According to Lui

and Matthews (2005), this theory fails to recognise that individuals can rise above social norms based on their ability to bring about personal understanding. However, the researcher is of the view that the socio-cultural theory is helpful in this study since it acknowledges that disclosure of CSA can largely be influenced by social and cultural contexts of people.

## **2.5 The South African Legislative Frameworks on Child Sexual Abuse**

CSA is a serious societal problem that affects both males and females at different ages. The impacts of CSA are malicious and negatively affect children's interaction with others (Council of Europe, 2017). As a result, South Africa has, in collaboration with international conventions, designed legislations and social policies that are committed to the progressive realisation of children's rights, and protect them from all forms of abuse and exploitation (Hendricks, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the following pieces of legislation of child protection will be discussed.

### **2.5.1 The Constitution of Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa safeguards the rights of children by virtue of Section 28 (2) which has declared the best interest of the child as of paramount importance (Ali, 2017). According to the Department of Social Development (2011), a human right-based approach is used by the Constitution of Republic of South Africa to recognise and exercise their human rights while the officials abide to respect, protect and fulfil those human rights. Chapter two of the Constitution addresses children's rights and grants special protection for children (Hendricks, 2014). According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2002), even though the Bill of Rights does not specifically mention protection against sexual abuse, the word abuse in section 28(1) refers to all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse.

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution upholds human rights for all and applies to both adults and children (Fouché, 2007). Section 7 affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Furthermore, section 28 1(d) states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.

This being clear, children equally need to be protected and adults should refrain from taking advantage of children's capacity to make informed decisions. Any conduct which is inconsistent with the prescription of the Constitution is invalid and the law should take its course. Despite clear implications of the Constitution, people continue to hear about the issue of CSA within their societies. Ali (2017) concludes that the legislative framework of South Africa is designed well at the procedural level. However, it is not effective in the implementation level and this is the reason why the results are not aligned with the desired outcomes.

### 2.5.2 Children's Act 38 of 2005

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 has been developed with the aim of strengthening the South African child protection system. This act acknowledges challenges that children often face in their lives and was designed to protect them from any forms of ill-treatment and harm. One of its objectives is to set out principles that are in line with the care and protection of children. Since CSA is prevalent in South Africa, it is important to use the legal route to ensure that children are protected and all incidents are reported to the relevant officials. The introduction of this Act is a significant achievement in law reform in respect to children's care and protection. According to Ali (2017), if this act is implemented correctly, it will provide South African children with the legal framework that will protect them against violation of their human rights and promote both their safety and comprehensive well-being.

According to Chapter 9 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, there are reasons why a child might be considered to be in need of care and protection. The child is in need of care and protection if he or she is living within the circumstances that expose him or her to situations that may seriously and negatively affect his or her physical, mental or social well-being (Ritcher & Dawes, 2008). The comprehensive wellbeing of the children is largely determined by the immediate social environment. It could be a challenge to provide support for children who are in need of care and protection if there is no disclosure of CSA. For instance, some children are being sexually abused by members of their family who are supposed to protect and take care of them. According to the Republic of South Africa (2012), the Children's Act aim to ensure that children are not subjected to any harmful social, cultural and religious

practices. However, this act does not have a clause that particularly addresses the issue of disclosure in the event of CSA.

### 2.5.3 Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007

The Amendment Act 41 of 2007 amends the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and seeks to strengthen children's rights and ensure maximum protection. This act provides services starting from prevention and early intervention to tertiary protection services of different forms of violence against children. Child sexual abuse takes place in different settings and times; therefore, it is important to prevent it from happening, provide early intervention where it has already happened, and provide continuous support to the victims because its impacts are detrimental to the wellbeing and development of the children. According to Proudlock and Jamieson (2008), the Children's Amendment Act provides the framework for psychological, rehabilitative and therapeutic services for abused children. However, the key to the effectiveness of this act is dependent on the available resources that are needed to fully implement it. Lack of resources for officials is a barrier to desired functionality and implementation. For instance, social workers at the DSD have reported severe resource constraints to carry out their respective duties while other officials reported no access to vehicles, computers, telephones and office space necessary for child abuse cases (Artz et al., 2016). It is important to acknowledge that disclosure is a process that does not take place automatically and requires resources and skilled officials. Furthermore, it is important for officials to have resources so that they can reach people across societies and educate them about CSA and legal routes that ensure protection by facilitating disclosure.

The Children's Amendment Act lays down the procedure for the protection of children, including reporting of suspected child abuse by professionals (Ali, 2017). Section 110 of Chapter seven of this act specifically addressed the reporting of abused children. Reporting of suspected child sexual abuse to the relevant authorities should be done as soon as the mandated reporter has reasonable grounds for his or her suspicion (Rule, 2017). The researcher is of the opinion it is often not simple for professionals to report CSA without reliable information as they may be fearful for their own safety. Feng, Chen, Fetzer, Feng and Lin (2012) argue

that the interest to report may be determined by attitudes of reporters towards possible outcomes. For instance, if reporters do not have confidence on the factors constituting suspicion, it is likely that they may have negative attitude towards reporting a suspicion of CSA. According to Rule (2017), the provision to report suspicion by professionals is a great initiative because most African families cannot, on their own, report and encourage disclosure of CSA as they fear that there will be division amongst family members. However, it could not always be easy to identify if the child of a certain family has been sexually abused because the social practice of keeping the family issues hidden is instilled in a way that the family may do anything to ensure that knowledge of CSA remains within the family. For instance, in Venda culture, prior sharing with external systems such as professionals (any matter concerning the family), the father should be consulted. If the father, as the head of the family, decides that the child sexual abuse experience should not be known by people outside the family, chances are that disclosure will not happen. Collin-Vézina et al. (2015) conclude that families that have rigid fixed gender roles, patriarchal attitudes, and poor channels of communication have potential to suppress disclosure.

#### 2.5.4 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

According to Ali (2017), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is also known as CRC, is designated to safeguard the human, social, cultural, civil, economic, health and safety rights of children. In addition, Hanzi (2006) states that the child has a right to survival and development, and is dependent on the family, and this can only be achieved under a stable, caring family environment that does not subject the child to cultural practices that will perpetuate sexual abuse or exploitation of the child. The UNCRC acknowledges the rights and duties of the family to nurture, socialise and develop their children in a manner consistent with local values, customs and traditions. In addition, Cobbett, McLaughlin and Kiragu (2013) argue that in practice, social positioning of children in the framework of Article 12 contradicts with local social-cultural practices as children are accorded little power in matters related to their wellbeing. It is disrespectful for children in the Venda culture to reveal matters that are considered as family secrets such as CSA. It is the researcher's observation that family members are more interested in sustaining the

dignity of their families than the well-being of the children. In support of the above observation, Abu-Farah (2015) argues that families with children who are sexually abused avoid social interactions and decide to keep quiet in order to avoid social stigma. Sawrikar and Katz (2017) conclude that fear of dishonouring the family name is a significant barrier to disclosure in that collective interests are valued than individual ones.

According to Mbagaya (2010), despite the adoption of international legislations such as UNCRC and national laws that are designed to protect children from sexual abuse and deal with offenders, many children remain at risk in Africa. Matthews, Jamieson, Lake and Smith (2014) further argue that despite having ratified the UNCRC and having developed a legislative framework whose aim is to prevent violence which children experience daily, there is still a need for collaborative responses from different levels. This legislature needs to focus more on preventative measures that empower community members with knowledge pertinent to the impacts of socio-cultural practices on the issue of disclosure of CSA. It is important that systems such as families and traditional institutions play an active role in protecting children from sexual abuse. As families are considered to be central in the process of socialising children, it is imperative that they set a good example of a role model and see to it that each and every practice is not detrimental to the upbringing of the child.

### 2.5.5 The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007

Section 15 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 states that having sex with a child without their consent following their kidnapping and abduction (*Ukuthwala*) constitutes rape and violation of this act. The consenting age, according to this act, is 16. Therefore, having sex with children who are below consensual age constitutes a sexual offence. This Act further prohibits other sexual activities with children such as sexual exploitation, grooming, and display of child pornography or pornography to children and using children for pornographic purposes or benefiting child pornography. Sexual grooming could be a series of several attempts that occur overtime. Vermont Department of Children and

Families (2013) define sexual grooming of children as a subtle, gradual and on-going process of building trust with the child. The abuser may groom the child for a short or long time before sexual abuse takes place (Rapholo, 2014). The fear of disrespecting the family makes it difficult for disclosure to take place. In addition, Carstens and Fouché (2006) argue that sexual abuse within and outside the family environment often starts with the grooming process that results in a certain kind of sexual relationship between the perpetrator and the victim.

This Act is imperative as it clarifies activities that constitute sexual offences. In The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, sexual offences are divided into penetrative and non-penetrative sexual acts. Historically, only a situation wherein a male had penetrative vaginal sexual intercourse with a female (using his penis against her wishes) was considered a sexual offence or rape (Rule, 2017). Currently, the definition of sexual abuse is wide in that it includes penetration with some inanimate objects, forced or coerced anal or oral sex regardless of the gender of either the victim or the perpetrator (Mathews, Loots, Sikweyiya & Jewkes, 2012). The challenge remains that most African caregivers, particularly in the rural settlements, do not have sufficient information regarding the dimensions of CSA. The researcher is of the observation that regardless of how descriptive this Act is, many people become concerned only when there is penetrative vaginal sexual experience.

## **2.6 Types of Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse**

Despite social and cultural factors that make it difficult for CSA disclosure to take place, there are some instances wherein disclosure occurs, such as when the child perceives the disclosure positively. Moreover, the researcher is of the view that disclosure occurs in different forms based on different situational factors. According to Ciarlante (2007), the disclosure of CSA process is varied and unique to each child. Ciarlante (2007) further maintains that children may make a full and detailed account of their abusive experience, or they may disclose little of information over time, not in a chronological order and to different people. Shackel (2009) argues that the type of disclosure may be dependant on developmental features of the child, such as their age at the onset of abuse and age at time of disclosure, with preschool children

being less likely to spontaneously disclose than older children. The following are the types of disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### 2.6.1 Purposeful disclosure

This type of disclosure is characterised by sexually abused children's desire and readiness to take control over the abuse they have gone through. Higson-Smith and Lamprecht (2004) state that many studies found that purposeful disclosure is the predominant mode of disclosure. The researcher is of the view that despite pressure from social and cultural contexts within which children are surrounded, they may seek alternatives, including direct and indirect ways of communicating their experience. Purposeful disclosure could take place if the child has experienced severe pain, or is of the perception that the disclosure would yield positive outcomes such as stopping sexual abuse from happening in future. However, such disclosure can rely on the child's developmental stage and ability to understand the issue of CSA and potential outcomes because it is not easy to defy socio-cultural practices such as secrecy. Children may, however, make statements that are not clear to people around them with the intention of disclosing the abuse. In support of this view, Ungar, Barter, McConnell, Tutty and Fairholm (2009) argue that children sometimes may use ambiguous verbal statements and their behaviour in trying to inform the adult they trust about their experience of abuse. In addition, Goodyear-Brown, Faith and Myers (2012) maintain that behaviour is a preferred way of communication, especially for young children. To that end, behavioural signs become an important part in the disclosure process.

It becomes easier to develop intervention strategies that seek to provide justice and protection to children when purposeful disclosure is facilitated. Disclosure does not happen automatically, but it is also facilitated by professionals. McElvaney (2013) argues that delays in disclosure and partial disclosure make it difficult for legal investigations and social interventions to take place. According to Reitsema and Grietens (2015), non-offending parents play an important role in the disclosure process, both as recipients of disclosure and as intermediaries regulating access to intervention from authorities. Gagnier and Collin-Vézina (2016) found that positive disclosure experiences were described by participants as those that they felt that

they had been listened to, were safe, were believed, and were not judged by the persons they disclosed to. Allnock and Miller (2013) argue that what has been a significant understanding about disclosure by children and young people is the perceived lack of someone being there for them to disclose to and to provide the support that they were seeking.

### 2.6.2 Accidental disclosure

Children who are abused by a family member are less likely to disclose and more likely to delay disclosure as compared to those abused by someone who is not part of the the family (Kogan, 2004). In Venda culture, it is difficult for disclosure to take place because of taboos associated with sex. However, it requires an adult who pays attention to the child's behaviour in order to learn about the child sexual abuse. One perfect time is when adults are sharing stories '*U a netshela*' with children during the night. The researcher is of the opinion that children may verbally and behaviourally show signs of sexual abuse with no intentions. This form of disclosure occurs as a result of a variety of external circumstances. The most common circumstances in this matter is when someone unexpectedly observes sexual activity, or the child exhibits adult-like sexual behaviours that prompt questions. In addition, Paine and Hansen (2002) argue that pre-school children are more likely to disclose sexual abuse accidentally and in response to a precipitating event, while older children are more likely to disclose in a purposeful manner.

Accidental disclosure may occur when a physical symptom is detected or when a child displays some behavioural or emotional symptoms (Shackel, 2009). It is the researcher's view that caregivers should pay attention to what they observe from their children's behaviours. In supporting the above view, Moors and Webber (2012) state that in most studies, it was recommended that caregivers need to empathise and provide support to their children the moment they discover the possibility of sexual abuse other than detaching themselves from their children and start to blame them. Parents play a very significant role, not only in recognising the sexual abuse of the child but also in encouraging reporting the abuse (Rapholo, 2014; Spies, 2006). Chabeletsane (2015) recommends that parents need to be educated on how

to maintain open communication with their children so that the child should not be fearful of disclosing.

## **2.7 Socio-Cultural Practices Influencing Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse in South Africa**

Children are less powerful within societies and thus they become targets for exerting power and control over (Brownmiller, 2013). As a result, people take advantage of children's status and use their power to abuse them and later threaten them so that they cannot disclose the abuse. The researcher holds the view that parents may implant fear into their children, which may minimise chances of disclosure. In supporting the above view, Franco (2006) argues that mothers have the tendency to advise their children to protect their fathers from knowledge of sexual abuse for fear of possible consequences such as anger and violent responses. On the other hand, the alleged sexually abused children often fear that their disclosure will cause problems for their family (Crisma, Bascelli, Paci & Romito, 2004). In addition, Mathews (2009) found that most children did not disclose immediately, with the majority fearing the response of parents or caregivers and expecting to be blamed. Various types of socio-cultural practices which influence disclosure of child sexual abuse are discussed below.

### **2.7.1 Socialisation**

The process by which people become accustomed to cultural values, beliefs, norms and shared meanings of behaviour is termed socialisation (Shtarkshall, Santelli & Hirsch, 2007). The male dominance and female subordination in most African societies are still considered pervasive and are underpinned as ordinary and an integral part of life by both males and females (Carter, 2015). The researcher is of the view that the way cultures socialise children determines the likelihood of disclosure. The perception of sex as secretive and sacred hinders disclosure of CSA. Furthermore, the thought (adopted in the process of socialisation) that it is unacceptable for males to experience sexual abuse is a socio-cultural barrier to disclosure. Alaggia (2005) found that boys fear being stigmatised as homosexuals and or victims, whereas girls on the other hand are more likely to fear that they will not be believed if they disclose their sexual abuse experience. Sexual abuse

perpetrated by a male brings contradiction on male sexuality in a society that assigns a value to masculinity. These feelings will impact on the motivation of a boy to disclose sexual abuse. In addition, according to Rapholo (2014), male victims may be reluctant to disclose child sexual abuse for fear of being labelled. As a consequence, the fear of being labelled as not man enough may make it a challenge for disclosure to take place.

It is difficult for boys to disclose sexual abuse, particularly when it is done by someone of the same gender because such admission requires confession to having been victimised, which is a blow to their masculine image (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). Male children are more exposed to sexual abuse that occur amongst themselves (sodomy) when they mostly go out herding cattle '*Malisoni*' and guarding crops at the family farms '*Masimuni*' from being destroyed by animals. It could therefore become difficult for male children to disclose such sexual experience because it is not regarded appropriate and normal to have same-gender sex in Venda culture. Disclosure rates amongst male children are generally lower than those of female children (DeVoe & Faller, 1999; Hershkowitz, Horowitz & Lamb, 2007; O'Leary & Barber, 2008). Bridgewater (2016) found that lower rates of sexual abuse disclosure by males may be influenced by patriarchal societies and traditional values of strong males who are not victimised. Russell and Bolen (2000) argue that because most offenders are male, it could be difficult for them to face the fact that they have encountered same-gender sexual abuse because it is considered as a taboo for such abuse to occur. The researcher is however mindful of the fact that sexual abuse happens amongst children of all genders.

### 2.7.2 Initiation schools

Culturally, Venda girls from the age of ten are ought to attend initiation schools called *Vhusha* (female initiation school). During this school, the emphasis is on learning *milayo* (initiation school laws) which are guidelines about how to be a good Venda woman and wife. This is often a trial period for the girls to honour their family name and clan by proving that they were still virgins. Additionally, when families learn that their daughters are no longer virgins, it becomes a shame; this further means that chances of someone asking their daughter's hand in marriage are minimal and the

number of cows (*lobola*) will as well decrease (Mulaudzi, Chinouya & Ngunyulu, 2015). In this regard, the researcher is of the view that the girls may not be interested in disclosing CSA for fear of losing their social positions. On the other hand, when boys return from initiation schools called *Ngoma ya Vhanna* (male initiation school), they no longer describe themselves as boys, but as men. Mohlaloka (2014) argues that when some initiates return from the 'bush' (male initiation school), they change their behaviour and feel superior.

In Venda culture, it is believed that the removal of the foreskin symbolises "sharpening of the warrior's spear" (Mohlaloka, Jacobs & de Wet, 2016). According to Malisha, Maharaj and Rogan (2008), the spear is a sign ought to be used to strike the "elephant". The elephant denotes the woman. The belief that the spear should strike the elephant may bring the portrait that it is expected that sexual intercourse should occur whether with or without consent. Mggolozana (2009) argues that initiation schools have emerged with the suggestion that young men are given unquestionable access to sex with multiple partners. However, through initiation schools, the initiates learn to think strategically in matters they encounter in their lives (Letseka, 2013). Twala (2007) holds that it is difficult for initiates to discuss most of their challenges because they are taught to sustain secrecy and confidentiality. Maharasoa and Maharaswa (2004) further argue that the initiates are considered to be real men and they are differentiated from the rest of the people by their ability to be strong and to be secretive. Notwithstanding the fact that initiation schools build initiates, the researcher is of the view that it may be difficult for children to disclose sexual abuse under the impression that they may be perceived to be weak or not men enough if they disclose their sexual abuse experience. Furthermore, having sex is a private matter in Venda culture and is considered to be for adults.

### 2.7.3 Lack of parent-child discussion on sexual life

Young children, in particular, may lack knowledge about sexual behaviour (Cederborg, Lamb & Laurell, 2007). Lack of knowledge and ignorance of what constitutes sexual abuse has profound impacts on CSA disclosure. Contrary to this, Schaeffer, Leventhal and Asnes (2011) argue that even if children have sexual knowledge, they may be brainwashed to a point in which they may not know that

sexual behaviour between an older person and a child is wrong. Adults in Venda culture use indirect words to refer to sex such as '*U daha tshinefu*', literally meaning to sniff. Such language is used to show respect and to teach children clean language. As a consequence, children learn of sexual issues when they reach developmental stages in which they can meditate through what they are taught. Alzoubi, Ali, Flah and Alnatour (2018) argue that caregivers hardly discuss sex-related issues with children because of their cultural and religious standpoints. It could be because of this reason that sex is culturally regarded as a taboo. Faller (2007) further argues that sexual abuse may be perceived as an activity that cannot be discussed with children. However, according to Meinck, Cluver, Loening-Voysey, Bray, Doubt, Casale and Sherr (2017), there is a difference between children's knowledge of services and children's reluctance to disclose and to seek help from formalised services. The researcher holds the view that the manner in which children grow in their respective cultural contexts has a significant impact in disclosure of CSA regardless of whether they have knowledge or not.

#### 2.7.4 Cultural scripts

Cultural scripts are social expectations of how certain social or cultural groups are expected to perceive and behave in different circumstances (Wiederman, 2005). According to Beres (2014), scripts specify guidelines for the expression of sexuality, and define and assign roles for males and females in social interactions. It is unfortunate that people do not consistently abide by these scripts. People deliberately avoid social and cultural prescriptions in order for the circumstances to favour their interests. In addition, Elliot (2010) argues that one may create interpersonal scripts to make them gratify their personal interests. In supplementing the above, Kottak (2011) posits that people purposefully interpret and manipulate common rules in different ways in order to satisfy their personal gratifications. The researcher is of the opinion that many individuals sexually abuse children because they may manipulate cultural scripts and take advantage of the age and relationship between themselves and children.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Socio-cultural and historical backgrounds of people can strongly affect their interest to report or disclose CSA. It is also important to note that disclosure is a process that can happen in different forms and time. Although it is difficult to have an exact figure regarding the prevalence of CSA, its severity in South Africa and at an international level is rife. This study has adopted both the ecological perspective and the socio-cultural theory to explore the influence of socio-cultural practices towards disclosure of CSA. National and international efforts on legal framework to protect children from violence such as sexual abuse have been witnessed across societies. The next chapter will focus on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data.

# CHAPTER 3

## QUALITATIVE DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

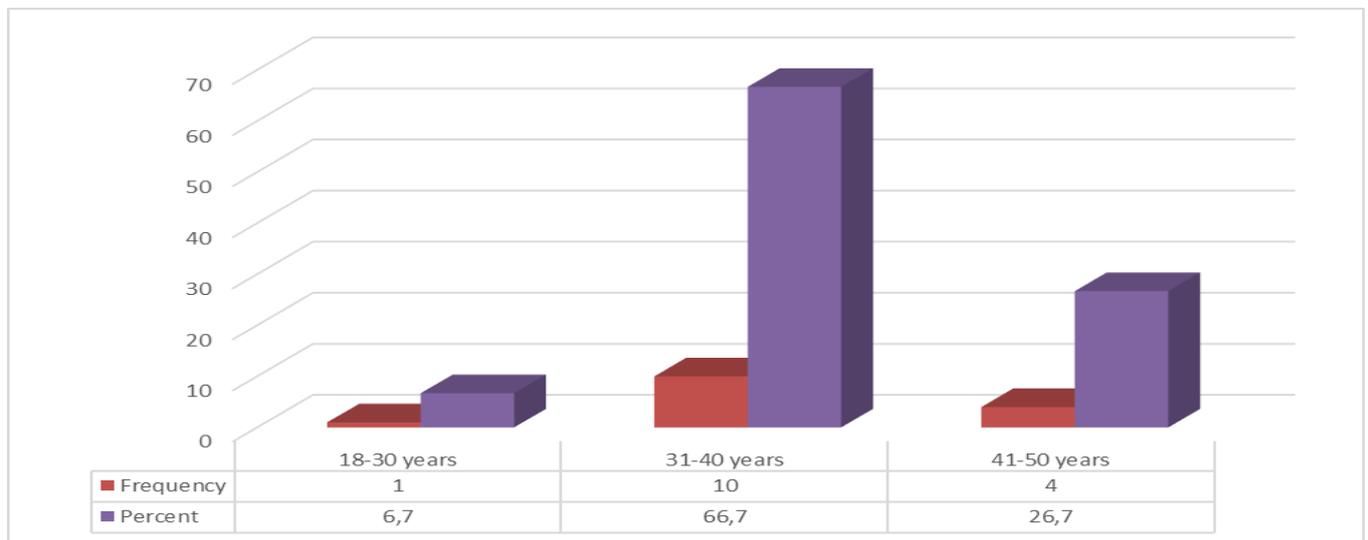
### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present, analyse and interpret the findings of the study, which was conducted in Vhembe District with fifteen (15) Venda speaking people. The aim was to explore the influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse. The study was qualitative in nature and an exploratory research design was used. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to purposefully collect data. The findings below are presented according to themes and sub-themes.

### 3.2 Biographical Details of the Participants

The biographical details of the participants in this study include age and gender.

#### 3.2.1 Age of the participants

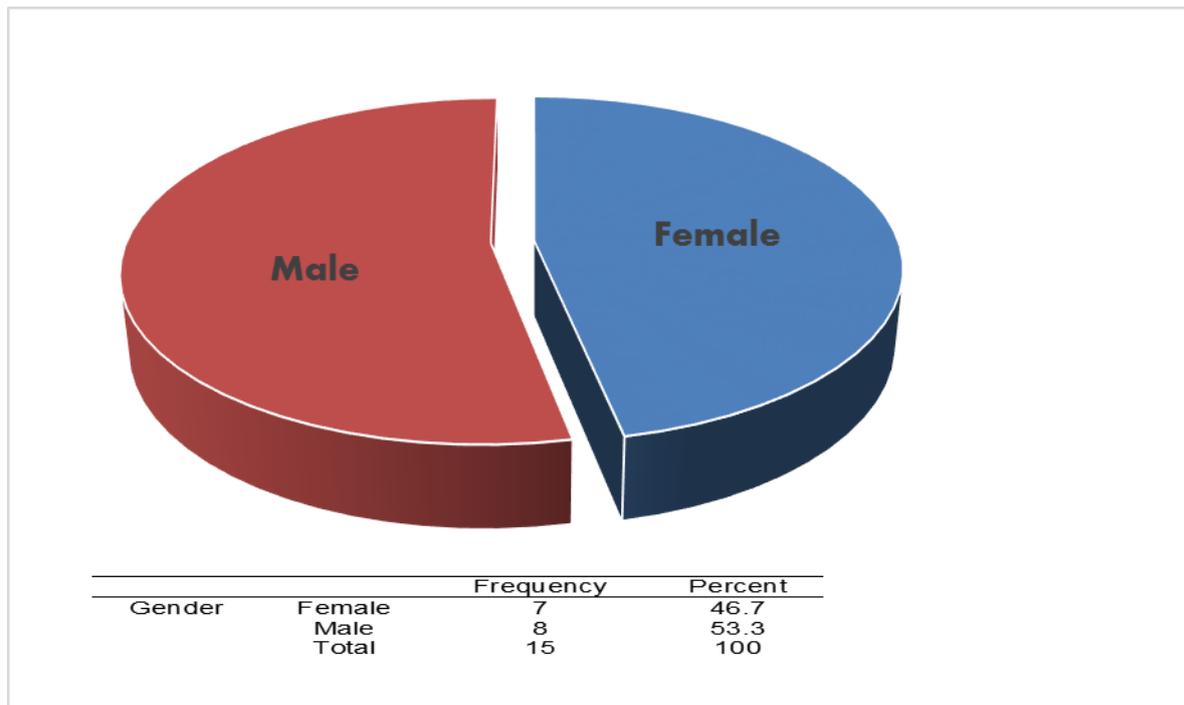


**Figure 1: Age of the participants**

Figure 1 above shows that only one participant was aged 27 years and ten participants were of the age range of 31-40 years. Four participants ranged between

the ages of 41-50 years. It can be noted from the above figure that majority of the participants were at an adulthood stage of human development. However, it cannot be concluded in this study that only adults at Venda possess adequate knowledge regarding socio-cultural influences on disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### 3.2.2 Gender of the participants



**Figure 2: Gender of the participants**

Figure 2 above illustrates that eight (8) of the participants were male and seven (7) were females. The researcher observed that Venda is a patriarchal society where there are more female caregivers of children than males. Ncitakalo (2011) supports the observation that in most patriarchal communities, most caregivers of children are females. However, it cannot be concluded from this study that the difference in gender participation in this study validates such observation.

### **3.3 Discussion of the Findings**

This section discusses the empirical findings of this study. The following themes and sub-themes emerged.

#### **3.3.1 Theme 1: Knowledge regarding what is child sexual abuse**

The aim of this section was to assess knowledge on what constitutes CSA according to the Venda speaking people. The researcher has learnt that there are lot of perspectives on the definition of child sexual abuse in different cultures. This is validated by Dawes and Higson (2005), Ngubane (2010) and Rapholo (2014), who established that the definition of child sexual abuse depends on what a particular culture validates as one. Gavey (2005) argues that sexual encounters involving children are interpreted based on norms and standards of the surrounding culture. Furthermore, according to Ward and Siegert (2002), people often adopt cultural rules and follow standards to determine how CSA experiences should be perceived and interpreted. In other words, the ascription of what is considered to be child sexual abuse varies from one cultural setting to the next. The subthemes associated with this theme included forceful sexual intercourse, pornography and sexual violence.

##### **3.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Forceful sexual intercourse**

Most participants attributed forceful sexual intercourse as CSA. Such participants defined a forceful sexual intercourse as a penile penetrative act by an adult to the child. According to the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007), sexual penetration includes any act which causes penetration to any extent whatsoever by a) the genital organs of one person into or beyond the genital organs, anus or mouth of another person; b) any other part of the body of one person or any object, including any part of the body of an animal, into or beyond the genital organs or anus of another person; or c) the genital organs of an animal, into or beyond the mouth of another person. The definition by the participants falls within that of the said act. Forceful sexual intercourse is said to be easy to identify because of its physical implications to the abused as a result of forceful penetration. In line with these findings, Tucker and Cheit (2010) assert that it becomes easy for people to define acts such as penetrative sexual intercourse as CSA than other behaviours that are less intrusive, like fondling or exhibitionism, and may be ambiguously

defined. It is the researcher's view that sexual abuse acts that do not involve penetration are less likely to be considered as strong because of their less perceived consequences to the abused child. Gender and age seem to exert significant influence on how particular cases of CSA are perceived according to the severity and extent of harm thought to be caused to the child (Bornstein, Kaplan & Perry, 2007). One participant has indicated that CSA involves forceful penetration, and it does not matter if the child has consented to such sexual intercourse.

In corroboration of the above, some participants echoed:

*“U tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani ndi musi mupondi a tshi shumisa vhudzimu hawe kha ha nwana mutuku. Zwi a leluwa u vhone arali nangoho ho vha na u kombetshedza u jenisa vhudzimu.” Translated as: “Child sexual abuse is when someone uses his private parts against that of the child. It can easily be identified only if there has been a forceful penile penetration.”*

*“Nga kuvhonele kwanga, u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani ndi musi muthu muhulwane nga minwaha o kombetshedza u dzhenisa vhudzimu hawe kha ha nwana. Kha nyimele iyi a ri koni u amba nga ha vhudifhinduleli na u kona u tenda vhudzekani vhu tshi itwa...mmmhh nwana ndi nwana.” Translated as: “For me, child sexual abuse is when there is a forceful penile penetration between a child and someone older than the child. We cannot talk about the issue of the child's ability to make consent...mmhh a child is a child.”*

The above findings show that whether or not the child has given consent, if there has been penile penetration, such act is considered as child sexual abuse. The researcher agrees with these findings in that children, depending on their development transitions, may not have comprehensive understanding of CSA; thus, one cannot simply depend on their consent. In support of the above, Krishnan, Syahirah, Syahirah and Amira (2017) define child sexual abuse as a use of a child in any sexual activity with or without consent and often without the child's understanding. The researcher is of the view that the perpetrators may take advantage of the child's cognitive development and abuse the child sexually.

According to Attah (2016), the final judgement of what constitutes CSA is influenced by several interacting factors, such as characteristics of the victim and offender. For instance, perpetrators who are older than the child may find it easy to manipulate the child's mind and sexually abuse him or her.

### 3.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Pornography and sexual grooming

The participants are of the view that pornography is when someone older than the child displays visuals that contain sexual elements for their own sexual gratifications and such act is regarded as CSA. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (SA, 2007) defines pornography as any image, however created, or any description of a person, real or simulated, who is 18 years or older, of an explicit or sexual nature that is intended to stimulate erotic feelings. The act of showing children pornographic visuals is child sexual abuse, according to the said act. The participants further argued that pornography can be used by perpetrators to bring children closer so that they can subsequently abuse them sexually. This process is called sexual grooming. Mitchell, Rhinnon and Claire (2012) define grooming as actions by perpetrators with the intention of establishing an emotional connection and trust with a child or young person to increase the likelihood of them engaging in sexual behaviour or exploitation at the later stage.

That was supported by participants who argued:

*“U tambudza ha vhana lwa vhudzekani ndi musu muthu muhulwane kha nwana nga minwaha a tshi shumisa nwana u fusha lutamo na dora lawe la zwa vhudzekani. Onoyo mupondi a nga lingedza u sendedza nwana tsini nga ndila ya u shumisa dzi vidio dza vhudzekani tshipikwa tshihulu hu u mu tambudza lwa vhudzekan.” Translated as: “Child sexual abuse happens when someone older than a child uses the child for sexual purposes such as pornography and masturbation. He can bring the child closer by showing him/her pornographic videos which culminates into a serious sexual offense against the child.”*

*“U sumbedza vhana zwifanyiso na dzividio dza vhudzekani kana vathu vhe fhedzi khathihi na u ita vhudzekani phanda ha vhana, ndi tshipida*

*tsha u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani. Tshinwe tshifhinga mupondi a nga shumisa zwifanyiso na dzividio idzo hu u itela u kunga khathihi na u tola dzangalelo la vhana zwi tshi da kha vhudzekani.”*  
*Translated as: “Showing children pornographic visuals and having sexual intercourse in the presence of children also form part of child sexual abuse. Sometimes offenders use pornographic visuals in order to seduce the child. They may use pornography to test waters.”*

It can be noted from this study that pornography amongst the Venda speaking people is known and regarded as CSA. The findings of this study reveal that pornography can be shown by offenders to children as a strategy to check if they are interested in sex. Potgieter (2000) found that the perpetrator creates a friendly environment with the child and gradually gains access from less private areas, to the child's body and ultimately to their private parts, i.e. genitals and excretory organs. Pornography is a premeditated act which perpetrators use to satisfy their sexual pleasure, and to gradually win children without having to go straight to actual intention. Sexual abuse within or outside a family context often starts with a grooming process, which later leads to a particular type of sexual relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (Carstens & Fouché, 2006). It is the researcher's opinion that once the perpetrator has won the child's mind, it could be a challenge for the child to disclose because of threats and incentives that may be made by the perpetrator. For instance, the perpetrator may threaten to hurt or kill someone if the child who is sexually abused discloses the sexual abuse. According to Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones and Gordon (2003), perpetrators may use threats to ensure that children keep the knowledge of sexual abuse hidden from people. As a consequence, the child is likely to be denial to disclose CSA for fear of the consequences.

### 3.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Sexual violence

According to Artz et al. (2016), Optimus study conducted in South Africa highlights that both boys and girls are equally vulnerable to some form of child sexual abuse even though the forms vary in that boys reported higher levels of non-contact sexual

abuse while girls reported being more likely to experience contact sexual abuse. Some participants indicated that child sexual abuse is when there is sexual violence. Sexual violence is defined by World Health Organisation (2011) as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. The participants further contended that sexual violence can happen even when there is no penetration towards the child. For instance, touching of the child's private parts was recorded to be a common act that constitutes sexual violence even in the absence of penetration. However, this act is quite controversial in most cultural contexts that still honour patriarchy, including Venda, because it is difficult to draw the line between abuse and the caregiver's traditional duty to care for children. This is validated by Fattah and Kabir (2013), who argue that sexual abuse that is perpetuated by females may not be perceived as abuse because women are socially perceived as caregivers, and they can have more intimate contact with children.

Some participants argued as follows:

*"Tshinwe tshifhinga u fara zwipida zwa muvhili zwingaho madamu na vhudzimu zwa muthu ndi u tambudza lwa vhudzekani. Fhedzi, nyimele na tshifhinga ndi zwa ndeme. Sa tsumbo, arali e mubebi wa mufumakadzi ane a khou tanzwa nwana ari koni uri u fara zwipida zwa nwana zwa tsini ndi u mutambudza lwa vhudzekani."* Translated as: *"Sometimes touching body parts such as breasts and private parts can be sexual violence, depending on the circumstance. For example, if it is a mother who is bathing her child it cannot be called child sexual abuse."*

*"Nga kupfesesele kwanga, a si tshifhinga tshothe hune u fara mirado ya vhana ya tsini zwi tshi nga vhidzwa u tambadza lwa vhudzekani ngauri nne sa mubebi wa tshifumakadzini ndi vhudifhinduleli hanga ha u vhona uri vhana vho kuna tshifhinga tshothe. Fhedzi, a huna inwe ndila ya u vha tanzwa ndi si kone u fara mirado yavho ya tsini."* Translated as: *"For me, it cannot always be sexual violence when I touch my children's body private parts because I am the only one who is responsible to keep them*

*clean and there is no way I can bathe them without touching their private parts.”*

The findings show that there are contradicting statements with respect to the definition of sexual violence in Venda. Some participants seem to understand it as the touching of breasts and genital organs of the child, whilst others raised concerns that caregivers of children are supposed to touch those body organs. The researcher agrees with these findings and is of the view that such is influenced by traditional attributions accorded to the role of parents who should take care of children. For instance, female parents are associated with the traditional roles of being close to children and of taking care of their daily hygiene, including helping them to bath. In this regard, parents become confused about what ‘touch’ should or should not be considered as child sexual abuse. According to Priebe and Svedin (2008), it is likely that girls would not disclose sexual abuse if they had experienced contact sexual abuse with or without penetration. The researcher noted that there is still a gap of knowledge amongst the Venda speaking people regarding what constitutes CSA. Therefore, there is a need to educate Venda communities about child sexual abuse and what it involves.

### 3.4 Theme 2: Socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people that influence disclosure of CSA

The aim of this section was to determine the way in which social and cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people influence the disclosure of CSA. People have different norms and standards with which they are guided, and it is important to understand them from their own standpoint. According to Fontes and Plummer (2010), it is important to understand the values and beliefs of specific cultures in order to enhance their ability to overcome barriers to disclosure of CSA amongst families. It was found during this study that the desire to preserve family name and dignity, gender socialisation, and secrecy has a major impact on disclosure of CSA.

### 3.4.1 Subtheme 1: Preservation of family name and dignity

The participants argued that most Venda families are more concerned about the dignity of the family, thus it becomes difficult to disclose CSA. The majority of the participants further indicated that parents are afraid of disclosing CSA because they do not want to divide and bring shame to the family. Fontes (2005) argues that shame amongst many cultures can suppress disclosure of child sexual abuse. There are several aspects that may bring feeling of shame such as possible perceptions of neighbours and friends (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). It is the researcher's view that it is difficult to prioritise the well-being of the children in the settings that place high value to family unity and dignity. In support of the above, Sawrikar and Katz (2017) argue that the needs of victims may not be a priority to the needs of the family, particularly the need to protect the reputation or dignity of the family.

Some participants said:

*“Rine sa muta ri a thogomela muhumbulo wa uri vhathu vha do ri vhonele’fhi nga murahu ha u divha uri nwana a bvaho kha muta washu o tambudziwa lwa vhudzekani. Phelelodzoni yazwo, muta u ya dzhia tsheo ya uri ndivho iyo i vhe tshiphiri tsha muta naho i tshi kwama mupondwa nga ndila i si ya vhudi.”* Translated as: *“We are concerned about what people will say after knowing that the child from our family is sexually abused. As a result, the family decides to keep the abuse secret even though it negatively affected the child.”*

*“Sa muta, ri vhona uri u shumana na fhungo hanefha mutani zwinga thusa u sa kokodzela dzina la muta matopeni.”* Translated as: *“We cannot risk the name of the family because of disclosure. We can work on that as a family.”*

The findings reveal that parents or caregivers of children are more willing to protect the family from any act that can negatively affect its dignity. Thus, when there is an incident of CSA, they may rather keep it hidden without regarding possible implications in the development of the abused child. As a consequence, children who are sexually abused often feel confused and helpless because of uneven support

from family members (Kaufman, de Wet & Stadler, 2001). It is the researcher's observation that families seek to maintain their social status, and do their best to fight against both internal and external issues that threaten their image. It is apparent from the findings that the interest is more on the collective than the individual. In other words, the family is placed at the centre of everything in a way that the impacts of sexual abuse on the child as an individual is less likely to be prioritised. According to Sawrikar and Katz (2018), most of African collectivist cultures have a social norm of silence with the intention of protecting the dignity and reputation of the family. The reputation and interest of the family is put above that of the abused child, and little attention is given to the impacts of the abuse to the child (Boakye, 2009).

#### 3.4.2 Subtheme 2: Gender socialisation and initiation schools

The findings of this study show that the manner in which children are socialised presents differences when it comes to disclosure amongst genders. Socialisation processes amongst the Venda speaking people makes it is easier for a female child to disclose CSA than a male child. The reason was found to be that the information children acquire from initiation schools somehow makes it difficult for them to come forth and to disclose their experiences of sexual abuse. For instance, female children go to female initiation schools to learn how to become good women as marriage is traditionally valued. Given the sentimental value attached to marriage, it could be a challenge to disclose sexual abuse amongst female children for fear of forfeiting their chances of getting married. In line with the above, Ratrout (2002) found that girls that are exposed to sexual abuse during childhood rarely get married in future. On the other hand, male children may not disclose their sexual abuse experiences in an attempt to satisfy cultural expectations acquired from the mountain (male initiation school) of being 'strong'. According to Attah (2016), fear of being equated with females, which is the opposite of what is expected of the traditional male, is another reason for CSA non-disclosure amongst males. Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) assert that to achieve the status of being a 'man', one must behave consistently with roles that allow one to claim membership of manhood.

Some participants echoed this sentiment as follows:

*“Nwana wa muthannga a nga pfa u nga ha na tshivhiti arali a bvisela khagala u tambudzwa hawe lwa vhudzekani. Nne u bva tshe nda vha hone, ndo no pfa milandu ya tshivhalo tshituku hune ha vha na vhudzekani ha vhatukana nga tshavho. Fhedzi-ha, a zwi ambi u ri zwo raloho a zwi itei.” Translated as: “A boy child may feel that he is not brave enough if he discloses CSA. I have personally heard few cases wherein male children were sexually abused, however, it does not mean such kind of abuse does not happen.”*

*“Vhunga zwi songo dowelea u ri vhana vha vhatukana vha tambudzwe lwa vhudzekani, muta u nga dzhia tsheo ya u sa vhiga hu u itela uri mupondwa a tsireledzee. Kha nwana wa musidzana, dzangalelo la vhanna la u mu vhingali nga thafha vhunga vhunzhi ha vhanna vha si nga si takalele muthu ono tshinyalelwaho ngauralo.” Translated as: “Since it is uncommon for a male child to be sexually abused, the family may not report child sexual abuse to avoid stigmatisation. For a girl child, men may no longer be interested to marry a woman who has been sexually abused.”*

In the same wavelength, another participant stated:

*“Ndila ine ra aluwa ngayo ari koni u sokou amba nga mafhungo manwe na manwe. Sa tsumbo, sa vhana musiri ngomani, ri guda u kondelela vhutungu na u kona u dzula na mafhungo u itela uri ri vhidzwe vho vhibvaho.” Translated as: “The way we grow up does not allow us to just talk about every issue. For example, as children, we learn from initiation schools to bear pains and keep things to ourselves so that we can be perceived strong.”*

Based on the findings of this study, disclosure of CSA can be determined by the manner in which children are raised within their own cultural contexts. This finding is validated by Aboul-Hagag and Hamed (2011), who found that there are low rates of CSA amongst males as compared with their female counterparts. It is estimated that between 7-36% of females and 5-10% of male children have experienced sexual violence across the globe (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005). The researcher is of the view that it must be noted that sexual abuse amongst males is considered uncommon in most communities, and its rate remains low because of the

cultural gender role expectations. It is a social perception that males are strong and brave, therefore, behaving contrarily can create confusion and non-disclosure. In support of the researcher's view, Bridgewater (2016) found that low rates of disclosure amongst males may be influenced by patriarchal and traditional values that place preference on males over females. Consistent with traditional gender roles, the male children are socialised to be assertive and have ability to control of their emotions (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison & Morton, 2012). It is difficult for males to share their experiences with other people because they are willing to maintain the social stereotypes of masculinity. Disclosure of sexual abuse amongst males threatens and questions masculine strengths and may be interpreted as though the victim is weak (Mathews, Bromfield, Walsh, Cheng & Norman, 2017).

### 3.4.3 Subtheme 3: Secrecy

The findings of this study revealed that it is difficult for the Venda speaking people to disclose child sexual abuse because of the desire to abide by the cultural norm of secrecy aligned to the belief that family matters must remain within their family. Victims of CSA may not come forward to declare what has happened to them, and this further encourages the cycle of abusive silence (Ritchter, Dawes & Hagson-Smith, 2004). Spiegel (2003) notes that keeping the knowledge of sexual abuse hidden from the relevant systems is influenced by the secrecy norm which is both a social phenomenon and a personal life event. It is the view of the researcher that a child may find it difficult to interact with peers after knowing that people within the community are aware of the sexual abuse he/she has experienced. Disclosure of CSA is inhabited by cultural, familial and societal taboos around sex and stigma attached to victims (Collin-Vézina, de la Sablonniere-Griffin, Palmer & Milne, 2015).

Some participants echoed this sentiment as follows:

*“Mvelele yashu ya Tshivenda i tendesa kha zwiphiri. Ri funa u kutela mafhungo ashu uri vhanwe vha si ri divhele. Ri tenda kha uri khaedu ifhio na ifhio mitani yashu I nga kona u tandululwa naho i songo divhiwa nga nnyi na nnyi ngei nnda.” Translated as: “Our Venda culture is a culture of secrets. We love hiding our issues from people. We believe that every*

*problem within our families can be resolved without having the world knowing about what we are going through.”*

*“U bvisa mafhungo mangafha-ngafha nda ha muta ndi u sa thonifha na luthihi. Arali mme a nwana onoyo o tambudzwaho lwa vhudzekani vha fanywa vha bula tshiphiri itshi, vha vha vho nyadza thoho ya muta na hone vhangha humiselwa mutani wa havho nga u bonya ha ito.”*  
*Translated as: “Speaking with someone outside the family about this serious matter is considered disrespectful. If for example a mother reveals such secret, she will be liable of disrespecting the head of the family and she can be sent back to her family.”*

It was found in this study that the Venda speaking people do not have interest of making their family matters known to the world. They keep secrets even when they go through difficult and challenging situations. In such a social system, sharing family matters with someone outside the family can be considered to be disrespectful. This is validated by Jewkes et al. (2005), who found that South African cultures and families believe that adults, particularly men, deserve respect and obedience. Children who show disrespect are subjected to punishment. Reported cases of CSA only constitute the tip of the iceberg because the majority of victims and survivors are emotionally manipulated to keep silent about the abuse (Vermeulen & Greeff, 2015). The researcher is of the view that this secrecy norm may not enable children to report their experience of sexual abuse to legal systems for fear of being reprimanded for their disobedient and disrespectful behaviour.

### **3.5 Theme 3: The Influence of Child-Parent Relationship towards Non-Disclosure of CSA**

The disclosure of CSA is dependent on the type of support that the victim receives from the confidant, be it parents or close friends. This is validated by Allnock and Miller (2013), who found the particular role of mothers as trusted confidantes. It is difficult for disclosure to occur in environments that are less supportive to children. The subthemes that emerged from this theme include child-parent open discussion

about sex, intra and interfamilial child sexual abuse, and fear of losing the breadwinner, and patriarchy.

### 3.5.1 Subtheme 1: Child-parent open discussion about sex

Majority of the participants indicated it is difficult for parents in Venda to communicate about sexuality with their children because of their cultural backgrounds. This is validated by Pattman and Chege (2003), who found that many adults struggle to have open discussions about sex with children. Conversation around sex with children is considered inappropriate in most cultures. According to Kacker, Varadan and Kumar (2007), familial beliefs that discussing sex is a taboo have been cited as a factor for low reporting rates of CSA. Lack of discussion on sexual life minimises opportunities for children to learn and to understand CSA, and as a consequence, children will continue to suffer as a result of sexual abuse. Impaired parent-child relationships coupled with CSA is predictive of suicidal behaviour in children and adolescents (Steele & Doey, 2007). McElvaney et al. (2013) found that a parent's ability to be receptive and believe on sexual abuse is a prerequisite for being able to ask a child if abuse has occurred.

The participants argued:

*“A zwo ngo tou leluwa u ri ri dzule fhasi na vhana vhashu ri ambe nga mafhungo a elanaho na kutshilele kwa zwa vhudzekani, ngauri ri a pfa zwi tshi ri shonisa na u ri nyadzisa. Ri a tshuwa u ri ri nga vho do vhonele sa vhabebi kana vhaundi vha si na thonifho na mikano. Zwavhudi-vhudi, mvelele na maitele ashu ha tendi ri tshi fara nyambedzano nga ha vhudzekani na vhana.”* Translated as: *“It is not easy for us to sit down with our children and talk about sexual life because we feel ashamed. We are afraid to be considered as disrespectful. Actually, it is against our tradition to discuss about sex with children.”*

*“Kha mvelele yashu ya Tshivenda, a zwo ngo leluwa u tou dzula fhasi na vhana vhashu ra amba nga ha vhudzekani. Zwi shonisa luvhilulaho vhunga ri tshi tama u vhona vhana vhashu vha tshi ri thonifha misi yothe. Mvelele yashu a i tendi ri tshi vha na nyambedzano ngaha vhudzekani na vhana.”* Translated

*as: "In our Venda culture, it is not easy to sit down with our children and talk about sex. We feel ashamed to talk about it with our children and we still want them to respect always respect us. It is against our tradition to have discussion about sex with children."*

The findings of this study reveal that parents have difficulties with discussions about sexual matters because it is traditionally a taboo topic. Traditionally, parents are leaders and role models of children. Therefore, it is likely that they will be uncomfortable with discussing about sex-related matters as it is against their tradition. Disclosure of CSA has fewer chances of occurrence in this context. According to Sossou and Yogyiba (2010), disclosure is a cultural phenomenon that discourages conversations on sexuality. The researcher is of the view that if it is difficult for parents to discuss sex-related matters with their children, then it will equally be a challenge for children to initiate such discussions. As a result, children are less likely to disclose if they believe that their disclosure may not be received with support. According to Priebe and Svedin (2008), children who disclose sexual abuse in formal settings are more likely to have supportive parents in particular mothers.

### 3.5.2 Subtheme 2: Victim-perpetrator relationship

According to Townsend and Dawes (2004), children are in a higher risk of being abused by a person known to them. In fact, CSA is most frequently committed by family members (Collings, 2006). Some participants averred that in Venda, the issue of family relations is highly valued. They indicated that disclosure is also determined by the victim-perpetrator relationship, which is likely to happen in a situation where the perpetrator is not part of the victim's family than intra-familial abuse. This is in line with findings by Posel (2005), that many of the South African instances of child sexual abuse which were cited in the media were incestuous. In several CSA cases, the perpetrator is known to the family and this makes it harder for disclosure to take place (Alzoubi, Ali, Flah, Alnatour, 2018). Furthermore, according to Dutchevici (2012), the fact that many cases of childhood sexual abuse are intra-familial and that makes it more difficult to discuss and disclose it.

Some participants echoed this, saying:

*“Ro sedzesa vhushaka hanefha mutani ngau angaredza, mupondiwa na vha muta vha nga dzhia tsheo ya u sa vhiga tshiwo tsha u tambudzwa ha nwana lwa vhudzekani mulayoni. Sa vhabebi, ri a sedza kana u thogomela mbuelo dzine dza nga lozwea arali muhumbulelwa a farwa.”*  
*Translated as: “Considering the relationship of the family as a whole, both the child and family may decide not to disclose intra-familial child sexual abuse. As parents, we consider the benefits that may be forfeited if the perpetrator is arrested.”*

*“Zwi vha khwine na u leluwa u vhiga mulandula wa u tambudzwa ha nwana lwa vhudzekani arali muhumbulelwa a si murado wa muta vhu nga zwi si nga si fhandekanye muta na u huvhadza vhushaka.”*  
*Translated as: “It can be better to report child sexual abuse if the offender is not a member of the family because there are no risks of dividing the family.”*

The findings of this study show that it becomes easy to disclose inter-familial child sexual abuse than intra-familial one because of possible loss and breakdown of relationship. Inter-familial child sexual abuse occurs when sexual abuse is perpetuated by someone who is not related to the victim by blood. 90% of child sexual abuse is estimated to have been perpetrated by someone known to the child (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). In addition, Huyssteen (2014) found that if the perpetrator is part of the family system, children will take longer to disclose the sexual abuse than when the perpetrator is not part of the family. In a similar vein, the data of this study reveals that both children and families do not easily disclose intra-familial child sexual abuse because they are afraid of dividing the family and its members. This, however, does not value the comprehensive wellbeing of the abused children because the focus is more on the perceived outcomes should the abuse become known to the public than getting justice for the victims. It should remain the responsibility of a family to ensure that children are well protected, and their constitutional right are not compromised for any reason. However, attachment issues, traumatic bonding and a child’s desire to protect and keep the family together are often cited as explanations of the deceased’s likelihood of disclosing when the

perpetrator is a family member or a significant carer (Malloy et al., 2007; Paine & Hansen, 2002). The issue of CSA needs to be considered seriously and reported regardless of who the perpetrator is. As it stands, most common types of perpetrators of CSA are family members such as fathers, mothers, step-fathers, uncles, domestic workers, siblings, and cousins (Thornton & Veenema, 2015).

### 3.5.3 Subtheme 3: Fear of losing the breadwinner and patriarchy

The findings of the study show that it is difficult for most parents to disclose or report CSA as they are afraid of losing financial support because perpetrators in most cases are breadwinners within families. Most participants indicated that most perpetrators of sexual abuse are fathers of children, and that Venda is a patriarchal society which believes in the domination of men in families. These findings are validated by Mathews et al. (2012), who found that social environments in which most South African children develop are dominated by patriarchal values which support male dominance over women and children. The patriarchal system that still subsists amongst many cultures has given men the authority to dominate women socially and financially. As a consequence, women are compelled to submit to men. They have less power to argue and object when decisions, including hiding knowledge of CSA, have been made. This is because of their social and financial subordinate status. In most South African communities, families are still defined in terms of men as primary financial providers and decision-makers (Mantell et al., 2009). It is the researcher's view that in such social environments, to most women, disclosure is seen as a ticket towards loss of both financial support and marriage.

Some participants echoed that:

*“A zwi ngo leluwa kha vhabebi u bvisela khagala ngauri ndivho i yo i nga swika kha nyimele ine vhangha shakulisiwa kana u to humiselwa hayani ha havho, zwine a si zwavhudi na luthihi vhunga rine vhanwe ri tshi bva kha mita i shayaho.” Translated as: “It is not simple for parents to disclose because it may lead to a situation wherein I might be fired or sent back home and it is not good because some of us come from poor families.”*

*“Kha vhunzhi ha milandu ya u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani, mupondi u vha e khotsi kana muundi wa afho mutani. Zworalo, nga mulandu wa hone vhushai ri kombetshedzea u zwi ita tshiphiri.”*  
*Translated as: “In most of child sexual abuse cases, the offender is the father or the breadwinner and due to poverty, we are forced to keep the matter to ourselves instead of reporting it.”*

These findings reveal that fear of losing family breadwinners and patriarchal beliefs influence women not to report or disclose CSA as they depend on their husbands financially. This is in line findings by Anderson (2010) that the non-offender mothers are significantly more likely to conceal sexual abuse due to fear of losing their families as they are economically dependent on the abuser. It is the researcher’s observation that traditionally, when most women get married in Venda, they become financially dependent on their husbands, making it difficult to go against their husbands’ wishes and demands. Bolen and Lamb (2004) add that this economic and emotional dependence could impact their ability to respond with full support to their children’s disclosure of the sexual abuse. According to Waterhouse (2008), perpetrators of CSA are often adults who are close to the child and his/her family, and adults that the child may decide to disclose may find it difficult to believe such disclosure. Waterhouse further argues this minimises the seriousness of the abuse and the offender is likely to be supported due to possible emotional and financial dependency. Most of parents come from financially disadvantaged families, and thus may not afford the consequences that may follow disclosure.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter was about the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data on the influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards disclosure of child sexual abuse. It was learnt that the issue of CSA disclosure can largely be determined by the social and cultural contexts of individuals. In fact, it is beyond the individual level and is likely not to occur in the contexts within which the interest of the family is valued than that of the abused child. Venda people consider possible outcomes to the family as a whole and relations amongst its members prior

to taking decisions to disclose CSA. The following chapter will focus on the summary of the major findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations. The study sought to explore the influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people regarding the disclosure of child sexual abuse. The findings of this study have shown that disclosure is a process that can largely be influenced by social and cultural backgrounds within which people find themselves. In other words, the manner in which the issue of CSA is socially and culturally perceived in a particular group of people determines the interest to or not to disclose. If the decision to disclose is likely to threaten the comprehensive well-being of the family, it is likely that it will be discouraged. Traditionally, parents or caregivers are considered to be the ones who are in the best position to know what is best for the children. Therefore, disclosure of CSA could only take place if it is perceived that it will yield positive well-being for both the children and family as a whole. For example, it was revealed in this study that the Venda speaking people are secretive and believe that matters concerning their families are best addressed within the confines of the family rather than making it known to everyone. To this point, disclosure in such environment can be suppressed by cultural norms that require keeping family matters private.

This chapter also presents re-statements of the research problem statement, the aim and objectives of the study. Feedback on the theoretical framework used in this study are presented. The summary of the major findings of this study which was conducted with the Venda speaking people are also presented. Subsequently, conclusions as well as recommendations based on the major findings of this study are also presented.

## 4.2 Re-statement of the Problem Statement

Social and cultural values and practices within the societies influence the likelihood of disclosure of CSA and professional measures that aim at facilitating disclosures (Fontes & Plummer, 2010). According to statistics provided by the Department of Justice (2016) for the period April and December 2016, over 10 300 children were victims of sexual offences. This study has shown that the decision to disclose or report CSA is not a solitary or individual one, rather it is largely influenced by the social contexts. It is individuals who perpetrate abuse, and while it is important to comprehend their particular motivations, it is equally important to understand the role of wider socio-cultural forces (Machel, 2001).

The researcher has learnt that the Venda speaking people feel ashamed to discuss issues related to sexuality with their children. This is in line with the assertion by Alaggia and Kishenbaum (2005), that disclosure of CSA is less likely to occur in families that have rigid and fixed patriarchy based gender roles and a tradition of closed and indirect communication. The researcher has further learnt from the Venda culture that, because of the respect they have for elders, children often find it inappropriate to talk about their sexual challenges with their parents. In Venda culture, there are channels of communication to be observed within particular families. For instance, children should share their concerns with their mothers or stepmothers before approaching their fathers, who happen to be heads of families. To support this, Cawson, Wattam, Brooker and Kelly (2000) found that children do not often communicate their abusive experiences. Cawson et al. (2000) established that 55% of children share their abusive experiences with their friends, 29% communicate the experiences to their mothers or stepmothers, and only 11% to their fathers. One of the barriers that parents and significant caregivers of children, professionals and support agencies must overcome is to ensure that children feel safe enough to disclose abuse (Featherstone & Evans, 2004).

Ignorance and lack of knowledge of what constitutes sexual abuse has profound impacts on child sexual abuse disclosure. Many cultures, including Venda culture, have traditional rituals that involve touching of genital parts of both female and male children. Amongst others are *Ngoma ya vhanna* (male initiation school) and *Vhusha*

(female initiation school). Initiation schools are places which mark the rite of passage from childhood to adult life (Manabe, 2010). It was established in this study that the knowledge children learn from initiation schools plays a significant role in disclosure of CSA. For example, male children are taught to be strong and to behave like real men, therefore, in an attempting to uphold to such social expectation, male children keep their sexual experiences to themselves. The thought that it is unacceptable for men to experience sexual abuse was found to be a barrier to disclosure. Alaggia (2004) argues that boys are afraid of being stigmatised as homosexuals and victims, whereas girls are more likely to fear that no one will believe them. This is why both boys and girls rarely disclose sexual abuse in most African cultures.

## **4.3 Re-statement of the Aim and Objectives of the Study**

### **4.3.1 Aim of the study**

The aim of this study was to explore the influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### **4.3.2 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To identify socio-cultural practices in Venda that influence disclosure of child sexual abuse. This objective was achieved in theme 2, which is illustrated in figure 3.3 of chapter 3.
- To determine how child-parent relationship in Venda contributes towards non-disclosure of child sexual abuse. This objective was achieved in theme 3, and is illustrated in figure 3.4 of chapter 3.
- To find out the knowledge of Venda people regarding what constitutes child sexual abuse. This objective was achieved in theme 4, and is illustrated in figure 3.5 of chapter 3.

## **4.4 Theoretical Frameworks of the Study**

This study has used both the ecological perspective and the socio-cultural theory to achieve its aim and objectives. Since disclosure of CSA is a process that progresses with time, it was imperative to apply theoretical lenses that pay attention to systems

and subsystems that play a significant role in understanding social issues that are influenced by social environments. The ecological perspective acknowledges that there are environmental factors that need to be understood in an attempt to apprehend disclosure of CSA. This perspective was helpful in this study as it enabled the researcher to focus on social systems within the child's environment that influence disclosure of CSA. For instance, the findings of this study have shown that disclosure is likely not to happen in intra-familially because of fear of bringing shame upon the family name and dignity. On the other hand, Shaffer and Clinton (2006) assert that the socio-cultural theory explains how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional and historical contexts. Furthermore, the theory focuses on how individuals' participation in social interactions and culturally organised activities influence their psychological development. Disclosure of CSA cannot be treated separately from people's social and cultural environments as it was found in this study that it is beyond individual interests. To this end, this theory was helpful in this study as it has guided the researcher to explore the relationship between the cognitive functionality of people and their social interactions on the issue of disclosure of CSA.

## **4.5 Summary of the Major Findings**

Below is the summary of the major findings of this study.

### **4.5.1 Knowledge of the Venda speaking people regarding what is child sexual abuse**

The participants indicated that the issue of CSA is broad and cannot be defined based on a single factor. This is consistent with the Community Agency for Social Enquiry {CASE} (2005), which asserts that definitions of CSA in South Africa may vary, and often covers a wide range of acts. The participants acknowledged forceful sexual intercourse-penetration as child sexual abuse. Pornography was also recognised as an act of CSA that is used by perpetrators to gradually get closer to children. It was revealed that it becomes difficult for children to disclose CSA if the perpetrator has groomed them. It was also found that sexual violence such as touching the child's private parts constitutes child sexual abuse even though there was no penetration of any object.

Both contact and non-contact sexual abuse constitute CSA. However, contact abuse was more recognised because it is more intrusive to children in that it mostly has physical implications to abused children. The knowledge of the participants regarding CSA is covered by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (2001c) that provided the following elaboration for clarification: fondling of a child's genitals, intercourse, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and commercial exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials. It was, however, noted that there is still a need to educate the Venda speaking people about CSA as there is still a gap of knowledge. To supplement the above observation, Taylor and Norma (2012) aver that lack of community awareness and understanding of child sexual abuse is amongst obstacles that suppress reporting or disclosure. Alzoubi et al. (2018) further assert that community awareness regarding CSA and its negative impacts on children's lives can be one of prevention efforts and can subsequently lead to disclosure.

#### 4.5.2 Socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people that influence the disclosure of child sexual abuse

It was found in this study that cultural settings make it difficult for parents to initiate conversations about sexual-related matters with their children. This validates the findings by Ige and Fawole (2011), who established that some parents perceive CSA as a rare event; that their children could not be sexually abused; and that there is no need to provide the child with prevention education. In support of the above authors, Pattman and Chege (2003) assert that many adults struggle with open discussion of sex with children. As a consequence, children are equally likely to have no courage to speak about sexual experiences and challenges with their parents for fear of being perceived disrespectful. It was further revealed in this study that the relationship between the child and the perpetrator could inhibit disclosure of CSA because of the perceived consequences. For instance, it was found that most perpetrators are members of the child's family and therefore becomes a challenge to disclose such abuse (intra-familial) because the perpetrators are mostly financial providers. The findings of this study have shown that because of the patriarchal system, women are less likely to disclose CSA as they mostly depend on their husbands financially.

Women are mostly financially disempowered, and becomes a challenge for them to go against the breadwinners because of their financial dependence.

### 4.5.3 The influence of child-parent relationship towards non-disclosure of CSA

It was revealed in this study that the desire to preserve both family name and dignity makes it difficult for the Venda speaking people to disclose CSA. It was learnt that it is difficult for disclosure to take place in a setting which is more concerned about collectivism than individualism. Collectivist cultures value the interests of the family and its relationships than the comprehensive well-being of children. The manner in which children are socialised has a great influence on disclosure of child sexual abuse as gender expectations may reduce chances for male children to disclose due to social expectations associated with their gender. For example, it was established that CSA amongst male children does happen but remain under-reported or unreported because of shame and fear of behaving inconsistently with social expectations such as being strong and brave. Furthermore, it was revealed that the cultural norm of secrecy suppresses disclosure. It was found that families prefer to handle their internal matters as a family, therefore, anyone who divulges such matters is likely to be punished. In such environment, it could be difficult for children who are in developmental stages that enable them to disclose CSA to do so if they are not supported. This is in line with Waterhouse (2008), who asserts that children cannot access the criminal justice system and other appropriate services without being supported by adults.

## 4.6 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

- CSA is a social issue that is broadly defined based on the social and cultural contexts of a particular group of people;
- The disclosure of CSA hardly takes place in a setting that reprimands discussion about sex amongst caregivers or parents and children;
- It is difficult for disclosure to take place in instances within which the perpetrator is part of the child's family because of perceived potential outcomes;

- The patriarchal system that places male supremacy even in the economic sphere makes it a challenge for women to disclose CSA because of their financial dependency on their husbands;
- The desire to preserve the family name and dignity can inhibit chances of disclosure to take place in that the focus is likely to be on how the family will be perceived by the society if the CSA is made known to people; and
- Gender roles and expectations make it a challenge for male children to disclose CSA than female children. Male children are socialised to be strong, and ultimately, they feel ashamed to disclose their sexual experiences for fear of being considered more feminine than masculine.

## **4.7 Recommendations**

Based on the empirical findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- It is important that the Venda speaking people be capacitated with knowledge through awareness campaigns regarding CSA so that they can have comprehensive understanding which is important for disclosure purposes;
- It is important that parents work on establishing a good relationship with their children as this could bring about a possible opportunity which will subsequently enable parent-child open discussions about sex, which is fundamental for disclosure purposes;
- Schools should improve on programmes that educate children about sexual life because most of their parents struggle to do so because of their social and cultural backgrounds;
- It is important that different stakeholders should collaborate to create an atmosphere that enables women to freely participate in the economic sphere so that they do not always depend financially on their husbands. This could be beneficial because their decisions to disclose CSA will not be influenced by their poor financial status;
- Social workers should strengthen their preventative and family preservation programmes to support families so that they can be able to recognise the significance of disclosing CSA even in the case of intra-familial abuse. Families

should be engaged in assisting them to understand that as much as family relations are essential, the well-being of children is equally important; and

- Community dialogues can be beneficial in shifting social attributions associated with gender roles. For instance, both caregivers and children should understand that sexual abuse can happen to anybody (irrespective of gender), and there is nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to disclosure of CSA.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Research Topic: Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse.**

**Respondent No:**

.....

### INTRODUCTION

I, Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel, am a social worker conducting research on the **“Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse”**. The findings of this study will be beneficial to our government and other bodies which are in the process of developing policies and programmes for the protection of children and conviction of perpetrators of CSA in South Africa. Your names will be addressed through the use of alphabets and numbers for anonymity.

Please answer the following questions honestly and to the fullest. Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer.

Thank you for your voluntary co-operation, your opinions and time. Your participation and perceptions are of utmost significance in this research.

### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

#### 1. Age of the participant.

Age	Mark with a “X” in the relevant box
18-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
ABOVE 60	

**2. Gender of the participant**

MALE	FEMALE

**SECTION B: Participants' knowledge of child sexual abuse and its disclosure**

1. As a true Venda speaking person, do you have any knowledge of what constitutes child sexual abuse? Please explain.

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2. What do you know about disclosure of child sexual abuse amongst the Venda speaking people? (Probe).

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**SECTION C: Socio-cultural practices influencing disclosure of child sexual abuse amongst the Venda speaking people**

3. What is the communication level amongst children and their parents in relation to discussing issues around sexuality? Do caregivers and their children communicate or discuss issues around sexuality? (Probe).

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4. As far as you know, what are the reasons for non-disclosure of child sexual abuse? (Probe)

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5. Tell us about Venda traditional rituals that impede disclosure of child sexual abuse. (Probe).

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6. Tell us about gender-based factors amongst the Venda speaking people that impede the disclosure of child sexual abuse. (Probe).

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**SECTION D: Child-parent relationship issues in disclosing child sexual abuse**

7. Tell us about how you think children's relationships with their parents in Venda culture can affect disclosure of child sexual abuse. (Probe).

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## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (Tshivenda Version)

Thoho ya thodisiso ino: Ndila ine maitete na vuvha ha vavenda zwa shela mulenzhe kha u bvisela khagala ha u tambudziwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani.

Nomboro ya muthu:

.....

### MVULATSWINGA

Nne, Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel, ndi mushumelavhapo ane a khou ita thodisiso nga fhasi ha thoho ine yari **“Ndila ine maitete na vuvha ha vavenda zwa shela mulenzhe kha u bvisela khagala ha u tambudziwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani”**. Mawanwa a thodisiso ino a do thusa muvhuso na zwinwe zwi imiswa kha lwendo lwau vhumba dzipholisi na dzinwe mbetshelwa hu u itela u tsireledza vhana khathihi na u fara vhatambudzi vha vhana lwa vhudzekano. Madzina avho ado imeliwa nga maledere na nomboro hu u itela uri mbuno dzavho na mafhungo avho asa kone u divhiwa nga nnyi na nnyi.

Vha khou humbelwa uri vha fhindle mbudziso dzi tevhelaho; nga u fhulufhedzea havho na hone vha tshi khou elelwa uri a huna phindulo yone-yone na i siyone. Ndi khou livhuwa tshumisano, tshifhinga, na ndila yavho ya kuhumbulele khathihi na ndila ine vha vhona ngayo zwi tshi kwama thoho ya thodisiso ino.

### Khethekanyo ya A: Zwitalusaho vhane vha khou shela mulenzhe

#### 1. Minwaha ya vha ne vha khou shela mulenzhe kha thodisiso

Minwaha	Vha swae nga ledere “X”
18-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
Nntha ha 60	

**2. Mbeu ya ane a khou shela mulenzhe**

Munna	Mufumakadzi

**Khethekanyo ya B: Ndivho ya vhatu vhane vha khou shela mulenzhe kha thodisiso ino zwi tshi kwama u tambudziwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani na u zwibvisela khagala vhutanzi**

1. Sa Muvenda-mu-bikwa-na-ive, vha na Ndivho na thalukanyo ya u ri u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani zwi amba mini? Vha nga ri bvisela khagala nga vhudalo.

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2. Vha divha'ni zwi tshi kwama u kutela vhutudzi vhungafha, ngeno mulayo u tshi fulufhedzisa u khwathisa tshanda kha vhaiti vhazwo?

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**Khethekanyo ya C: Maitele na vhuvha ha Vhavenda zwi tshi kwama sia lau bvisela khagala maitele a u tambudza vhana lwa vhudzekani.**

3. Nga maitele na mikhwa ya Vhavenda, zwi leluwa kana zwi konda u guma-fhi u ri vhbebi na vhana vha fare nyambedzano vho livhana zwifhatuwo, zwi tshi kwama fungo ili? Kha vha digede u amba zwine vha divha, hu sin a u dzumbetsshedza na u vhuvhisa.

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4. Sa Muvenda-vhukuma, ndi dzifhio mbuno dzi thivhelaho u bvisela khagala ha u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani?

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5. Ri tshi khou tenda na u fulufhela u ri zwa maramani vha nazwo nga ha mvelele na sialala ya Vhavenda, zwi tshi kwama u tambudzwa ha vhana kha ili sia. Vha nga talutshedza tshenzhemo tshavho u ri ndi ngani vhathu vha tshi tata vhukuma u vhiga na u bvisela vhutanzi khagala?

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6. Vha divha'ni nga maitete odi sendekaho nga mbeu ane a ngalangadza vhutala na u khakhisa u bvisela khagala ha a u tambudzwa ha vhana lwa vhudzekani. Kha vha digede u bvisela vhupfiwa havho khagala.

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**Khethekanyo ya D: Vhushaka vhukati ha vhana na vhabebi vhavho zwitshi da kha mafhungo a u bvisela khagala maitete a u tambudza vhana lwa vhudzekani.**

7. Musi ri tshe ro vha hadzima ndevhe, vha nga dzhia tshifhinga itshi u talutshedza ndila ine vha humbula uri vhushaka vhukati ha vhana na vhabebi vhavho vhu nga kwama hani u bvisela khagala maitete a u tambudza vhana lwa vhudzekani. Ndi zwifhio zwi shushedzaho na u fara vhana milomo u ri vha ofhe u bula vhutshinyi uvhu?

.....  
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.....

## **APPENDIX C: WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Title of the study: **Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse**

Researcher: Mr L.B Ramphabana

Supervisor: Dr S.F Rapholo

Co-supervisor: Prof J.C Makhubela

I, Livhuwani Bethuel Ramphabana, am a master's student in social work at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus). I would like to invite you to voluntarily participate in my research project titled **Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse**. Prior to giving consent, I would like you to take your time and read the section below so that you can make an informed decision.

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to explore influences of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse.

### **Significance of the study**

The findings of this study could help both caregivers and child protection officers such as social workers, investigative officers, and legal courts to have in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural influences in disclosure of CSA in South Africa. The study could be beneficial to the South African government, practitioners, NGOs, academics and policy makers during the process of developing policies and programmes aimed at protecting children and facilitating CSA disclosure in South Africa and internationally.

### **Discomfort and Risks**

Some questions during the interview may cause some discomforts. However, the researcher will refer you to authorised personnel should the need arises as a result of participating in this study.

**Interviews**

All interviews will be tape-recorded. The researcher will keep every information safely and only the external transcriber, and possibly the researcher’s supervisors can access the recordings. The recordings will not made public in any way.

**Confidentiality**

Information given in the study will be handled in a way that will protect your identity and ensure that your responses remain confidential. Numbers and alphabets will be accorded to the participants.

**Withdrawal**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time even after signing this consent form, there are no fees or any form of penalties.

**Feedback of the findings**

The findings of the study will be shared with you if you are interested.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I fully understand the aim and the significance of this study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage.

Participant’s Signature  
.....

Date  
.....

Researcher’s Signature  
.....

Date  
.....

## APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION LETTER

P.O. BOX 01  
MANENZHE  
0967

**To: Chief Manenzhe T.E**

**RE: A REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY**

I, Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel, a master's student social worker at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus) kindly request formal permission to conduct research with the Venda speaking people within your community. The topic of my research is **'Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse'**.

The population of this study will be caregivers of children and the findings will help both caregivers and child protection officers such as, but not limited to, social workers, investigative officers, traditional structures, and legal courts to have in-depth understanding of the manner in which socio-cultural practices influence disclosure of child sexual abuse and develop protective mechanisms to protect children.

A complete anonymity and confidentiality to every participant is assured and guaranteed. Should you need further information regarding this study please contact the following details:

Researcher: 076 973 1546/081 811 352 or [iramphabana@gmail.com](mailto:iramphabana@gmail.com)

Research leader 1: Dr S.F Rapholo 079 970 7404 or [Frank.Rapholo@ul.ac.za](mailto:Frank.Rapholo@ul.ac.za)

Research leader 2: Prof J.C Makhubele 084 712 2913/[Jabulani.Makhubele@ul.ac.za](mailto:Jabulani.Makhubele@ul.ac.za)

Ndaaa!

# APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

P.O. Box 01

Manenzhe

0967

01/06/2018

To: Mr Ramphabana LB

**SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

This certifies that I the chief, MANENZHE TAKALANI ELON, have received a letter from Mr Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel that requests permission to conduct research project titled **"Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse"** within Manenzhe community which is the area of my jurisdiction.

I am granting the above researcher permission to conduct his research with the Venda speaking people within my community. It is my sincere belief that the findings of this research will benefit the community as a whole.

I wish you all the best.

Contact details: 072 508 2787

Signature: *F. E. M...*

<p><b>MANENZHE TRADITIONAL COUNCIL</b> SENIOR TRADITIONAL LEADER MANENZHE T.E.</p> <p>01 JUN 2018</p> <p>P.O. BOX 01 MANENZHE 0967 CELL: 072 508 2787</p>
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# APPENDIX F: TREC CERTIFICATE



**University of Limpopo**  
Department of Research Administration and Development  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 4029, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:Abdul.Maluleke@ul.ac.za

## TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**MEETING:** 07 February 2018

**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/01/2018: PG

**PROJECT:**

**Title:** Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse  
**Researcher:** LB Ramphabana  
**Supervisor:** Mr SF Rapholo  
**Co-Supervisors:** Prof JC Makhubele  
**School:** Social Sciences  
**Degree:** Masters in Social Work

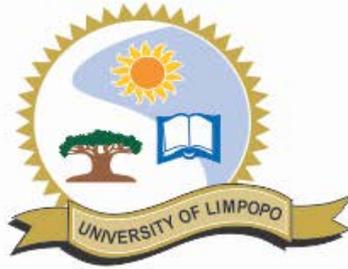
  
**PROF. L.B. MASHEGO**  
**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

**Note:**

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
- ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol. PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

## APPENDIX H: LANGUAGE EDITOR LETTER



**University of Limpopo**

**School of Languages and Communication Studies**

**Translation Studies and Linguistics**

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**18 July 2018 Dear Sir/Madam**

**SUBJECT: EDITING OF MASTERS DISSERTATION**

This is to certify that the master's dissertation entitled 'Influence of socio-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse by Mr L.B Ramphabana was proofread and edited by me, and that unless further tampered with, I am content that all editorial issues have been dealt with.

Kind regards



Dr SJ Kubayi (DLitt et Phil - Unisa)

Senior Lecturer (Department of Translation Studies and Linguistics – UL)

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*Finding solutions for Africa*

## APPENDIX G: CONFIDENTIAL AGREEMENT

Machebe Mixo  
P.O Box 3479  
Giyani  
0826

To whom it may concern.

I, Mixo Machebe, hereby confirm that I transcribed data collected through interviews conducted by Mr Ramphabana Livhuwani Bethuel as part of his Master's research titled **Influence of social-cultural practices amongst the Venda speaking people towards the disclosure of child sexual abuse.**

I declare to keep every information contained in the audio tape and fields notes concerning this study confidential. I further understand that violating this agreement would constitute unethical infringement of the right to privacy of the participants.

Cell no: 078 627 3259

Email: mixongile@gmail.com

Signature



Date

20-06-18