SECTION C: SUMMARISED FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In this section the most important findings and conclusions of this study will be presented. The hypothesis formulated for the study will also be tested. Recommendations will be made, based on the conclusions derived from the study. The contribution of this study towards the social work field will be highlighted.

2. SUMMARISED FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings, conclusions and recommendations will be discussed according to the research design and –procedure for this study as well the articles in Section B. The phases of the intervention research model will be used as a guideline for this discussion.

The aim of this research is: To develop, implement and evaluate a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children to improve their psychosocial functioning and their knowledge and skills regarding the dynamics of sexual abuse.

In order to reach this aim, the intervention research model was utilised as research design.

- PHASE ONE: PROBLEM ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PLANNING
  (ORIENTATION TO THIS STUDY AND ARTICLE ONE)

The objective for this phase of the study is to do a literature review to determine the implications of sexual abuse for foster care. The following steps were followed in this phase: identifying and involving clients, gaining entry and cooperation from settings, identifying concerns of the population, analysing concerns or problems identified, setting goals and objectives.
Initial problem analysis consisted of a literature review and consulting various resources, including subject related and relevant journals, completed research reports and text books that included the subjects of sexual abuse, foster care, foster parents, intervention programmes, empowerment programmes and social group work were consulted. Both national and international resources were consulted and were readily available. The literature study initially enabled the researcher to analyse the problem, delineate the study and plan the research project. Later this enabled the researcher to confirm findings from the empirical study with literature, compile questions for the focus group discussion, develop the self-developed questionnaire to gather qualitative data, compare literature with experience in practice, develop the empowerment programme, evaluate the programme and compare the findings obtained with other research findings.

An in-depth literature study was executed in the first phase and second phase of the intervention phase, namely problem analysis and project planning and information gathering and synthesis respectively. This study is presented in the orientation to this study (Section A) and article one. It focussed on the implications of sexual abuse for foster care. From this literature it became evident that sexual abuse of children has various implications for foster care. Literature also revealed that foster parents should be trained and empowered and this is especially true of foster parents of sexually abused children. Specific areas that need empowerment in order for foster parents to improve their psychosocial functioning, and eventually their ability to provide effectively in the needs of the sexually abused foster children, were identified in literature. Literature also revealed a lack of empowerment programmes that focus on the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.

The need for a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children was identified during this phase of the study. Certain topics to be included in such programme were also identified from the literature, which include: knowledge of sexual abuse, normal child development and needs, relationship between the foster parent and foster child, how to cope with a traumatised child, how to manage challenging behaviour and self-care for foster parents. The conclusion can be drawn that the literature study contributed significantly in enabling the
researcher to execute this research study within a scientifically based framework provided by literature.

Within this framework of literature and executing certain steps, entry was gained and co-operation gained from Child Welfare South Africa and Christelike Maatskaplike Raad to do the study within the abovementioned organisations. Social workers were willing to identify relevant clients on their caseloads to take part in the research study. Good co-operation was obtained from these organisations. Through informal discussions with foster parents of sexually abused children their concerns were identified and analysed. Their concerns were amongst others, lack of support, knowledge, and inability to manage challenging behaviour of the foster children in their care.

The abovementioned procedures enabled the researcher to gather enough information to set an aim and objectives for the next phases of the research study. These objectives will be discussed under each applicable phase. It can be concluded that the first phase of the research study was completed successfully and made further investigation possible. The objective for this phase was reached.

- **PHASE TWO: INFORMATION GATHERING AND SYNTHESIS (ARTICLE TWO)**

The objective for this phase of this study is to establish the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children. The following steps were used in this phase using existing information sources, studying natural examples, identifying functional elements of successful models.

The need for the development of an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children was initially identified by talking to experts and practitioners in the field of foster care and sexual abuse. It was also decided that a focus group discussion with foster parents of sexually abused children will be the most
appropriate method to obtain the required information regarding the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.

A focus group discussion was executed with five (N=5) foster parents of sexually abused children within an exploratory and descriptive research design. A purposive non-probability sampling method was used to identify the foster parents on the caseload of Child Welfare South Africa, White River. The latter gave permission that the research be done within their organisation. This organisation was chosen because it was in the immediate vicinity of the researcher and convenient to execute the study.

Questions utilised to obtain information during this discussion was compiled after consultation with experts and a literature review. A recording was made of the discussion. Researcher did the processing of the data self. It was transcribed and the qualitative data obtained was analysed according to the procedure of Tesch. It was organised in categories, themes and sub-themes by open-coding. Focus group discussion was used as interviewing method for information collection as part of a qualitative research approach. Five foster parents, male and female participated and information regarding the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children were gathered and analysed.

Two categories, ten themes and eleven sub-themes emanated from the gathered and transcribed data. The two categories were: The feelings, experiences and challenges of foster parents of sexually abused children, and the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.

The ten themes were: Foster care is challenging; fear to lose the child; feeling of contentment, sympathy and the need to protect; feelings of discomfort, disbelief and embarrassment; need to understand the foster child’s behaviour; need for knowledge on how to cope with the foster child’s sexualised behaviour; need for knowledge on how to manage contact between foster child and biological parents; need for support.
The sub-themes were: Foster care is challenging; fear to lose the child; feeling of contentment, sympathy and the need to protect; feelings of discomfort, disbelief and embarrassment; need to understand the foster child’s behaviour; need for knowledge on how to cope with the foster child’s sexualised behaviour; need for knowledge on how to manage contact between foster child and biological parents; need for support.

Professional ethics was adhered to throughout the research process. The rights of the participants to informed consent and voluntary participation and the responsibilities of the researcher in this regard were observed closely. Ethical considerations namely the principles of confidentiality, no discomfort, informed consent and voluntary participation were carefully adhered to. Before implementation of this study, consent was obtained from the ethical committee of the University of the North West (Potchefstroom Campus).

This phase of the research enabled the researcher to establish the empowerment needs of the foster parents of sexually abused children to use as a foundation for the development of an empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. It can thus be concluded that the objective for this phase was reached.

- **PHASE THREE: DESIGN**

No objective was set for this phase of the model. Steps that were followed in this phase are: Designing an observational system and specifying procedural elements of the intervention.

A single system design (A-B-A) was selected as observational system for this study. A pre-test and post-test was executed by completion of three standardised instruments. A self-developed instrument was completed after termination of the social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. The specific procedural elements for the intervention were by means of psycho-educational group work. The three broad phases being the preparatory phase, the initial phase, the working phase and the termination phase.
This phase enabled researcher to have a clear design of how the programme should be implemented and how it would be observed to provide reliable and valid results. The observational system made it possible to obtain quantitative as well as qualitative data and ensured that the empowerment programme would be replicable. Results would also be more reliable through the triangulation of measuring instruments being of the qualitative and quantitative framework.

• **PHASE FOUR: EARLY DEVELOPMENT AND PILOT TESTING**

The objective for this phase of the study is to develop and implement a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. Steps that were followed in this phase are: Developing a prototype of preliminary intervention, conducting a pilot test, applying design criteria to the preliminary intervention concept.

The development of the social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children was based on the identified needs gathered through a literature review, consultation with experts and the focus group discussion as discussed under the information gathering and synthesis phase.

After the empowerment programme was developed, the prototype was implemented by presenting it to seven (N=7) participants who were selected by means of purposive non-probability sampling. Criteria for the selection of participants were: they have to be foster parents of sexually abused children, be on the case load of Christelike Maatskaplike Raad, Nelspruit, understand Afrikaans or English.

The social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children consist of nine sessions presented over three days. Each session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The topics of the empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children included the following topics. Session one: Introduction and pre-test. Session two: What is sexual abuse. Definition and symptomatology. Session three: Basic emotional needs of children. Session four: Psychosocial development of the child. Session five: Challenging behaviour of sexually abused foster children and how to cope with it. Session six: Contact and visitation by the biological parents. Session seven: Relationship between foster

The social work empowerment programme was implemented over three days, consisting of three sessions per day. All the aims and objectives of the sessions were reached. The participants verbalised that they were able to utilise the knowledge obtained in their everyday life and that it improved their psychosocial functioning, including their relationship with their foster child and the lowering of their own anxieties and fears relating to the foster care situation. Recommendations regarding the logistics and content of the presentation were made. These recommendations will be included in the refining of the social work empowerment programme.

The conclusion can be made that the objective this phase of the research process was reached.

- **PHASE FIVE: EVALUATION AND ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT (ARTICLE FOUR)**

The objective for this phase of the study is to evaluate the social work empowerment programme and the effect of the empowerment programme on the psychosocial functioning of foster parents with sexually abused children. Steps that were followed in this phase: Selecting an experimental design, collecting and analysing data, replicating the intervention under field conditions, refining the intervention. The second last step was not necessary in this research.

A single-system procedure (A-B-A) was selected as the experimental design for this phase of the study. Seven (N=7) foster parents of sexually abused children attended the presentation of a social work empowerment programme for sexually abused children by means of a psycho-educational group. The topics identified during the problem analysis and synthesis phase were included in the presentation as part of the empowerment programme. Applicable ethical considerations namely, no discomfort, informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were
adhered to during the data gathering, the presentation of the empowerment programme, as well as the analysis of data.

In this study three standardised instruments from Perspective Training College were utilised to gather quantitative data in order to evaluate the effect of the social work empowerment programme on the psychosocial functioning of the foster parents of sexually abused children. Personal Multi-Screening Inventory (PMSI), General Contentment Scale (GCS) and Index of Parental Attitude (IPA) were completed as a pre-test. The intervention was applied by means of the developed social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. The abovementioned standardised measuring instruments were again completed after the termination of the social work empowerment programme. The scores of the pre-test were compared with the scores of the post-test (A-B-A). The data obtained from these instruments was processed by the researcher utilising the PASWIN programme of Perspective Training College.

A self-developed questionnaire was completed by the participants after termination of the empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. The data analysis was done by the researcher according to Tesch’s model. The data revealed that the participants experienced the empowerment programme as of value to their everyday life and that it would have a positive effect on their psychosocial functioning in relation to the sexually abused foster child. The recommendations received during the qualitative data gathering process will be included in the further development of the programme, which will be outside the scope of this research.

Scores on the General Contentment Scale showed an increase of 3% on the combined score of the group. The score of three participants decreased, three increased and one stayed the same. The scores on the Index of Parental Attitude show an increase of 2% on the combined score of the group. The score of two participants decreased, the score of two increased and the score of three stayed the same. The conclusion can be made that there was a positive improvement in the attitude of the foster parents towards the sexually abused children. Another conclusion is that the general contentment of the foster parents increased.
The quantitative data obtained from the Personal Multi-Screening Inventory revealed less positive data. The combined scores of the group revealed the following information:

Foster Child- foster parent relationship: A significant decrease of -100% in total
Interpersonal functioning: A significant decrease of 86% in total
Self-perception: A significant increase of 13% in total
Negative functioning areas: A significant increase of 10% in total
Positive functioning areas: A decrease of -5% in total.

From the abovementioned data it is clear that a negative development in the relationship of the foster parent with the foster child was reported. This is the opposite that was reported on the Index of Parental Attitude. The interpersonal functioning of the foster parent also shows a negative development. There was also a decrease in the positive functioning areas which includes constructs like achievement, expectation and satisfaction. This is also in contrast with the scores obtained from the General Contentment Scale. An increase was reported in the score measuring self-perception (inner insecurity, guilt feelings, lack of self-worth) and negative functioning areas (frustration, helplessness and stress).

The decreased scores on the interpersonal functioning and child-parent relationship could be ascribed to the fact that foster parents want to make a good impression and might be scared that the social worker will remove the foster child from their care if everything is not fine. Over reporting during the pre-test might be the reason for the quantitative data not being representative of a positive growing effect on the psychosocial functioning of the foster parents. Foster parents might have reported a unrealistic high score during the pre-test and returned to be realistic during the post-test.

The conclusion could be made from the qualitative data that the psychosocial functioning of the foster parents of sexually abused children improved after attending
the social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children. With the intervention research model as guideline, the researcher was able to develop, implement and evaluate a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children within a scientifically based framework.

PHASE SIX: DISSEMINATION
This study will be submitted for possible publication in the journal: Social work/Maatskaplike Werk. It will also be distributed for use by social workers in the social work field, especially Christelike Maatskaplike Raad, Mpumalanga.

3. TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS
This study was based on the following hypothesis:

Should foster parents of sexually abused children take part in a social work empowerment programme, their psychosocial functioning will improve.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, as described above, the conclusion can be made that the hypothesis has been confirmed from a qualitative research paradigm. With regards to the quantitative research, it seems that there has been an increase in some of the psychosocial aspects, but a decrease in others. The conclusion can thus be made that the hypothesis cannot be confirmed from a quantitative research paradigm, but from a qualitative research paradigm.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the above findings and conclusions the following recommendations can be made in terms of the needs of foster parents of sexually abused children:

- The needs assessment should be expanded to include a more comprehensive study on the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.
- Various data collection methods should be implemented in assessing the empowerment needs of foster parents of sexually abused children.
• Individual interviews could be done to determine empowerment needs because some foster parents may be hesitant to reveal information in a group.

• More focus group discussions should be repeated to investigate certain needs in depth. This should be done with the same sample and could also be compared with focus groups with other samples.

Recommendations regarding the development of a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children:

• The social work empowerment programme should be simplified for presentation to illiterate foster parents. This programme required a comprehensive amount of reading to be done, which illiterate foster parents will not be able to do.

• The number of participant should not be more than ten in order to provide for enough discussion and participation by all the individuals. Participants should consist of both genders and various age groups in order to keep the groups stimulating and encourage optimum sharing of information and knowledge.

• The facilitator should be someone with a thorough knowledge of foster care, trauma and sexual abuse in order to communicate the correct information. This is necessary because questions are asked by participants that requires an in depth knowledge of the above mentioned.

• This programme should be presented to foster parents in collaboration with a programme aimed at foster care in general. It should also be presented to foster parents after screening and even before placement of a foster child. It could also be presented to temporary safe place parents.

• This programme could be implemented as weekend camp programme for foster parents where a programme for the foster children is being presented simultaneously.

• Information gathered through the standardised measuring instruments regarding the psychosocial functioning of the participants could be used as baseline by the foster care case worker. The information could be used to
address certain aspects that might influence the foster care situation negatively. This should however be done with the consent of the participants.

- With minor changes this programme could also be presented to biological parents of sexually abused children.

Recommendations regarding the development of a social work empowerment programme for foster parents of sexually abused children:

- The programme should be presented to foster parents before sexually abused children are actually placed with them in order to be pro-active.
- This programme should be implemented with foster parents in general as part of their in-service-training. Although this programme focusses on sexual abuse, many children who are in foster care might not have disclosed yet, but exhibit typical behaviour of a traumatised, sexually abused child.
- The psycho-educational group as method of implementing the empowerment programme could also serve as a support group after the implementation of the termination of the empowerment programme.

5. **CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

- This research has made contributions towards the social work discipline as there has not been a social work empowerment programme developed for foster parents of sexually abused children.
- This research will be submitted for publication to Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work. Feedback is still awaited.
- This programme will be implemented in the Christelike Maatskaplike Raad organisations in Mpumalanga. Social workers will be trained in implementing the programme.