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**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COUNSELLORS'
ORIENTATION, EXPERIENCES AND TRAINING AND
THEIR CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THEIR TASKS IN THE
HEALING PROCESS IN SEXUAL ABUSE COUNSELLING:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Arts
in Psychology at
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Susan Ellen Stevens

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ABSTRACT

Eight counsellors registered with the Accident Compensation Corporation as sexual abuse counsellors participated in qualitative research employing semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A qualitative approach was used to explore previously unidentified variables in sexual abuse counselling, and the relationships among these. Transcribed interviews were analysed for recurrent regularities in themes and dynamics. Four overall themes emerged that appeared most salient in influencing counsellor's conceptualization of the tasks and processes involved in treating the effects of sexual abuse. These themes were (1) counsellor's orientation; (2) training and development; (3) understanding of the dynamics, issues, and effects of sexual abuse; and (4) personal experience of abuse. These variables have implications for both the practice of sexual abuse counselling and for future research.

PREFACE

The writer's interest in the area of sexual abuse counselling stems from working for several years as a residential social worker with (adolescent) young women, the majority of whom had been sexually abused. This experience led to an awareness that expertise in sexual abuse counselling largely comes from experience, and that validation of the methods counsellors use is usually derived from sharing experiences with other counsellors. While the effectiveness of current therapeutic interventions has strong clinical support, it is largely empirically untested.

The writer's objective in undertaking the present study was to attempt to learn about and understand, first hand, the experiences of a small number of people providing counselling for survivors of sexual abuse. By exploring with them their perception of the important factors in the healing process, the present study attempts an analysis that is grounded in the practice of sexual abuse counselling.

It is the writer's belief that the concepts (including therapist and treatment variables) pertaining to sexual abuse healing have not been fully identified, and that the relationships between variables are insufficiently understood and conceptually undeveloped. So rather than *testing* the relationships among variables, the present study attempts to *discover* the relevant

concepts and categories pertaining to sexual abuse counselling and the relationships, if any, among them.

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