

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PRE-SCHOOLER'S  
PERCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPTS  
TAUGHT IN THE "FEELING SPECIAL, FEELING SAFE"  
SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University

Kathryn McKenna Weir  
1999

## ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a recognised problem worldwide. Education programs targeting school-aged children have been the main type of primary prevention of sexual abuse. Programs for pre-school aged children are a recent development with pre-schooler's developmental level posing a challenge. This study aimed to explore pre-schooler's understanding of the 'Feeling Special, Feeling Safe' program (FSFS) developed by the New Zealand Family Planning Association. It used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative section used a between subjects design. Ninety-eight children from 8 Manawatu kindergartens completed an adapted version of the Children's Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire Revision II (CKAQ-RII). The participant group (n=63, average age 4 yr. 7 mth.) completed the questionnaire after FSFS participation, and the control group (n=35, average age 4 yr. 6 mth.) before FSFS participation. Parents of children in the participant group completed a 6-item survey on how their child responded to FSFS, and their view of FSFS. In the qualitative section 8 participant group children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. It was hypothesised that participant group children would have more knowledge of prevention concepts than control group children would. This was supported by the results. The participant group scored significantly higher than the control group overall, and on items about appropriate responses and bullying. All children had difficulty identifying characteristics of strangers, understanding that a familiar person may perpetrate, and with the touch continuum concept. Parents generally viewed FSFS positively, although 13.5% observed negative behaviour changes stemming from the body ownership concept. Results are discussed in view of adaptations and extensions to FSFS and prevention programs for pre-schoolers in general that could aid children's learning and abuse prevention. FSFS was concluded to be a worthwhile prevention program for pre-school aged children.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their assistance in this research:

To Cheryl Woolley, my supervisor, for her encouragement and support, and for her contribution in all stages of the research.

To Ross Flett, who provided a second opinion in the design phase, and who gave crucial help in data analysis.

To Christine Moss and Aevryl Jestin, FPA Educators, who took the initiative to have the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe program evaluated. They provided valuable assistance in data collection. Their enthusiasm for and belief in the worth of the research were good motivational sources.

To the teachers at kindergartens who were involved in the study, thank you for your willingness and co-operation during the time I was in your kindergartens.

To the parents who permitted their children to be involved in the study, thank you for doing so. To the children who answered what may have seemed like endless questions, thank you for answering them seriously and for telling me what you thought.

Thank you to my family for their support at all stages of the project. Especially thank you to Andrew, for many helpful suggestions, for helping me to stay focused and countless other things you did to help me through this year.

Lastly, thank you to Stripey - you were the highlight of numerous kindergarten sessions, and brought a smile to many faces.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION	9
Child sexual abuse defined	9
Epidemiology	11
Offenders/perpetrators	17
Effects of abuse	21
CHAPTER 2	
PREVENTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE	26
Types of prevention	26
Education programs as a form of primary prevention	26
Research concerns about prevention programs	35
The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program	37
The present study	41
CHAPTER 3	
METHOD	42
Participants	42
Measures	43
Procedure	48
CHAPTER 4	
RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	51
Children' Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire revision II	51
Disclosures	57
Parent Questionnaire	57
CHAPTER 5	
RESULTS: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS	61
Profiles of children who were interviewed	61
Children's perceptions of concepts taught in Feeling Special, Feeling Safe	63
CHAPTER 6	
DISCUSSION	76
General findings	76
Limitations of the present study	81
CHAPTER 7	
RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS	84
Revisions to Feeling Special, Feeling Safe (FSFS)	84
Extensions to FSFS	85
An alternative form of prevention	86
Networking	87

Future research ideas for FPA	87
CONCLUSION	88
Suggestions for future research	89
REFERENCES	90
APPENDIX A*	98
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Information Sheet For Teachers (Control Group)	
APPENDIX B	100
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Information Sheet For Teachers (Participant Group)	
APPENDIX C	102
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Teachers Consent Form And Confidentiality Agreement	
APPENDIX D	103
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Information Sheet For Parents And Children (Control Group)	
APPENDIX E	105
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Parent Consent Form (Control Group)	
APPENDIX F	106
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Information Sheet For Parents and Children (Participant Group)	
APPENDIX G	108
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Parent Consent Form (Participant Group)	
APPENDIX H	109
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Parent Consent Form For Interview	

---

\* All correspondence with teachers and parents used Massey University letterhead.

APPENDIX I	110
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Information Sheet For Parents And Children (Participant Group – For parents who may have literacy problems)	
APPENDIX J	111
Investigation of the Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program Consent Form (Participant Group – For parents who may have literacy problems)	
APPENDIX K	112
Children’s Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire Revision II	
APPENDIX L	115
Children’s Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire Revision II First Adaptation	
APPENDIX M	117
Children’s Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire Revision II Second Adaptation (Version used for evaluation of FSFS)	
APPENDIX N	121
Parent Questionnaire	
APPENDIX O	123
Interview Format	
APPENDIX P	125
Selection of Children’s Drawings of What They Think A Stranger Looks Like	

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Characteristics Of High-Risk Children Identified By Finkelhor & Baron (1986)	15
Table 2: Results From Interviews With Child Sex Offenders On Their Target Victims	16
Table 3: Findings Of The Third National Incidence Study Of Percentage Of Abuse Committed By People Known To Child	18
Table 4: Factors Of Victim, Offender, Abuse Situation, And Case Evidence Related To Prosecution Of Offender For Child Sexual Abuse	18
Table 5: Type Of Sexual Acts Reported According To Offender's Age	20
Table 6: Outline Of The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program	38
Table 7: Percentage Of Participant And Control Group Children Who Responded Correctly To Each Item On The Children's Knowledge Of Abuse Questionnaire-Revision II	51
Table 8: Level Of Difficulty (LOD) Participant And Control Group Children Found For Each Children's Knowledge Of Abuse Questionnaire-Revision II Item	54
Table 9: Mean Score For Participant And Control Group Children In All Categories	56
Table 10: Correlations Between Age Of Child And SES Of Parent With Child's Scores On Full Questionnaire And Appropriate Touch Scale	56
Table 11: Aspects Of The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program That Children Enjoyed	58
Table 12: Aspects Of The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program That Children Did Not Enjoy	58
Table 13: Aspects Of The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program That Children Talked About At Home	58

Table 14: Changes In Child's Behaviour Since Participating In The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program As Observed By Parents	59
Table 15: Parts Of The Feeling Special, Feeling Safe Program That Parents Consider Deserve Recommendation	60