

**HOW SIBLINGS, RAISED IN ABUSIVE OR NEGLECTFUL HOMES, ARE
TREATED SIMILARLY OR DIFFERENTLY: AN EXPLORATION BY NORTHERN
SOCIAL WORKERS**

by

Cathy Lipke

BSW, University of British Columbia, 2005

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ABSTRACT

In situations of child abuse or neglect, it is beneficial to know how and why siblings may be treated differently. The thesis question was investigated using transcendental phenomenology. The participants were social workers in northern British Columbia, who worked for a minimum of two years in a position assessing risk to families. In this study, siblings who were treated differently by their abusive parents were male children who were physical and emotionally abused by a step-father. Two reasons given were because of the parent's upbringing, and the child's behavioural diagnoses. Further, siblings who are treated similarly in abusive homes were neglected by their mother. Neglect occurs because of mental health diagnoses and alcohol and substance misuse by the parent. The childhood experiences of the parent, including sibling relationships, and keeping Aboriginal children connected to their communities are also themes from this research. Solution-focused therapy was suggested as one treatment to be used by clinicians working with siblings who have been abused. Social workers working with families assessing risk may examine these results when working with abusive or neglectful families where children appear to be treated similarly or differently.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Different and similar treatment of siblings by their parents in abusive or neglectful homes as experienced by northern social workers is the phenomena that will be examined in this thesis. This topic is of interest to me as I am a northern social worker who has worked in the north for the last four and a half years. As a social worker, I have encountered the unique challenges of working in the northern region. A few of the challenges I have experienced are lack of resources, sometimes irrelevant policies, professional isolation, and high professional turnover. I am personally interested in the topic of siblings, as I am the oldest of four siblings. In my practice as a Child Protection Social Worker, I have worked with many families struggling with abuse and/or neglect issues with their children. In my practice, I have been involved in situations where parents in abusive or neglectful homes treat their children similarly, and I have been involved in situations where parents in abusive or neglectful homes treat their children differently. I have observed the impact this has on the children as individuals, the sibling relationships, and the family dynamics. The questions I ask myself when working with abusive or neglectful families are: how are the children treated differently? How are the children treated the same? This thesis will explore these questions.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the differential treatment of siblings by their parents in abusive and neglectful homes as seen from the perspective of northern social workers. The term northern and social worker will be defined in the definition of terms section later in this chapter. The phenomena of differential parental

treatment is explored through questions designed to encourage conversation. By interviewing social workers, I have gained practical knowledge about how social workers in the north can work more effectively with families where abuse and/or neglect of the children have been confirmed. I have also learned how social workers in the north view and assess situations in abusive and/or neglectful homes where parents treat their children both similarly and differently. Through the response of the participants, themes and descriptions of phenomena were derived and examined from a social work lens (these themes and goals are described in detail in chapter four). The knowledge gained by this research will assist social workers in recognizing abusive differential treatment situations. The knowledge gained through this research will also assist social workers with how to work with sibling who have been abused and/or neglected.

Literature Review

The literature contains a large volume of research on siblings. When reviewing the literature on this topic area, it is essential to examine historical theories as well as current ideas to get the full picture of what previous researchers have discovered on the topic. The literature review will emphasize the gaps in research on the topic of sibling differential treatment in abusive and/or neglectful homes, and illustrate areas for further research consideration.

The sibling relationship needs to be studied as it has many long lasting effects that stretch into adulthood. The sibling relationship has a direct impact on child development (Dunn, 1983). Not only does the sibling relationship effect development, it is a subject of controversy in the nature versus nurture debate. The literature on siblings clearly outlines the importance of this topic for development and for helping professionals; however in

my undergraduate education, the sibling relationship was a little examined topic. The sibling relationship is important when looking at child development, and family dynamics. Social workers can benefit from understanding the sibling relationship and how it affects different areas in family life.

The first portion of the literature review discusses the historical research completed on the topic of siblings. Research into this subject started in the 1970s with a closer look into birth order, sibling rivalry, and the sibling bond (Freeman, 1993). Another area of early research is the area of nature versus nurture in sibling relationships and in sibling personalities. The study of genetic and environmental influences on personality is a widely researched area with many studies using adopted and twin siblings as subjects. In addition, early interest in the treatment options for siblings was also explored. The use of counselling as treatment for siblings, dealing with issues such as abuse or neglect, has been explored and includes the counselling techniques shown to be useful. The review of the literature has shown the importance of sibling research in the areas of personality development and counselling, more about this in Chapter 2.

Research on the topic of siblings has important historical roots. Current literature appears to focus more on siblings and abuse/neglect issues. In terms of placement together, siblings in adoption and foster care situations is an area of controversy as some literature challenges the previously held belief that siblings should always be placed together (Whelan, 2003). Sibling abuse is an area of growing interest. It is now thought sibling abuse is more prevalent than it is reported. Sibling abuse has been linked to situations where the perpetrating sibling has witnessed violence between his or her parents and is enacting the witnessed abuse toward a sibling, often a scapegoated child.

Another situation sibling abuse has been linked to is a lack of parental supervision creating a higher degree of responsibility for siblings. These situations, although not mutually exclusive, contribute toward sibling abuse.

Role theory is seen to be a focal point of the research completed on siblings and treatment. Role theory is relevant to siblings in the process of how parents assign roles to their children based on their own family backgrounds. In the same fashion as role theory, labelling theory is often used when discussing siblings and family dynamics. Labelling theory is documented in parental abuse cases where the child and siblings act out the roles they have been labelled with. More on labelling and role theory is described in the related research section of the literature review.

Child abuse is another area of research closely related to the topic of siblings. In this section, the prevalence of child abuse in Canada, and the effects of child abuse specific to siblings is examined. Sibling abuse has implications for the sibling relationship, and the role of the child in the family. Children are particularly vulnerable to abuse from their caregivers as they are dependent upon them for basic needs. There are agencies that specialize in protecting children from abuse and neglect. The agency in British Columbia is the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Child abuse and neglect is a persistent problem in Canada and therefore it is an issue that would benefit from more funding into research, assessment, and intervention. More discussion on the child abuse research will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development, MCFD, is the organization that is charged with assessing and ensuring children are protected in British Columbia. However, in British Columbia there are several Aboriginal agencies across the province

which have been, or are in the process of being, delegated to assess risk to children and families. The mandate of MCFD is to live in a province,

where vulnerable children and youth are healthy and safe in their families and communities; where children and youth, including those with special needs, are supported to achieve their full potential; and children, youth, and their families are served by accountable and responsive community-based service delivery systems (British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development).

The Ministry of Children and Family Development has the position of assessing risk to children and families and decision making authority in regards to placing children outside of the home. There are several documents used to guide practice and assist social workers in making these important decisions. These practice standards and how they fit with the literature will be discussed more later.

Characteristics of North

Because this research has a northern focus, it is important to discuss the characteristics and the term ‘north’ at this point. A definition of the term north is located in the definition of terms section further in this chapter. When talking about north, it is necessary to discuss location as well as economic and political factors of northern living. The majority of the Canadian population reside in cities close to the United States boarder leaving a minority of Canadians residing in 80% of the land mass of Canada (Zapf, 1993). This presents its own unique challenges in determining provincial policy. Policies that affect life in the north are often created by government located in urban settings who do not have an understanding of the north and its unique challenges. The power to create and change polices that dictate the lives of northern residents are often out of reach (Delaney, Brownlee, Sellick & Tranter, 1997). Some of the challenges northern social workers face are minimal clinical supervision and lack of resources. Two

other structural challenges to being a northern social worker can be the perception of residents that you are an outsider and maintaining confidentiality. The north can be defined by location, but also can be looked at by its unique characteristics. This thesis used northern social workers as participants as a way of capturing what the phenomena of differential parental treatment in abusive and neglectful homes may look like in northern British Columbia. The geographical boundaries for northern British Columbia were taken from the Northern Health boundaries for service, which is described in more detail in the definition section of this chapter (Northern Health, 2008).

Four social workers currently working in the north were invited to participate in this study. Each of the social workers had at least a four-year degree in social work and has worked, or currently works, assessing risk to families. The participants were asked questions in a one-hour semi-structured interview. The questions were created to facilitate conversation about the social workers' experience working with siblings who are treated differently and similarly by abusive or neglectful parents. The data obtained was analyzed using a transcendental phenomenological approach outlined in Creswell (2007) and Patton (2002).

Self-Location in the Research

To place myself in the research, I need to point out I am a northern social worker who assesses risk to children and families. I have worked in a position assessing risk to children and families since I graduated with my bachelor of social work degree in 2005. I have three younger siblings with whom I feel I have a close bond. For the reasons stated above, I was interested to find out more about how the factors of abuse affect siblings and family dynamics. I learned a great deal about the phenomena of different and similar

treatment toward siblings in abusive and neglectful families from the research participants.

Definition of Terms

The purpose of this section is to ensure common definitions are understood. The key concepts defined are: abuse (including the specific types of abuse), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, feminist perspective, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, gender issues, labelling theory, neglect, northern, phenomenology, role theory, scapegoat, siblings, social worker, and solution-focused therapy. These concepts are interconnected when examining how siblings are treated similarly or differently in abusive or neglectful homes.

Abuse: physical harm (including harm caused by neglect), sexual abuse (including sexual exploitation, touching, molestation, fondling, and exhibitionism), emotional harm (including humiliation, degrading, and rejecting), deprivation of necessary health care (including refusal to treat or provide consent for treatment), inability or unwillingness to care for a child without adequate provisions for care (Turner, 2005) (Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996).

Attention deficit hyper activity disorder: is a diagnosis, with a usual onset during childhood, characterized with poor concentration, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Treatment is oftentimes medication and/or a focus on environmental factors, particularly child/parent interactions (Turner, 2005).

Feminist perspective: this perspective attempts to end the patriarchal, oppressive influence built into societal roles, and institutions. Feminists sometimes use consciousness raising to help marginalized peoples gain equality (Turner, 2005).

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder: a continuum of permanent birth defects caused by maternal alcohol consumption while the baby is in-vitro. Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder can be characterized by facial features, deficiencies in height and weight, and behaviour problems (Wikimedia, 2009).

Gender issues: are difficulties arising from a person acting different from the socially constructed gender norms seen as traditional to their biological gender. Gender issues can be complex and affect every area of a person's life (Turner, 2005).

Labelling theory: states that identity and behaviour are influenced by the perceptions and

things people say and think about us. This theory is often used when speaking of deviant behaviour (Wikimedia, 2009).

Neglect: the failure to provide basic essentials to live. Also includes abandonment (Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996) (Turner, 2005).

Northern: latitude, temperature, population, and accessibility are a few of the measurements that have been used to characterize the north. The north cannot be defined by one measurement (Graham, 1990). The majority of Canadians live close to the United States boarder, leaving 1% of the population residing in 80% of the land mass (Zapf, 1993). In British Columbia, Northern Health identifies the north as 600,000sqkm affecting 300,000 people. The north is recognized to be almost two-thirds of British Columbia and span from Northwest Territories to the Alberta boarder to the Pacific Ocean (Northern Health, 2008).

Phenomenology: a qualitative approach that attempts to understand a human experience through investigative processes. The purpose of phenomenological research is to create a description for the lived experience (Creswell, 2007).

Role theory: is the understanding of relationships through the roles projected by others. Role theory is most widely wrote about by Herbert Strean and Helen Perlman. This theory examines the interactions between people as a way of demonstrating how norms shape behaviour and cause stress or benefit in people. (Turner, 2005).

Scapegoat: One who is blamed for the actions and problems of others. The one who is blamed is often the subject of unreasonable resentment (Scapegoat, 2009).

Sibling: can include biological siblings (sharing two biological parents), half siblings (sharing one biological parent), step-siblings (related through marriage of parents), adoptive siblings (related through legal process), foster siblings (related through shared home), or other circumstances (not biologically related but live together and are considered siblings) (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007).

Social worker: A professional that is characterized by services such as treatment, aid, or investigation of the physically, mentally, economically or socially disadvantaged (Social work, 2009).

Solution-focused therapy: One theoretical approach, used by clinicians, to improve functioning in a family and individuals. The premise is clients should focus on problem solving and solution focused exercises as opposed to focusing on the issue (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). The clinician centers the attention on the strengths of the family and uses examples of family cohesion as learning instruments (Berg, 1994).

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is composed of six chapters outlining the research study. Chapter one is the introduction, Chapter two is the literature review, Chapter three is the research methodology section, Chapter four is the data analysis, Chapter five is the chapter discussing implications for social workers, and Chapter six is the conclusion.

Chapter one, provides an introduction of the research study and explains and defines the key concepts. The introduction is meant to launch a general understanding of what will occur during the research study including a breakdown of each chapter, which highlighting the important aspects. The definition of the key concepts will be given so readers and author alike have the same understanding of the concepts used throughout the research and what is meant by these terms.

Chapter two of this thesis is the literature review. The literature review looks at the historical roots within the research on the topic of siblings. The focus of historical research on siblings, and the nature versus nurture debate in terms of sibling and childhood development is discussed. The treatment options for siblings who have been abused or neglected and possible counselling techniques are also examined. Next, the current areas of research are explored. The considerations for siblings placed in foster care and adoption situations and the controversy that surrounds is an area of current research interest. This chapter also looks at areas of research related to the topic of siblings. Child abuse and neglect, sibling abuse, and role and labelling theory are some of the areas where research, related to siblings, is occurring. The next section is a critique of the literature. There are several areas identified in the literature reviewed for this thesis where gaps have been identified. The literature review, chapter two, provides a

foundation for what is known about siblings, and how this research will add to the literature.

Chapter three is research methodology. This chapter discusses the research methodology and how and why the research was conducted the way it was. This research was completed from the qualitative approach. The research method chosen is transcendental phenomenology. The research methodology chapter discusses the sample size and its rationale, and the data collection process. Also discussed in this chapter are ethical considerations. This is an important section as it discusses the provisions set in place to ensure participant confidentiality is protected to the best of the researcher and institution's ability. Finally, the limitation section examines the borders of the research project.

Chapter four focuses on data analysis. This section discusses the results of the interviews with participants and describes in detail the themes and descriptions of the phenomena. This chapter starts with the research specifics, such as how the participants came to be involved in the study. The next section gives an in depth look at how the data is analyzed based on a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Each question asked to the participants during the interview is analyzed in the same fashion and the responses recorded. After, the themes for each question were analyzed from the transcriptions. Finally, the themes were sorted and descriptions of the phenomena were given. This chapter is a significant portion of this thesis as it explains the results of the research. The themes were insightful and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. The results inform social work practice and assist new practitioners with knowledge in this area.

The fifth chapter discusses the implications of the research for social workers. This section considers how the research results can benefit helping professionals and how this research will add to the current literature on the subject of siblings. Completing this research opens several possibilities for further research, which is also discussed in this section of the implications chapter. Transferability of the results for the greater population is the next section of chapter five. Transferability speaks to the population to whom the results are relevant and on whom the results will have an impact. While this is a small study, chapter five will show that pieces of the framework may be relevant and inform the broader population based on Guba and Lincoln's criteria for transferability (1982). Next a potential treatment option for siblings who have been abused or neglected will be discussed. Solution-focused therapy is a counselling treatment for siblings, which is outlined in this chapter. The implications chapter discusses how the results of this research are relevant for social workers.

Finally, chapter six is the conclusion. Areas for further research are formalized so that those researching the subject of siblings are given suggestions on where the research could go from here. The research results are organized into themes and descriptions of the phenomena are given. Finally the chapter ends with concluding thoughts and reflections from the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will begin by looking at the historical research completed on the topic of siblings, and on abusive parental differential treatment, followed by an examination of current literature.

The sibling relationship is an important relationship to understand. The relationship between siblings is often complex with changing dynamics (Sanders, 2004). Sometimes siblings need to compete for parental attention and/or resources; sometimes siblings have a complimentary relationship where experiences and emotions are shared. It is theorized siblings will spend more time together than with anyone else, including their parents. Siblings are likely the longest standing relationship many people will ever have (Sanders, 2004). The relationship between siblings is multifaceted and has benefits to being studied.

Child Abuse

Child abuse can include physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect by a parent or caregiver toward a child (*Child, Family and Community Services Act*, 1996). Parental abuse can have different affects on siblings. In abusive or neglectful homes, some siblings may turn toward each other to provide the needs unmet by their parents, such as love and kindness (Bank & Kahn, 1997). In abusive or neglectful homes, children can sometimes become the caregivers for their siblings. A care-taking sibling is the term coined by Bank and Kahn to describe siblings who take over the role of raising their siblings (1997). Also described are super-kids who, in addition to having the role of caring for their siblings, take on the role of caring for their parents. These children feed,

discipline, and attempt to keep their younger siblings in line to avoid further abuse for them or their siblings. Not all older children should have the role of care giving for younger siblings as many older siblings have been researched to be harsher in discipline and aggressive toward younger siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1997). Children's abusive behaviour toward each other is sometimes a reflection of the relationship they see between their parents (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007).

Any amount of child abuse or neglect is too much, but in Canada, the number is alarmingly high. In Canada it is estimated, 33% of males and 27% of females reported experiences of physical or sexual abuse as children (Government of Canada, 2006). The high prevalence of child abuse and neglect may be further exacerbated by high rates of child poverty in Canada. Both ways, children in Canada are suffering and more should to be done to mediate the risk.

The effects of child abuse and neglect can stretch into adulthood for many survivors. Issues such as low self-esteem, depression, substance misuse, criminal activity, and sexual deviance may be the result of childhood trauma (Government of Canada, 2006). There are social factors that have been linked to child abuse and neglect. Social factors such as low socio-economic status, large family size, life stressors, and substance misuse can all play a part in negative family dynamics (Government of Canada, 2006). The importance of studying family, sibling, and individual therapy is apparent in the risk factors and long-term effects of child abuse and neglect.

The prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Canada is high. Maltreatment in childhood is further aggravated by social factors. The effects of such maltreatment can be

long lasting and life changing. One reason it is important to study child abuse and neglect is to develop new insights into prevention and interventions for families.

Scapegoating.

Another example of child abuse is scapegoating. Scapegoating is an extreme form of parental differential treatment. Scapegoating is where one child is treated differently from his or her siblings in a negative way (Sanders, 2004). The concept of scapegoating has biblical roots. The Old Testament teaches that the sins of the people were confessed to a goat that was later expelled from the community. Similarly, in the story of Jonah, he could not escape God's anger in the middle of the ocean and all of the men on the boat were in danger because of Jonah. However, the storm calmed once Jonah left the boat and was swallowed by a fish (Sanders, 2004). These concepts of scapegoating are not always how it occurs within the family, as the scapegoated child may be victimized over and over and not leave the family home. The other family members may not want the scapegoated members to leave. It is not always known why one child is viewed as less than and becomes a scapegoat (Dunn & Plomin, 1990). Some theorize the reason may be related to the parent's relationships with their own siblings, or how the child's birth order affects the marital relationship (Bank & Kahn, 1997). If one child in the family is the scapegoat, the research shows, the dynamics between siblings is altered. Familial abuse and scapegoating may be different in each family.

Research on sibling and parent interactions have shown older children are often shown less attention by their parents when compared to their younger siblings. This has been documented by several researchers (Brody & Stoneman, 1994; Dunn & Plomin, 1990; Heilbrunn, 1986). Some of the research on scapegoating shows that if one sibling is

scapegoated by the parent, the other sibling(s) may act as mediator between the parents and sibling, or may work to detract attention away from the sibling (Heilbrunn, 1986). Or the other siblings, in a scapegoating situation, will learn from their parents and model the behaviour by also acting aggressively toward the child (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). The decision to ally with the parents may be made to avoid being abused themselves. On the other hand, differential treatment could lead to resentment and further alienation between the siblings by the scapegoated child (Bank & Kahn, 1997). The reasons why some children are scapegoated and others are not, is not widely researched, although some believe that the parent's childhood relationships with their own siblings are related to the way the parent views and treats their children (Bank & Kahn, 1997).

Scapegoating is a family problem that has an impact on each member of the family unit. The sibling relationship, in abusive homes, can be affected negatively through the development of relationships and in child development. The non-abused sibling may blame the abused sibling for receiving more attention: this may be particularly true in cases of parental sexual abuse against a child. The non-abused sibling may also blame the abused sibling if the situation causes a Child Protection Social Worker to become involved.

The scapegoated child may exhibit personality characteristics that contribute to the scapegoating. If the child has a disability or a difficult temperament the parents may single the child out because of the child's personal issues (Sanders, 2004).

As discussed earlier, sibling abuse may also be relevant in scapegoating. Sibling abuse can further alienate the child who is labelled the scapegoat. Each family member has a role, and once a child has gotten into the scapegoat role, siblings may model parent

behaviour toward the child (Kiselica, 2007). Risk factors for sibling abuse include: lack of parental supervision, rigid family dynamics, spousal assault, and child assault (Kiselica, 2007). Differential treatment can, in extreme cases, be a slippery slope to sibling abuse. The sibling relationship and family unit are affected negatively by scapegoating.

Some researchers view a negative sibling relationship and the existence of scapegoating as being the influence of the mother (Dunn, 1983). Stark and Flitcraft argue that the male partner abuses the female partner and she in turns abuses her child as a way to feel like she has control (as cited in Sanders, 2004). Other research shows men as the initiators of child abuse and scapegoating and urges social workers to take a close look at families where there are siblings who have different biological fathers and assess the risk individually (Jaude & Diamond, as cited in Sanders, 2004).

Differential parental treatment.

Differential treatment, positive and negative, has been highlighted in many studies. Dunn and Plomin (1990) looked at research conducted with Colorado parents: approximately one third said they felt the same intensity of affection for both of their children, and only one third admitted they gave both their children the same amount of attention. Another study that interviewed siblings concluded that 50% of siblings believe their sibling is treated worse than they are (Dunn & McGuire, 1994). On the other hand, differential treatment is not always considered abusive. For example, a parent cannot treat their eight-year-old child in the exact same way as their five-year-old child: different ages call for different discipline and privilege. Rowe (1981) argues that it is not parental differential treatment that harms the child, but a perceived difference in treatment by the

child that causes the emotional harm. Children react to their perceived treatment and the perceived intention behind the parental action. When the child interprets the act as aggressive or unfair, the child may experience distress (Rowe, 1983).

The way a child perceives parental treatment determines reaction. Children are especially sensitive to differences in parental treatment. Perceptions of parental support correlate with deviant teenage behaviour (Rowe 1981). Studies have shown children react to their parent's perceived behaviour, regardless of actual intent. This explains how children can be psychologically harmed by a parent's actions even when the parent intention was honourable (Dunn, 1983). If children perceive they are being treated differently, it changes their reactions toward their parents, which in turn changes the relationship. As shown in the next section, differential treatment by parents can also strain sibling relationship with each other.

In one study about sibling differential treatment, researchers monitored parent's interaction with their children together and then observed siblings afterward. The study found, mother's differential controlling behaviours caused negative behaviours from the younger child toward their older sibling. On the other hand, the mother's differential positive behaviours toward her child caused more negative behaviours from the oldest child toward their youngest sibling (Brody & Stoneman, 1994). Thus, parents have tremendous influence on the relationship their children have with each other (Dunn, 1983). Parental abuse also has the potential to normalize, or encourage, siblings treating of one another negatively as they observe their parents doing. "Adolescent perceptions of parenting did significantly mediate a composite measure of parental conflict-negativity and adolescent antisocial behaviour and depressive symptoms" (Neiderhiser,

Hetherington, Pike & Reiss, 1998, p. 1459). Anxiety, depression, and withdrawing are characteristics used to describe children who experience abuse by their parents (Dunn & Plomin, 1990).

Historical Overview of the Literature

The topic of siblings is a widely researched one. Research of siblings is a new practice according to Freeman (1993). This literature review follows Freeman's method of organizing the literature on siblings into decades. According to Freeman, early research on siblings commences in the beginning of the 1970s. This research focused on birth order, sibling rivalry, and the sibling bond. Birth order is the study of how the order and spacing of each child affects their personality and family role (Kluger, 2007). Sibling rivalry centers on why and how siblings are competitive with each other and usually gives suggestions for how parents can cope with this (Bank & Kahn, 1997). The sibling bond is an area of interest as it looks at the unique connection most siblings seem to have with one another (Bank & Kahn, 1997). The roots of research into the topic of siblings set the stage for further studies.

A second area of early theoretical interest of researchers into the topic of siblings focuses on nature versus nurture (aspects of people's personalities compared to that of their siblings). This research, according to Freeman (1993), started in the 1980s. Dunn and Plomin are at the heart of the nature versus nurture debate, and the shared versus non-shared environmental influences debate (eg., Dunn, 1983; Dunn & McGuire, 1994; Dunn & Plomin, 1990; Plomin, Chipuer & Neiderhiser, 1994; Plomin, McClearn, Pedersen, Nesselroade & Bergman, 1998; Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington & Howe, 1994). The research agrees neither genetic nor environmental influences are enough of a single

contributing factor to explain the personality and behavioural differences between siblings raised in the same home and sharing two biological parents.

There is still much researchers do not know about the sibling relationship and how it affects their relationships with parents and peers, and in personality and development (Dunn, 1983). There are several factors, according to Dunn and McGuire (1994), which influence child development: the parent's childhood experiences, parent's relationship, child's education, child's location, and parent's approach to education and discipline. Research also suggests these differences may contribute to differential treatment by parents, which in turn contributes to the development of the child. Siblings are sensitive to the differences in treatment between themselves and their siblings by their parents. This sensitivity may not be far off as some parents readily admit differences in strength of feelings toward each of their children (Dunn & Plomin, 1990). Children's interpretation of differential treatment can have the same negative affect as actual parental differential treatment (Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington & Howe, 1994).

Treatment options.

A third historical area covered in the literature is treatment options for siblings and families. Although research on sibling therapy is minimal, there are theories to use when working clinically with siblings (Freeman, 1993). Theories used in sibling therapy, historically and presently, are: bridging, mediation, problem solving, structural, and role theories (Freeman, 1993). Bridging is the therapeutic tool used to bring siblings closer together. Mediation is the process of speaking about problems and coming to an agreement (Freeman, 1993). Problem solving is a clinical approach where the therapist focuses on what the clients identify as the issues and tries to solve them (Lefton,

Brannon, Boyes & Ogden, 2005). Structural theory in sibling therapy is the process of identifying and challenging the structure of the family. Role theories state siblings can sometimes get stuck in rigid roles that are tied to their self-esteem and self worth. Therapists who subscribe to role theory help siblings realize their role in the family and how it affects their behaviours and actions (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005).

Activities that therapists may use when engaging in sibling therapy are: genograms, a map of the family which may include labelling and roles in the family; social network analysis, a map of significant people involved in the client's life which plots the relationships (negative or positive) with each person; and ecomaps, a systems theory look at family and friends and how their relationships affect the client (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). Although treatment for siblings is a minimally researched topic, theories used by clinicians are useful in identifying family roles, recognizing relationships with friends and family, and bringing siblings together. Theory in sibling treatment has evolved over time and seems to focus on changing the relationship by challenging roles, and by problem solving. A closer look at problem solving theory, or solution-focused therapy in sibling treatment will occur later in this thesis.

Looking at the literature, the importance of researching siblings and sibling relationships quickly became apparent. Siblings play an essential role in child development (Dunn, 1983; Edwards, Hadfield & Mauthner, 2006; Erich & Leung, 2002). The literature suggests a question to be answered: if sibling relationships are so important to personality and development, why is the topic not studied more extensively? Sibling relationships and development was not an area extensively explored during my undergraduate social work education, nor was it an important part of my training as a

Child Protection Social Worker. It became clear, while reviewing the literature that social work students could benefit from further education on siblings and sibling family dynamics.

The historical overview of the literature suggests a focus on sibling rivalry, the nature versus nature debate, and treatment options for families. Researchers began to take a closer look into the sibling relationship in the mid 1970s. Researchers soon realized the importance of the sibling bond and how greatly it affects child development.

To summarize, a review of the literature shows that academics have focused on the areas of birth order, sibling rivalry, and the sibling bond (Freeman, 1993). Researchers have also focused on the nature versus nurture debate in regards to personality development. Another area of interest in early research is treatment considerations for siblings. After reviewing the historical research directions it makes sense to next examine the current directions.

Current Research Directions

Current research (within the last ten years) discusses a variety of sibling issues. There are a growing number of research studies examining sibling considerations in adoption and foster care. When children are placed in adoption and foster care the policy surrounding best interest of the children assists in planning and placement decisions. The current research builds on earlier research, and will be discussed next.

Adoption and foster placement.

Sibling issues in adoption and foster care has been an area of discussion and controversy in current literature. It is a previously held belief that siblings adjust and function better when placed together in adoption or foster placements; this belief is now

being questioned. There is a growing volume of research urging practitioners to look at best interest for siblings' placement on a case-by-case basis (Erich & Leung, 2002; Massinga & Pecora, 2004; Whelan, 2003). Additional discussion on current policy and practice in regards to siblings being placed together will occur further on in this section.

Attachment.

The topic of attachment is of critical importance in any discussion of abused and neglected children in adoption and foster care. Attachment is a long-standing emotional connection between a child and caregiver (Child Trauma Academy, 2005). There are short time periods where attachment needs to occur or else the child may have difficulty forming healthy relationships throughout life. Children who are abused or neglected are particularly at risk for poor attachment (Child Trauma Academy, 2005). Parents who have experienced trauma may have trouble attaching to their children. Children who have poor attachment may exhibit development delays, emotional issues, or aggression. However, current literature suggests children who miss the critical attachment period may still be able to replace their missed experiences. This may be a long and difficult process for both child and caregiver (Child Trauma Academy, 2005). Attachment is an area of vast research and interest in the mental health field. The long lasting effects of attachment in child development make this a subject related to siblings.

Service standards.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development supports a publication titled *Child and Family Development Service Standards* (2003). This publication speaks to best practices and guidelines for social workers working with children and families. Standard 20 speaks about the importance of placing children who are in care of the Ministry with

extended family members to promote lifelong relationships and stability. Standard 20 also addresses placing aboriginal children within their community, or if this is not possible, within another aboriginal home. Standard 20 argues that it is important to

make every effort to place the child in a location: where he or she can maintain contact with relatives and friends, in the same family unit as the child's brothers and sister, that will allow the child to continue in the same school, and that will allow continued contact with his or her cultural community" (*Child and Family Service Standards*, 2003, p. 70).

The intent behind these standards is to reduce the trauma to the child, give emotional stability, create a sense of belonging, increase the opportunity for family reunification, and preserve family values (*Child and Family Service Standards*, 2003). These standards encourage placing siblings together in the same family unit. It does not address the considerations for how to decide if and when siblings should not be placed together. The standards do not give consideration or guidelines to children who are abused by their siblings and where it may not be in their best interest to be placed with a particular sibling. A standard which acknowledges the abusive relationship which can sometimes occur between siblings, and offers suggestions for placement would be beneficial to Child Protection Social Workers. A tool for Child Protection Social Workers in assessing the relationship between siblings would be beneficial. The standards, which offer guidelines for placement of children in care, offers recommendations for placement to promote stability and family ties in children. However, these standards do not acknowledge specifically, or address the abusive sibling relationship which sometimes occurs.

A second Ministry of Children and Family Development supported publication *Child in Care Standards* (2004) speaks about the sibling relationship when a child is in

care of the Ministry. Standard 10 encourages making it a priority to promote lifelong stability and continuity of relationships. Standard 10 says,

Make it a priority to promote the stability and continuity of lifelong relationships for the child, by: actively supporting the child in maintaining positive attachments with parents, siblings, extended family, friends, caregivers and others; making every effort to prevent unnecessary delays in decision making by using collaborative planning and alternative dispute resolution processes to reach agreements on developing and implementing the plan of care; reunifying the child with family or extended family, or if that is not possible, developing an alternative out-of-care living arrangement that will provide the opportunity to maintain and develop lifelong relationships, and explore on an ongoing, regular basis whether reunification with family or extended family is possible” (*Children in Care Service Standards*, 2004, p. 112).

This standard specifies that Child Protection Social Workers should promote positive relationships between children and their siblings and family and community. This standard has a similar intention to Standard 20; however neither speaks about the considerations for siblings for whom regular contact may be negative and not in the best interests of the child. On the other hand, Standard 10 does specify promoting positive contact between the siblings.

Sibling abuse.

The relationship between siblings is altered if the children are growing up in an abusive or neglectful home. Heilbrunn (1986) wrote on the topic of sibling relationships in abusive homes. Heilbrunn’s observations were, in general, siblings raised in abusive homes had more positive interactions between each other. These interactions are based on birth order and spacing with middle born children having more negative behaviours toward siblings, and closer spaced children having more positive behaviours toward each other. Disturbingly, people who identify as being gay, bisexual, or lesbian reported higher levels of abuse as children than their heterosexual siblings; the causality relationship is

not known (Balsam, Rothblum & Beauchaine, 2005). The dynamics between siblings and parents is changed in abusive or neglectful homes.

Sibling violence is a common form of violence and may often be viewed as normal sibling interaction (Simonelli, Mullis & Rohde, 2005). Straus and Gelles estimate that as many as 80% of children between the ages of 13 and 17 commit what they define as a violent act against a sibling (1990). Siblings can abuse each other in the same way caregivers can abuse children: sexually, physically, or emotionally. It is estimated that a high number of acts of violence between siblings may go unreported and may be viewed as normal sibling play. Research has shown siblings often treat each other the way they see their parents acting toward each other (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). There are often common characteristics in situations where one sibling is abused by another sibling. A lack of parental supervision, dependence of one sibling upon another (as in care giving situations), and a history of abuse of the sibling by another member of the family, are all characteristics common in sibling abuse (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007).

One case of sibling abuse in Saskatchewan received national attention when the show *The Fifth Estate* highlighted a set of three siblings (one brother and two sisters) who made wild accusations of extreme abuse by their foster parents and relatives. In the summer of 1991, these siblings made accusations which sparked a ten month investigation, and led to the arrest of sixteen people including two teenagers. The accusations included tales of babies being killed, sexual sadism, and people being cut up. The investigators involved (RCMP and social workers) believed the children could not possibly have made this up. Eleven years later, when the siblings had reached the age of majority, two of the children have changed their stories. The brother disclosed how he

forced his sisters to participate in extravagant lies about their foster parents and relatives, through threat of death, for the purpose of having access to his sisters (by living in the same foster home) so he could continue to sexually abuse them. One sister states she was so afraid she made up elaborate stories about her foster parents to avoid the wrath of her brother. The sister speaks of how she endured sexual abuse from her brother for years. Even after the social workers and RCMP were aware of the sibling abuse, the children were still kept in the same foster homes. This is one example of an extreme Canadian case of sibling abuse which had implications for foster parents and the social welfare system (Cashore, 2002). While child protection policies have change in the last 19 years, we need to acknowledge the seriousness of sibling abuse, recognize the signs of abuse, and take immediate action.

Sibling abuse is not a specific type of abuse as provided in the *Child, Family and Community Services Act* (1996). Sibling abuse is not a specific risk factor that is assessed in the immediate safety assessment that Child Protection Social Workers complete when conducting investigations. Likely, a report of sibling abuse would be coded as parent not protecting their child from abuse. This is potentially an interesting dilemma for a single working mother. If the mother is told one of her children is abusing her other child and it is her job to protect her abused child, how is she to do this when she is working? A working parent may be forced to make a decision between work and her children, or one child versus the other child. Sibling abuse can potentially lead to some difficult decisions for the parent of the siblings.

Sibling abuse has been studied and common characteristics identified. Within the home, there seems to be little distinction between male and female perpetrators; however,

outside the home males appear more likely the aggressor (Sanders, 2004). Green (as cited on Sanders, 2004), studied sibling abuse and found distinguishing characteristics common in situations of sibling abuse. Some of the characteristics commonly found in situations of sibling abuse are: the abuser had been physically abused themselves, experienced parental withdrawal, were given large amounts of responsibility for care taking of siblings, and perceived favoritism of the abused sibling. In some cases, abuse, perpetrated by siblings, may be acted out for purposes of revenge or venting misdirected anger toward a parent.

The research on siblings and foster and adoption care is sometimes controversial, as shown in this section, as some researchers have made findings which contradict the previously held belief, that it is not always best for siblings to be placed together. There has been an abundance of research in the last few years about sibling abuse and the widely held belief that it is severely unreported.

Areas of Related Research

Research related to siblings and abuse has been completed in the area of role theory. Role theory is the psychoanalytical idea that people play roles that regulate social situations (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). Role theory is often used when examining families and sibling relationships. According to role theory, an individual's relationships with others are observed as complementary or reciprocal (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). In terms of siblings, some researchers argue that siblings get caught in rigid roles within the family (Freeman, 1993). The "smart one" and the "bad one" are terms used to differentiate between siblings, and often times between twins. Parents early on instill the roles each child will play within a family based on birth order, gender, hierarchy, and

their relationship with their own siblings. The role directed toward children by their parents can be a self-fulfilling prophecy as theorized in labelling theory (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey & Mauthner, 2006).

Labelling theory.

Closely related to role theory is labelling theory. Labelling is the social control theory that individuals seen as having a certain characteristic will act the way they perceive people see them (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000). In terms of families, if a parent has labeled a child a troublemaker, labelling theory says the child will act out the role as troublemaker. Bank and Kahn (1997) point out that parents may create these roles for their children based on their own experiences with siblings. Children act out the roles given by their parents, which enforce the roles they hold in the family (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey & Mauthner, 2006). As described earlier, the study looking at the self-reported childhood abuse rates of people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual and how sexuality may or may not have influenced childhood abuse fits in this category (Balsam, Rothblum & Beauchaine, 2005). The research questioned the reaction or labelling of the abuse based on the parent's perception of the child. Labelling can be a powerful influence in the personality of a child.

Critique of the Literature

The following critique of the literature acknowledges limitations and looks for areas where further research is needed. In this section, three limitations of the literature will be discussed. One limitation is that, for the most part, the research related to siblings and abuse is self-reported. A second limitation is the majority of the research on the topic of siblings is quantitative in design. A third limitation is the lack of Canadian research

completed on this topic. Through critiquing the literature, areas for further research can be discovered.

The first critique is the fact that much of the research reviewed on siblings is done from the sibling's point of view and self-reporting. The drawback to having much of the research conducted from the standpoint of the sibling is that the research is only as reliable as one can recall; therefore, the research is only as accurate as one's memory (Creswell, 2003). This can also mean that the data is biased by the person recalling the events, or even biased by the researcher interpreting the data. While completing interviews and questionnaires from the sibling's point of view is useful, validity is stronger when other sources or third parties can corroborate the information (Creswell, 2003).

A second limitation is that much of the literature reviewed that was completed on siblings and abuse is quantitative research. Quantitative research does not make as many allowances for personal experience from the researcher or the participant as a qualitative study may. Patton (2002, p. 14) states, "Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned". The sibling relationship can be deeply emotional and multifaceted; to appreciate it involves listening to personal experiences (Sanders, 2004). The phenomena of siblings needs to be looked at from many angles to get a handle on the complexity.

There is a lack of Canadian literature on the issue of siblings and abuse. Much of the research comes from the United States. Canada is uniquely different from the United

States and therefore research from Canada will more accurately reflect life in Canada. Equally, I was not able to find research on siblings in northern or rural communities. How rural or northern life affects- positively or negatively- the sibling relationship has not been widely explored. This thesis seeks to shed light on sibling relationships in abusive or neglectful homes, from the viewpoint of social workers, in northern British Columbia. A shortfall of Canadian literature on the topic of siblings is one limitation of the research on the subject of siblings.

The literature on siblings and abuse has some limitations that prevent the issue from being seen from different points of view, such as from a qualitative and Canadian perspective. To conclude, one limitation of the literature is that much of the literature is done from a sibling's point of view, this research could be strengthened if the data was corroborated from siblings and other third parties. A second limitation is that the research on siblings that has been produced is mainly quantitative. A third limitation is the lack of Canadian literature on siblings. One goal of this research thesis is to further the knowledge about siblings, in a northern British Columbian context, who are abused or neglected similarly and differently by their parents.

Gaps in the Literature

There is a wealth of information about siblings in academia, but there are also gaps in the literature. One gap is that research into sibling relationship is theory, and because it is theory there is room for growth and new ideas. Another gap in the literature is the personal experiences of scapegoated children completed from a qualitative research perspective. There is little research on why children are treated differently in some families. Researchers have discovered different contributors to personality development

in siblings (Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington & Howe, 1994), and how siblings play a large role in early development (Newman, 1994). Siblings and family dynamics, as observed by social workers, is an area that needs further consideration. Questions about the phenomena and experience of being a sibling and how social workers view family dynamics in abusive or neglectful homes are not widely researched. Social workers can provide unique insight into the family system, which is one reason social workers were utilized in this research.

Research into the sibling relationship is widely based on role and labelling theory. These theories are two of the foundations that shape our understanding of siblings (Sanders, 2004). In Kubiliene's (2009) study on resilience in childhood, she quoted Wegscheider's role theory. This facet of role theory discusses four types of children: family hero, scapegoat, mascot, and lost child; these roles are consistent with the literature on siblings. The theories used in research on sibling relationships are just that-theories; because they are theories, there is room for new ideas and new research to explore the complexities of the sibling relationship.

Qualitative research into the personal experiences of scapegoated children is an area not extensively studied. In-depth interviews with scapegoated children, including analyzed themes, would open up a world of insight. Interviews with parents who scapegoat their children could potentially change the way child protection work is done. There could be benefits for fresh research into the areas related to children and social work. Qualitative research is beneficial, particularly in areas of social work where new idea and theories are generated that change the way people, relationships, and families are viewed (Marlow, 2005). The research completed for this thesis will hopefully shed a

little light on the reasons children are treated differently or similarly in abusive and/or neglectful homes.

The research outlined in this thesis will contribute to the literature on what is known about siblings. The research will provide a distinct view of how parents treat siblings similarly and differently in abusive and neglectful homes. This thesis offers a social work perspective of siblings and family framed in a qualitative research study. The results will add to the current literature about why abusive and neglectful parents treat their children similarly and differently and how this affects family dynamics and sibling relationships. Identifying reasons for scapegoating children is a hypothesized outcome of the study.

The potential knowledge generated from this study could give social workers the tools to examine how differential sibling treatment may be detrimental to the child. Social workers could use these tools to point out observations to parents and families, and empower them to change. Social work clinicians may use the knowledge gained for treatment purposes in family, or sibling therapies. The lack of qualitative studies on siblings and abusive families suggests there is room for this knowledge. Social workers and other helping professionals can benefit from as much knowledge as possible on siblings and families.

Summary of the Literature

To summarize the literature, there are a few key areas of interest. Sibling rivalry, birth order, and the sibling bond are three more commonly researched areas (Freeman, 1993). These areas provide insight into how personality is developed, but on a whole, they do not offer all of the knowledge needed for professionals working with siblings and

families assessing risk. In this literature review, research from books, journals, dissertations, textbooks, and newsletters were examined. Academics do not agree on all of the aspects of the literature: there are some interesting debates in the world of sibling research. One example of an interesting debate is: how much a child's development is based on genetics and how much is based on environment. Another controversial question is: should siblings always be placed together when brought into a foster care or adoption situations? Researchers theorize sibling abuse may be generally underreported and therefore not always recognized and addressed (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). Sibling abuse can be considered child abuse: anytime a child is abused (physically, sexually, or emotionally) and a parent knows but does not protect it is considered child abuse. One form of child abuse could be differential treatment or, in its extreme form, scapegoating. Scapegoating is not a largely researched topic; it is hoped that professionals, who work with children and families, will find insight in this thesis that can inform practice about parental differential treatment in abusive or neglectful homes.

Contribution to the Literature

This research contributes to the literature that is known about siblings. This research gives a distinct view of how parents treat siblings differently or similarly in abusive and neglectful homes. This thesis offers a social work perspective of siblings and family framed into a qualitative research approach. The results will add to current literature about why abusive and neglectful parents treat their children similarly and differently and how this affects family dynamics and sibling relationships. Identifying reasons for scapegoating children can be useful for helping professionals who work with children and families. The potential knowledge generated from this study will offer social

workers more tools to identify when differential sibling treatment is occurring. Social workers may use these tools to point out observations to parents and families, and empower change. Social workers may also use the knowledge gained for treatment purposes in family or sibling therapies. The lack of qualitative studies on siblings and abuse in families means there is room for this type of research. Recognizing how important sibling and family relationships are to the development of children, social workers and other helping professionals can benefit from as much knowledge as possible on this topic.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 will outline the methodology for this research. To begin, qualitative research and its application in this thesis will be described and the rationale for its use explained. This study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach. The parameters of the phenomenological study and its justification will be described. Next a discussion of the sample population and the reasons this sample was preferred will be outlined. The data collection methods and procedures is outlined in the next section, followed by a discussion of ethical considerations and ending with the limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research

This thesis prescribes to the qualitative approach. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it is “interactive and humanistic”, and the themes of the research emerge based on the responses and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). There are five common qualitative approaches: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. The qualitative approach is consistent with social work values and, in turn, social work research. Qualitative research argues that a theorist’s intuition, past experience, and observations are ways of learning about experiences and human behaviour. Some research, like participatory action and narrative, offers participants empowerment through the telling of their story, listening to opinions, and peer-generated knowledge (Marlow, 2005). Finally, qualitative research characteristically has open-ended contacts with participants, interpretive data, acknowledgement of values and biases, and has a unique role of the researcher (Creswell,

2003). The qualitative approach is also a preferred approach to learn about a phenomenon.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is the examination of the “meaning of experiences of a phenomena (or topic or concert) for several individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 236).

Phenomenology is the study of human consciousness or the study of the essence of experience (Solomon, 1980). Phenomenology is based on philosophical groundwork by Hursell, labelled the “father of phenomenology”, and his associates (Solomon, 1980).

Phenomenology has different meanings, based on the context. Phenomenology has different meanings in philosophy and research, and has several theories (Patton, 2002).

While transcendental phenomenology is one type of phenomenological research, there are different approaches. Hermeneutical phenomenology, for example, has the same basic goal as the transcendental type, which is to explain a phenomena or lived experience, but calls for more researcher involvement. While transcendental phenomenology has the researcher bracket their experiences of the phenomenology to avoid biasing the participant responses, hermeneutical phenomenology has the researcher participate in developing the description of the phenomena based on their own interpretations (Creswell, 2007). Each approach has benefits and limitations depending on the research project. For the purposes of this research, transcendental phenomenology was chosen for the reasons outlined below.

When examining research methods, I considered the research assumptions, framework, limitations, and benefits of several approaches but in the end transcendental phenomenology was chosen as it is an excellent tool for researching certain types of

human behaviour and experience. Phenomenology is best used when the researcher is investigating or trying to discover the essence of life or a lived experience (Ashworth, 1996). When looking at a fit between the research and methodology, Mauch and Park (2003, p. 126) list a set of guidelines to evaluate. Of this set of criterion, transcendental phenomenology is a practical, efficient, promising, and readily available way to study the experience of northern social workers of similar and differential treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes.

Transcendental phenomenology, according to Creswell (2007), involves a specific set of research procedures. Bracketing, interviewing until the saturation point is reached, and data analyzing are all parts of these processes. Data analysis involves pulling statements from participant interviews that give insight into the phenomena being studied, and then looks for themes among the responses. The researcher examines what the participants experienced and then the researcher is able to write a description of the phenomena based on common themes (Creswell, 2007).

An understanding of the philosophical assumptions is required and needs to be acknowledged in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). In this section, three philosophical assumptions of phenomenology will be discussed: consciousness is the real world, common essences experienced, and social interactions and meaning. An explanation of these assumptions in terms of phenomenological research will follow.

Is the consciousness the real world? This is the first question that needs to be answered. The reason this is an important assumption is because phenomenology is the investigation of human consciousness (Solomon, 1980). The transcendental assumption in phenomenology is that consciousness is the only connection humans have to the world

(Ashworth, 1996). The opposing question is: if consciousness is not the only access to the world and each other, is there a detached consciousness? Consciousness must be interpreted in this context as the act of research participants making the consciousness happen (Solomon, 1980). Hurssel (as quoted by Patton, 2002) explained that humans know and interpret essences based on the meaning we place on them; this occurs within our consciousness. When doing research under the phenomenological approach, one needs to accept the assumption that what people experience is their consciousness of the real world.

The second philosophical assumption is essence as commonly experienced by people (Ainsworth, 1996). In order to do phenomenological research, one must believe the phenomena they are studying can be transferred to other people who have shared similar experiences. Phenomenological researchers understand that people experience things differently and therefore have a unique worldview based on their race, sex, socioeconomic status, and education. This is the argument for why observation and intensive interviewing of each participant is sometimes recommended. It is assumed, however, despite these many differences, that people experience certain essences in similar ways (Patton, 2002). If the philosophical assumption that people share similar essences is not held, phenomenological research is not appropriate.

The final point is the philosophical assumption that the world and social interactions are meaningful (Ashworth, 1996). The purpose of phenomenological research is to get a better understanding of how people interpret and experience the world; therefore, the phenomena people experience is important to the essence of life. Understanding the way people interpret the world and how people create meaning gives

insight into the essence of human character (Patton, 2002). Without the philosophical assumption that shared essences are meaningful, phenomenological research would not be completed.

The philosophical assumptions of phenomenology need to be examined and acknowledged before research can take place. The three assumptions discussed were: real life is within consciousness, essences are commonly experienced, and social interactions are meaningful. It is important to recognize these assumptions during the phenomenological research process of bracketing. These assumptions make phenomenological research important to social sciences' study of human experience and life (Patton, 2002).

Another important component of transcendental phenomenology is the concept of bracketing. Bracketing, which occurs throughout this study, is when the researcher acknowledges and puts aside all preconceived notions of experience and intellect on the topic. The purpose of bracketing is so the researcher can learn, untainted, as much as possible about the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). There are criticisms regarding bracketing, and there is open debate within the scientific community as to the ability of a researcher to bracket (Ashworth, 1996).

When bracketing, researchers are asked to put aside empiricism, intellectualism, personal experiences, and any predetermined idea of what will be learned from participants (Ashworth, 1996). Some researchers even choose not to do literature reviews of the topic before conducting the research so as not to taint the study. Researchers argue bracketing must be carried out to make sure presuppositions do not interfere with the

findings (Ashworth, 1996). Bracketing is a difficult task, and some scientists argue phenomenology is not for beginner researchers.

A common critique of bracketing is the statement that it is impossible to bracket all preconceived notions of experience and past experiences to complete an unbiased study (Creswell, 2007). Both the interpretive and feminist critiques state that researchers cannot be separated from their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The experience of the researcher (which is influenced by race, sex, socio-economic status, and education), cannot be put aside. Some researchers argue personal experiences are ingrained in the person and it is impossible to separate (Creswell, 2007). What makes transcendental phenomenological research different from other approaches is the fact that researchers are not supposed to have any ideas or expectations about what they will learn. Putting aside prejudgements and expectations of what will be said by participants is challenging, yet is necessary to create new understanding of phenomena and human essence. Critics of phenomenology argue bracketing is difficult for experienced scientists (Ashworth, 1996). The purpose of bracketing is for the researcher to learn, unaffected by personal knowledge, about the participant's experience of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Bracketing is an ongoing procedure applied throughout this research thesis. By bracketing, or acknowledging the biases, the researcher can put their ideas and preconceived notions aside and focus on the participant's experience (Patton, 2002).

One consideration in phenomenology is researcher error. All qualitative studies have the risk of researcher error; however, some argue this is especially true for phenomenology because of the process of bracketing and clustering. Clustering is the act of putting the data together and looking for themes and meaning (Creswell, 2007). Both

clustering and bracketing are important to transcendental phenomenology. Critics state that researcher error in phenomenological processes of clustering and bracketing is high due to the nature of the task. The nature of transcendental phenomenological study, clear of bias, leaves room for scrutiny of the process. Some argue it is impossible to bracket all previously held experiences and beliefs, as stated earlier. Some state further that the clustering processes can be flawed if researchers are not careful. If a researcher is not able to bracket all their own preconceived notions while interviewing the participants, they will certainly not be able to keep their personal ideas out of the clustering process (Creswell, 2007).

All research carries the risk of researcher error at any stage of the study. Careful attention must be paid to all processes of the study. Phenomenology is also criticized for its circular and “self obsessed” nature (Solomon, 1980, p.5). Phenomenology supporters defend the notion that research needs to be examined and re-examined for missing meanings. Supporters also argue that while phenomenology may be circular, its nature is not vicious (Solomon, 1980). The saturation point is one way of knowing when the researcher has gathered and examined enough information so that any more information received would not lead to new insight (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the saturation point was reached; criteria for saturation will be discussed further in this chapter.

Interviewing

Interviews are frequently used for data collection in phenomenological research. An interview is a time efficient way to gather data from the participants on the topic of study. Some phenomenological researchers believe that one in-depth interview is good enough to gather the information from the participant, while other researchers argue

multiple interviews are necessary (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions should be open ended and focus on descriptions of the phenomena. The interview questions, if well worded and thought out, should offer the researcher an idea of what, in the opinion of the participant, the phenomena is and/or means to that individual. Once the interviews from all of the participants have been completed, the data analysis procedure can occur.

Interviewing is a skill learned and refined through social work education and research. Interviewing is a complex procedure and requires a great deal of thought and understanding for each research project. There are specific goals when using interviewing in qualitative research. There are different types of interviews and different challenges to each approach. There are other considerations when using interviews as a data collection technique that will be discussed further in this chapter.

The goals of interviewing are straightforward. Interviews done by helping professionals or in qualitative research have the purpose of assessing, treating, and gathering information (Turner, 2005). Social workers often use interviewing to assess the needs of their clients. By assessing client's needs, social workers can better define what services and referrals clients will benefit from. Helping professionals sometimes use interviews as a way of treating clients. Turner (2005) reminds practitioners that social work interviews can be distressing and painful to clients due to the nature of the questions and topics discussed; this is one reason for the decision to use social workers as a research participants as opposed to siblings themselves. Another social work use for interviews is to gather information; this is particularly true for social work researchers. In this thesis, interviews were used to gather information on the topic being studied.

There are various types of interviews to consider when designing a research study. Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured are three different types of interviews (Creswell, 2007). The structured interview is an interview arranged by a researcher, asking a specific number of questions with the goal of gathering data on a topic. In a structured interview, the questions are designed to open lines of communication to gain as much knowledge as possible from the interviewee (Creswell, 2007). In a semi-structured interview (the type of interview completed in this study) the interviewer asks specific questions but leaves room for follow up questions, or questions raised during the interview (Patton, 2002). Finally, in an unstructured interview the interviewer can change the questions at will to suit the interviewee (Patton, 2002). The unstructured interview is not as common as the structured and semi-structured interviews used for research because the conversation with each participant may be quite different from participant to participant (Creswell, 2007). The types of interviews used in research projects needs to be carefully considered by the researcher.

There are challenges to using interviewing as a research data-gathering tool. Researchers need to be prepared for issues that arise when conducting interviews, such as, participants not being willing to fully engage in conversation, or speaking too freely about the issue and potentially speaking off topic (Creswell, 2007). These challenges can hinder the researcher by not allowing them to gather enough information specific to the topic. Another challenge is asking difficult questions which may cause the participant to become emotional (Creswell, 2007). The researcher must be aware that the process may be traumatic and distressing to clients, which may cause crying or unexpected outbursts from the interviewees. Another potential challenge to the interview may be the ability to

gain enough confidence from the interviewee to obtain the information being sought. Qualitative research often involves the interviewing of people who are from different socio-economic, racial, educational, and/or cultural background than the researcher. Gaining the trust of the participants to provide the needed information may be more difficult if the interviewee does not trust or feel they can relate to the interviewer (Creswell, 2007).

There are other practicalities to consider when choosing to interview participants for a research study. Using appropriate recording procedures is essential to capture the intended responses of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Another practicality is deciding a suitable interview location. When considering a suitable interview location, a researcher must also consider confidentiality. In the case of a face-to-face interview the location should be a quiet, private, setting which makes the participant feel comfortable (Creswell, 2007). The third consideration is non-verbal cues. When deciding on location for a face-to-face interview the researcher needs to be conscious of the need to be able to observe and record the subtle non-verbal cues of the interviewee (Creswell, 2007).

When deciding to use telephone, internet or other non face-to-face interview methods, the researcher needs to consider how a lack of observations of the non-verbal cues of the participant will affect the research and the interview. There are many practicalities to consider when making the decision to interview during a research project. Location, recording, and non-verbal cues are some of these considerations.

This research used semi-structured interviews. This interview method was chosen because it encourages participants to give detailed answers describing their experiences, and also allows for follow up questions for clarification purposes (Patton, 2002). The

questions asked in this study were open ended and allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences. Having the questions pre-arranged and asked to each participant promoted consistency and confirmability, which will be used to measure the trustworthiness of the study (Guba & Lincon, 1982). Looking at the different types of interviews, semi-structured was chosen for this research as it best meets the research goals: to determine how siblings, in abusive or neglectful homes are treated similarly or differently.

Sample

The sample is an area of the research that needs careful consideration. There are many factors to consider in determining the sample for research. Some of these factors are, the research question, population to transfer the results to, and audience. This thesis looks at differential and similar parental treatment of abused and/or neglected siblings, and asked for three to six individuals with a minimum four-year degree in social work, and a minimum of two years working in a position assessing risk to children and families. This is called criterion sampling: looking for participant samples based on a specific set of criteria (Patton, 2002).

The requirements were designed to attract northern social workers who have a working knowledge of assessing risk, because assessing risk involves knowledge of abuse and neglect, and family dynamics. This population of people had the experience needed to answer the questions, and they are capable of providing insight into differential and similar treatment toward siblings in abusive and neglectful homes in northern British Columbia. The recruitment posters advertised the research study topic, and invited interested volunteers who meet the criteria to contact the researcher by e-mail or phone

(Appendix 1). Several community offices within the north, where social workers are employed, were contacted via e-mail asking to put the recruitment posters in the offices' lunchrooms.

Of the seven e-mails sent out, five positive responses were received. Because the participant criteria was narrowed to a certain set of skills, and narrowed further by the recruitment poster locations, it is reasonable to assume the results are most relevant to northern social workers and helping professionals working in a position assessing risk to siblings and families. The two requirements ensured that only qualified participants would be interviewed during the study.

Description of Participants

Five participants responded to the recruitment posters, which were advertised in multiple northern offices, which employ social workers, in the kitchen/break room. Of the five participants, four completed interviews and one, after lengthy correspondence back and forth ceased contact with the researcher after being unable to find a mutual time to meet for an interview. Of the four participants who completed the interview, all were women, all met the criteria of having completed a minimum four-year degree in social work, and all have worked a minimum two years in a position assessing risk to children and families. All four participants read the information letter, signed the consent form, and answered all six questions of the interview.

Data Collection

Interviews are beneficial to research in several ways. They can provide a window into the mind of another: a way to gain an understanding of another's experiences (Patton, 2002). Interviews as a research method also have limitations. Researcher bias,

recall error, and participant emotion (based on how the participant is feeling that particular day) can all have a negative effect on the research collected (Patton, 2002). Asking open-ended questions, and observing the reactions and mannerisms of the participant while answering the questions, may counteract aspects of the limitations. The way the data is collected and handled can influence the results of the research.

The participants were asked six questions and their answers tape-recorded (Appendix 2). As per the information and confidentiality letters, the participants were offered a copy of the transcript of their interview for the purposes of accuracy, to adjust any misconceptions and as a part of the evaluative criteria.

Treatment of the data is a significant concern to the researcher, participant, and to university ethics. The data collected contained sensitive information that needed to be handled, and disposed of carefully. The data (audiotapes) is kept in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. The information will be kept until the final report of the research project is complete and approved. Audiotapes will be destroyed after two years. After the final report is completed, original documents related to the interviews will be shredded. Throughout the research project, confidentiality of the participants and the data was kept locked and secure to the best of the researcher's ability. The data gathered is reflected in the final research report in the areas of analysis and recommendations for practice: anonymity was maintained. Confidentiality is a high priority of this research and therefore strict treatment of the data is in place.

Phenomenological data analysis consists of two main practices: identifying and highlighting important ideas from each interview, and creating themes (Creswell, 2007). If done correctly, the ideas and themes will outline and give a description of the

phenomena. Identifying and highlighting important sections occurred after each interview was transcribed. In this thesis, the transcribed interviews were carefully looked over by the researcher and important points underlined. The underlined sections were examined and themes pulled from the text. The data analysis was a lengthy process as each interview was re-read and underlined, and themes were examined.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in every study are of fundamental consideration. In this thesis, informed consent and appropriate ethics are the responsibility of the institution, thesis supervisor, and, above all else, the student conducting the research. The University of Northern British Columbia prides itself on its high ethical standards, and its ethics approval process attests to this. The research approved ethics package is listed as Appendix 3; the ethics approval form is listed as Appendix 4.

Research participants maintain certain rights afforded under the ethics guidelines. For semi-structured qualitative interviews, Patton (2002) states participants should give “informed consent”, which includes the purpose of the research, how the information will be used, how the information collected will be handled, confidentiality, and benefits and risks to the participant (p. 407). For the purpose of this thesis, participants were provided with this information in an information letter (see Appendix 5). Confidentiality is a high priority in this research study. Participants were asked to provide a pseudonym to protect their identities. In a further act of protecting confidentiality, consent forms (see Appendix 6), research notes and transcriptions are kept separate from each other. Finally, all notes, recordings and consent forms are kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home.

Confidentiality is a main priority of the researcher and university before, during, and after the research project.

There are three main ethical reasons for choosing to interview social workers as a method of data collection for this research as opposed to interviewing siblings who have been abused and/or neglected. One reason was the ethics of the University of Northern British Columbia. Receiving approval to interview a vulnerable population, like an abused child, would likely involve a lengthy process and this research would be subject to the inquisition of the research ethics board. Social workers, on the other hand, are professionals. One reason for using social workers as research participants was the time considerations in having the University of Northern British Columbia research ethics board approve this project.

A second and third ethical reason was Ministry of Children and Family Development ethics. For confidentiality and sensitivity around using vulnerable clients for research reasons, MCFD has a lengthy approval process when allowing research to be completed based on ministry involvement. As a Child Protection Social Worker myself, I recognize the boundaries and dual roles further complicate matters. Parents' may not be keen on a researcher who is currently a Child Protection Social Worker interviewing their children about parental abuse. The use of social workers as participants allowed data to be collected on child protection experiences, while also allowing for confidentiality, and preservation of vulnerable clients. These professional and personal ethical reasons were all factors in the decision to use social workers as research participants.

Limitations

The limitations of this research project is the next area of discussion in this chapter. The limitations and delimitations of the research are important points to be examined. Limitations include things outside of the researcher's control (Mauch & Park, 2003). Despite the knowledge and insight this research has produced on the subject of similar and differential treatment of siblings who have been abused or neglected, there are limitations to the research and the population to which the results can be transferred. Four northern social workers responded to the recruitment posters and spoke about their experiences in the north working with abused and/or neglected sibling groups.

One limitation of this research is the number of social workers who responded to the advertisement for the study. Due to time and feasibility, the study aimed for three to six participants. Five research participants contacted the researcher after seeing the recruitment poster: however, only four participated. The fifth participant contacted the researcher through e-mail and was forwarded a copy of the consent and information letter. The potential participant stated she agreed to the terms, however she was unable to find a time to meet for the purpose of completing the interview. The potential participant eventually discontinued contact with the researcher. In the end, while several people who saw the recruitment posters approached the researcher expressing interest in the research project, only four social workers pursued arrangements to complete the interview. This small sample size makes the study manageable, but will limit the ability to transfer the results. The number of research participants is one of the limitations and delimitations of this research. While four is an agreeable number for a qualitative research thesis, the transferability is weaker than a research study with a hundred participants. Therefore, the focus of this research is not so much to generalize, but to inform practice in similar

conditions. Regardless of the size of the study, the participants gave insightful descriptions of their experiences of similar and differential treatment of siblings.

Using social workers as participants is a limitation of the research but was chosen based on ethical considerations listed previously. By interviewing only social workers, the experiences of parents and siblings involved in the abusive differential treatment is undiscovered. While social workers have a distinct perspective of abuse due to their specific education, they have biases which affect the way families are viewed and abuse is assessed. Although data was not collected from family members and children, social workers offer an insider perspective in abuse and neglect situations.

Social workers have a unique view of families, but are not without bias. Social work values are based on the strong principles of equality, human rights, self-determination, and empowerment for the vulnerable in society. These values were embedded in my undergraduate social work education and shaped the way my social work colleagues and I were taught to view and work with clients. Because social workers have a unique perspective of family, accessing them as research participants will influence the responses received. In addition, because this research was completed by a social worker, and will likely be read predominantly by other social workers and helping professionals, the use of social workers as research participants is appropriate.

A final limitation is the accuracy of the memory of the social work participants to give examples as answers to the questions. The ability of the social work participants to recall situations where siblings have been treated similarly or differently is a factor to be considered by the researcher.

The limitations of the research is the final piece of the methodology section. It is important for the researcher to describe these aspects to make the reader aware of the parameters of the research study. The limitations of this thesis are the use of social workers as participants, the number of respondents to the recruitment poster, and the accuracy of the memory of the participants.

This chapter on research methodology gives a comprehensive description of how the research has occurred step-by-step. The qualitative approach, specifically transcendental phenomenology was defined to give context to the research study. The sample sought and rationale for why it was used was illustrated. The use of interviews as a data collection method and the benefits and drawbacks for this were discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study were given.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative research uses a variety of ways to examine and understand the phenomena being researched. The first step was to discuss the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomena. Next, the specifics of the process used to analyze the data is discussed. Finally, a section will be provided on the themes that emerged from the data. Each question will be documented highlighting the themes, and a description of the phenomena will be given.

Bracketing

The process of discussing the researcher's own experience of the phenomena is described by some as epoché and by others as bracketing (Creswell, 2007). This process has the goal of putting the researcher's own thoughts and ideas aside so the researcher can be unbiased and look at the data objectively (Patton, 2002). I am a Child Protection Social Worker, and have been practicing for four and a half years. In my work, I have seen families where parents abuse and neglect all of their children similarly and cases where parents abuse and neglect all of their children differently. This sparked personal interest in this topic as I saw the potential for research.

One particular example in which siblings in abusive or neglectful homes seem to be treated differently stands out for me: where in one family the third of four children was blamed for all of the problems and rivalry between the siblings. In my opinion, the reason for this could be because the child was the youngest for a long time (before the fourth child was born) and the child required more attention than the parents could offer. After this particular child was neglected and blamed, his/her development slowed and

his/her behaviour became more challenging, making it easier and easier for the parents to isolate and blame the child for the problems of the family.

I have also had experience, as a Child Protection Social Worker working with siblings in abusive or neglectful families, where siblings seem to be treated similarly. One example that stands out for me is a single mother of three children. The mother had an abusive childhood herself, and seemed not to know how to show affection, appropriately discipline her children, or provide proper supervision. I believe she treated her children similarly because she loved them equally but did not know how to appropriately discipline, supervise and parent any of her children. This experience is not uncommon in many families I have worked with.

In the process of examining and discussing my own experiences I have actively put my personal experiences aside in order to look at the data received by the research participants impartially. As the researcher, I was drawn to the topic of similar and differential parental treatment in abusive or neglectful homes because of my experiences in my current employment. The process of bracketing my own experiences with the research topic was partially completed through the writing of these experiences and partially through the ongoing sketching and webbing of my personal biases and knowledge of the topic. Webbing was an activity of self-reflection, when I noticed that I was starting to compare or relate my experiences to that of the participants I webbed. One example of a web I created was under the heading foster care. Under this heading I webbed the terms: behaviour problem, favouritism by parents and foster parents and sibling abuse. Sibling abuse was given a separate web where rejection and rivalry were two of the terms noted. Siblings and scapegoat are two more of the topics I webbed. One

way I was able to demonstrate my success in bracketing was the fact that some of the findings, particularly the participants theme of keeping siblings together have not been my experience. The ability to capture this theme in the research findings, despite the discrepancy in my own experience, is one example of success in bracketing during this research.

Ongoing webbing on the subject of siblings has been an exercise in bracketing. It has helped me, as the researcher, to focus on keeping my own biases and experiences out of the themes and responses from the participants. I found bracketing to be a process that assisted to keep the data analysis process on track. Bracketing is a process that is not completed just once during a research project, but is an ongoing process that is done throughout (Patton, 2002). The controversy of whether or not a researcher can ever be completely without bias has already been discussed. Now that my personal experiences have been bracketed, a discussion on the findings of the participants can occur in a hopefully more objective manner.

Process of Analysis

The process outlined by Creswell (2007) and inspired by Moustakas starts with bracketing, and then asks the researcher to organize the answers to the questions in “significant statements” (p. 159). Next, the researcher should categorize the statements into broader themes. The themes will be detailed and a description of the phenomena is the end result (Creswell, 2007). This process, when completed fully, captures the essence of replies and organizes the responses into phenomena. Each of the four interviews were put through this process to create the final result: a description of the phenomena, based on the perceptions of the participants.

After the transcriptions were typed and printed, I went through each interview, line by line, underlining significant statements. I wrote these significant statements in a separate chart next to the significant statements of each of the participants. Next, I looked at the significant statements for each participant and pulled out common themes, which I added to the next section of the chart. After this was complete, I wrote a detailed description of the phenomena based on the themes from each participant and added it to the next line of the chart. Finally, the descriptions of the phenomena were compared from each participant. This process was completed for questions three through six. Bracketing, webbing of my experiences, was completed four times during the analysis process: twice before the analysis started, once after pulling out significant statements, and once before writing the description of the phenomena.

After the descriptions of the phenomena was written, participants were contacted by e-mail, and offered a copy of the data analysis section. This measure was taken to ensure the participants had a chance to verify their responses and give feedback on the themes and descriptions. Of the four participants, two responded to the e-mail regarding the data analysis. One participant declined the section, and one participant asked for the section to be forwarded to her by e-mail. The second participant did not contact the researcher again after having been sent the data analysis section.

Saturation point is a consideration in the process of analysis of phenomenological research. Researchers need to decide when the information required for the study has been collected and further interviews would fail to provide more insight into the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007). Saturation point in regards to this research is explored in the next chapter.

Findings: Question Three

Can you tell me of a few situations that stand out for you where siblings, in abusive or neglectful homes, seem to be treated differently?

This was the third of the six questions asked of the four participants. The themes presented by all four participants were very similar. All four participants spoke of one or two examples of a scapegoated child who was singled out and abused differently when compared to his or her siblings. Almost all of the examples given by participants identified that it was a male child who was scapegoated. Out of all the examples, there was only one participant who identified a caregiver who scapegoated a female child.

Three of the four participants spoke of the increased likelihood that the stepparent of the scapegoated child was the aggressor. Not only was the stepparent the aggressor in all but four of the examples, the stepparent who was the aggressor was identified as the stepfather. The other four examples of the aggressors were the biological father (one), the grandparents (one), and the mother (two). Participants gave examples of who the aggressor was, the type of abuse, and the behaviours of the child. The next section will talk about the type of abuse.

Differential parental treatment was described as involving different abuse types. All four participants gave examples of how a scapegoated child was abused in the home by his or her caregivers. Three examples given described emotional abuse and, more specifically, name calling of a child. Three of the examples talked about the scapegoated child being physically abused by the caregivers. One participant, Sarah, gave an example of an extreme case of scapegoating,

``Jim``, when he came home from school had to clean the entire house. And he wasn't allowed to have friends, um, he-his chores list, he had to clean the

bathroom, clean the kitchen, he had to put the-clean up the boot room in the front room, and then, when he had completed his chores he had to go straight to his bedroom for the night. Right. Often he had to eat his dinner in his room. There was times, there were a couple of instances where he was sent to his room and wasn't able to come out of his room to use the bathroom, and he was using the corner of his bedroom to go, to urinate and there was feces there as well.

This child was removed from his mother and stepfather's care when he was discovered with head to toe bruising caused by his stepfather. The type of abuse the child suffered in the participant examples contributed to the determinant of the themes and description of the phenomena. The behaviour of the child is the next discussion when talking about differential parental treatment.

The behaviour of the child who was singled out as a scapegoat was an area of interest for the researcher. Two participants gave examples of the child being affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), one participant spoke of a child being affected by Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and one participant said the scapegoated child had gender issues.

Sarah commented about the boy in her example of physical abuse, "Um, [the child] had somewhat of an interesting accent, but had always been raised in the area."

Two of the participants described the scapegoated child in their examples as being lower functioning. All four participants believed that the child's behaviour, as it differed from that of their siblings, contributed to the way the parents treated the child. One participant, Sarah spoke of how the child's functioning, which was seemingly lower functioning when compared to family standards, seemed to increase once the child was removed from the home environment. Sarah was the only participant who suggested a causal relationship between the way the child was treated and how the child

behaved. The next section gives the reasons why the participants believe the scapegoated child was treated differently by his or her caregivers.

The question as to why a particular child was scapegoated within a family was met with a broader range of responses. Participants perceived a variety of factors contribute to differential treatment and, in a few examples, the participants stated they did not know why a child seemed to be treated differently. In the two examples given where the mother was identified as the aggressor, the participants stated the reason may be related to her own history of abuse and neglect as a child. One participant, Nicole, believed the reason her client treated her son differently from her three other female children may be because she was sexually abused as a child: she may harbour resentment toward men, or she may have an inability to relate to men. In two examples, the participants said the parents scapegoated the child because of the parents' own lack of knowledge about how to deal with the different behaviour caused by diagnoses such as FASD or ADHD.

Ruthy-Lou believed in her example, “the mother is harbouring ill feelings toward the dad and taking it out on the child.” Many of the participants identified the stepfather as the aggressor, and they concluded that the reason for this was because he was not the biological father and therefore had fewer emotional ties to the children. Sarah went so far as to say that maybe the stepfather was insecure about the fact the mother had an older son with another man. Sarah said insightfully,

As the Ministry became more involved with this family, the biological father of this-of “Jim”- became more involved and so there could be some correlation between the escalation of abuse toward him and the, you know, ex, the father, the spouse's ex becoming more involved.

The four participants had several different reasons for why caregivers scapegoat children.

Themes and Descriptions

From the responses given, I derived a description of the phenomena based on three main themes as to why the children in abusive or neglectful homes are scapegoated by their caregivers. The first theme is that caregivers are more likely to scapegoat children if the caregiver themselves was abused or neglected as a child. Ruthy-Lou stated social workers should “see what experiences that those parents that you are working with had as children, and as, you know, in sibling groups.” The literature has shown that parents’ own experiences as children influence their own parenting style and thoughts about siblings (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Dunn & McGuire, 1994).

The second theme identified, suggests in blended families, stepparents are more likely to scapegoat their stepchildren than their own biological children. Sanders (2004) urges helping professionals to assess risk individually for each child in blended families as sometimes there are different risk factors. Most participants agreed on this theme, but had different ideas as to why this was. Literature reviewed showed there is less of an emotional connection between stepparents and stepchildren (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey & Mauthner, 2006).

The third theme related to the individual challenges the child faced and the caregivers’ lack of knowledge as to how to parent these children. Dunn and McGuire (1994) comment on the different factors that affect the way parents treat their children including child personality and development. There are three main themes, which were generally agreed upon by all participants when answering each question, and which lead

to a description of the phenomena of why siblings appear to be treated differently in abusive and neglectful homes.

The phenomena of differential parental treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes, as perceived by northern social workers, could be described as the stepfather physically abusing one of the children. The child may be a male child. The aggressor may emotionally abuse the child, including name-calling. The child may be described as having behavioural issues, or as lower functioning, or may have been diagnosed as having FASD, or ADHD. The mother of the child may have a history of sexual abuse or physical abuse in her childhood. The description of the phenomena is taken from the interviews' transcription.

The third of the six questions asked participants to give examples of children in abusive or neglectful homes that appear to be treated differently, and the reasons why. The four participants had several similarities in their examples, perhaps because of the unique make up of the northern region from which the participants pulled their examples, or perhaps because the experiences of abusive or neglectful differential treatment is similar in many circumstances. The participants agreed that the aggressor in the majority of situations was the stepfather. The participants mostly gave examples of scapegoated children who experienced physical and emotional abuse. The behaviour of the child who was scapegoated seemed to play a role in the abuse. FASD, ADHD, and gender issues were common diagnoses of the scapegoated child.

The reasons why the children were scapegoated was a more broadly answered question. Emerging from the responses were three main themes about why children seem to be treated differently in abusive or neglectful homes. The themes were the backbone of

the description given for the phenomena of differential abusive or neglectful treatment of siblings.

Findings: Question Four

The fourth of the six questions given to participants was:

Can you tell me of a few situations that stand out for you where siblings, in abusive or neglectful homes, seem to be treated similarly?

The respondents gave similar examples and reasons why siblings were treated similarly in these homes. The participants spoke about one caregiver who was abusive or neglectful and who treated their children similarly. The respondents also discussed the type of abuse the siblings endured and reasons why, in the participant's experience, the siblings were treated similarly. This section will discuss the themes, and give a description of the phenomena of similar sibling treatment in abusive or neglectful homes.

In the majority of the examples given by the participants, the mother was identified as the abusive or neglectful parent. In the other two examples, one participant used an example with both parents, and one participant did not give a specific example for this question. The examples of the mother as the abuser or neglecter were interesting, particularly when compared to those where the stepparent (stepfather) was described as the main aggressor in situations where children are treated differently in abusive or neglectful homes. Although this is not the focus of the research, I cannot help but reflect on why the participants answered this way. Perhaps the gender roles of male as physical abuser and female as passive aggressive neglecter are embedded in social work practice or societal norms. Perhaps the majority of situations in the north reflect the makeup that mothers who abuse and neglect their children do so similarly for all siblings, whereas

stepparents (stepfathers) who abuse or neglect their children do so differently for each child.

The majority of examples given by the participants showed the mother as the abuser/neglecter who treated her children similarly. This is in sharp contrast to the previous question where the aggressor in the abusive and neglectful home was the stepparent (stepfather).

The participants spoke of the type of abuse in abusive or neglectful homes where siblings are treated similarly. All of the examples given by three of the four participants stated the children who are treated similarly were neglected. The fourth participant did not give a specific example. The participants spoke of different types of neglect: hygiene issues, unsanitary home, educational neglect, and lack of involvement.

Liz stated, “the concerns I see toward both the siblings would be chronic issues with lice, um, a chronic issue with cleanliness or keeping clean, or being able to toilet train properly.” Some of the examples spoke of the mother having FASD, and some spoke of the children having ADHD. The participants, for the most part, gave examples of neglect in the form of hygiene issues in the children, unsanitary home, and lack of parental involvement in education and other aspects of life.

The respondents were all asked why they believe the siblings in these situations were treated similarly. The participants spoke about some of the mothers being lower functioning, suffering from FASD, and having other mental health concerns. The participants gave four examples of mothers who have substance misuse issues (two abused prescription medication, one abused cocaine, and one abused alcohol), which may

lead to the neglect of their children. Some of the mothers were described as lower functioning.

Nicole explained, “this mother was sexually abused and she was a kid in care at different points in her life: basically a young mother and really had no guidance.”

Ruthy-Lou gave an example of siblings who were neglected by a mother and father who went to residential school and were disconnected from their families.

The reasons why the participants thought the parents in these situations abused and neglected their children similarly was because of substance misuse, residential school, separation from their own families, and inability to parent due to mental health or medical condition.

Themes and Descriptions

The themes, which lead to the description of the phenomena, were similar and interconnected. The first was the background of the abusing/neglectful parent. The participants described the childhood of these parents as abusive, neglectful, and dysfunctional. One of the mothers herself was in care, two of the parents attended residential school, and two of the mothers were sexually abused as children. Many of the parents were disconnected from their families.

The second description is the parent’s mental health. Many of the examples explained the parent had anxiety, or bipolar disorder, or was lower functioning. The mental illness was given as a reason why the parents neglected the children. The fact that three of the four participants used neglect as an example when talking about similar sibling treatment is significant. Participants were able to give descriptions of their experience of similar sibling treatment in neglectful homes.

How children are treated similarly in abusive and neglectful homes in an interesting question. The majority of the participants seemed to give closely related answers to the questions. The aggressor in the majority of these situations was the mother, and the type of abuse in most of the examples given was neglect. The reasons identified or provided that indicated why siblings were treated similarly was related to the parent's own family background, the parent's mental health, substance misuse, and capacity. The themes identified helped give a description of the phenomena. The descriptions had the parents coming from abusive families, and having personal challenges surrounding mental health and addiction issues.

The description of the phenomena of similar parental treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes, as perceived by northern social workers, is less straightforward than differential parental treatment. The mother is the parent who may treat her children similarly. The similar treatment among her children, the sibling group, may be neglect. Neglect is described, by the participants, as including unsanitary housing, lack of hygiene in children, lice in children, and little or no educational involvement. The mother may have addiction issues, such as prescription medication, or alcohol. The mother may have mental health concerns such as adult onset ADHD, or FASD, or bipolar disorder, or be lower functioning. The mother may be disconnected from her family because of historical abuse, or residential school. This is the description of the phenomena of similar parental treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes based on the responses of the participants.

Findings: Question Five

The fifth question asked participants:

If you were going to teach emerging social workers about working with siblings who have been abused what would you tell them?

This question assisted with understanding what these social work participants believe other social workers should know about abused or neglected siblings. All four participants gave comparable thoughts on what they would teach emerging social workers. There are five main themes to describe the phenomena. The five main themes will be described next.

The first theme identified by the participants as being important to teach emerging social workers is that the experiences of parents when they were children is important in determining how the parent will treat their own children. This is consistent with the tool used by Ministry of Children and Family Development called the comprehensive risk assessment. This tool measures the risk to children based on several factors, one of which is abuse and neglect of the parent when they were a child.

Ruthy-Lou stated social workers should “look at the relationship that the parent has with their parent and their sibling to, sort of, determine what they are going to be doing with their own children.”

The literature supports this factor as explained by other researchers (Bank & Kahn, 1997; Dunn & McGuire, 1994; Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey & Mauthner, 2006). There are five key influences of a child’s development, according to Dunn and McGuire (1994), the parent’s childhood background, the parent’s marital relationship, education, location, and parent’s beliefs toward school and discipline. A parent’s relationship with their own parents and siblings influence the way the person will behave toward their own children. This influence extends to the parents preconceived notions about what sibling

relationships look like and what role siblings should have in relation to each other and the family (Edwards, Hadfield, Lucey & Mauthner, 2006). An important theme given by participants is that emerging social workers should pay attention to the family relationships of the parent when they were a child.

A second description of the phenomena is keeping aboriginal children connected to their family, community and culture.

Ruthy-Lou emphasized the importance of aboriginal children and aboriginal culture and said it is essential to, “keep[ing] aboriginal children with a family member that, you know, meets the safety matrix criteria.”

The literature has long since supported the supposition that services for aboriginal peoples need to be provided by aboriginal communities, and children need to remain connected to their culture (Turner, 2005). Keeping children connected with culture and, when possible, keeping children within their community, is the second theme provided by participants.

The third theme identified was to look at family functioning and family roles when determining the best way to work with a particular family. Role theory, as discussed earlier, is the pinnacle of much of the literature on siblings and family dynamics. This theme is also consistent with the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s comprehensive risk assessment’s measure of the risk factor: family interaction and identity. Liz stated,

I would tell them to always look for the bigger picture-it is about the bigger picture-so um, when you are working with siblings in a family situation that have been in an abusive cycle or pattern in this family, you are looking at the family functioning, the family structure, the family system, and within that family system role each child and parent has in that.

The fact that many of the participants spoke about looking beyond the presenting problem to the roles and functioning of each family member may show the need for more emphasis during education and training of social workers in this area. Looking at family roles and family functioning is the third theme presented by participants.

A fourth theme identified was to teach emerging social workers to give children a sense of mastery and accomplishment.

Nicole spoke about building children's confidence and showing them they are special by facilitating an opportunity to learn a skill and gain accomplishment they can be proud of. Nicole says this can go a long way in keeping children grounded. Encouraging the mastery of skills and in turn a sense of accomplishment in all children, particularly children in care is a fourth theme brought up by participants.

The final theme identified was about the difference in families. As Sarah pointed out, all families are different in make-up, structure, and roles and there is no "one blanket treatment" for working with children and families. This is a simple, but important theme. To look at each family on a case by case basis could help the worker avoid a one size fits all approach to intervention. This theme is consistent with the solution-focused therapy approach. Solution-focused therapy encourages neutrality and objectivity in the assessment, and joining and contracting stages of therapy (Berg, 1994). This theme speaks about the importance of acknowledging differences in each family, and tailoring the intervention to suit the needs of the family.

Themes and Descriptions

Five main themes were given by the participants after being asked what they would like to teach emerging social workers about working with siblings who have been

abused and neglected. Importance of looking at the parent's experience as a child, keeping aboriginal children connected to culture and community, examining family roles and family functioning, giving children in care a sense of accomplishment, and acknowledging the differences in each family are the five themes.

These themes represent what the interviewed social workers think needs to be emphasized to all emerging social workers. It speaks about their individual practice and social work values. Many of these themes are consistent with the Ministry of Children and Family Development's current tool which measures risk to children. The themes lead to the description of the phenomena in this section.

The phenomena described here is what seasoned social workers would teach emerging social workers about working with siblings who have been abused or neglected. It is helpful to get to know the family dynamics and roles of each member when working with a family. It is also beneficial to understand each family is different and needs to be treated as such. Keeping children, particularly Aboriginal children, connected with their families, communities, and culture can be of utmost priority. Children in care do well when they have a sense of accomplishment, so encouraging the mastering of a skill is beneficial. These are the descriptions of the phenomena of what seasoned workers would teach emerging social workers about working with siblings who have been abused or neglected.

Findings: Question Six

The sixth and final question asked participants if they had anything else they would like to share about what research topic. Only one participant wanted to share further. Liz wanted to emphasize the importance of understanding the family dynamics

when working with a family, and if children need to be removed stating, “siblings should always be placed together, first and foremost”.

Family dynamics has been an important theme, which was repeated throughout the interviews. The sixth and final question did not encourage a theme or description, but reiterated an important point.

To conclude, this chapter described the emerging themes and descriptions. The themes given by the participants for many of the questions were quite similar to each other. Overall, common themes throughout the interviews surrounding the importance of looking at the parent’s family history, and the unique nature of family dynamics and relationship were insightful and may be useful for helping professionals working with families where abuse and neglect occur.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

This chapter will discuss the implications of the research for social workers as well as the implications on the literature on the topic of siblings and abuse and neglect. This chapter is separated into sections. The ability to transfer the results to social workers and to the literature will be discussed. Areas of further research will look at the places where research still needs to be completed, and areas for further questioning that this research has encouraged. Solution-focused therapy is a possible treatment for siblings who have been abused and neglected. This chapter explains why, how, and for whom the research and results are important.

The purpose of phenomenological research is to gain the meaning and essence of a phenomena (Patton, 2002). The phenomena studied in this thesis are the different and similar treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes. This research seeks to provide clarification and a description of the phenomena, as perceived by northern social workers, as outlined in the previous chapter. Also shown in the previous chapter, the data collected and themes analyzed have confirmed what the literature has already shown us in previous research. Much qualitative, phenomenological research ends with the description of the phenomena and does not go on to suggest causation relationship. Likewise, this thesis has given the description of the phenomena but was not designed to explain causation.

Evaluative Criteria

The participants were all social workers working in northern communities in British Columbia. The participants gave examples of families they are working with or

have worked with in these same northern communities. Because of the location of the sample and location of the families in the examples, helping professionals in northern British Columbia may choose to examine these results to see if they fit their own case examples. This study is reliable, which is discussed further in Guba and Lincoln's (1982) criteria for transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability. The majority of participants had similar experiences and used similar scenarios when answering the questions: for example, stepfathers as the aggressors of physical abuse in situations where siblings are treated differently in abusive or neglectful homes. Or another example, mothers stated as neglecting their children in abusive or neglectful homes where siblings are treated similarly. These examples appear to be a common experience of the northern social workers who participated in this research study.

These results may be important for social workers working with families where similar situations occur. The results may be relevant to social workers who work with families assessing risk and those who work with families where siblings are treated similarly or differently by their parents. The reason these results are specific in who they apply to is because of the small size of the sample. According to Patton, smaller sample sizes means more details from the participants, but offers a lessened ability to generalize the results, this is known as the "breadth versus depth" debate (2002, p. 227). Social workers working with families assessing risk could benefit from the research, as they may find similar situations where parents are treating their children differently or similarly. Siblings are an important part of life, family, and child development; any profession working with families may benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

How the results are beneficial and relevant for helping professionals is in one way measured through what Guba and Lincoln (1982) call transferability. Transferability is, “demonstrated by showing that the data have been collected from a sample that is in some way (randomized, stratified, etc.) representative of the population to which generalization is sought.” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, pp. 246-247). Transferability is strongest when there is an in-depth description of the phenomena being studied, and the sample used was chosen to maximize data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). While this research has a small sample size, the consistency of the descriptions given makes it reasonable to assume that the results may be beneficial for other helping professionals who are facing similar situations.

Transferability is one of four criteria for trustworthiness. Trustworthiness, coined by Guba and Lincoln (1982) is a way of examining, and analyzing a research study and its results. The three criteria are credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, pp. 246-247). Credibility is speaking to whether or not the readers of the research find the results to be believable. Credibility can be tested in a few different ways. For this research, peer debriefing, and triangulation were used. Peer debriefing was used in two ways, one of which was after the participants had completed their interview, they were given the opportunity to read over the transcription of their interview to ensure the answers and concepts were accurate. The transcriptions and recorded interviews have also been made available to my thesis supervisor for accuracy and verification purposes. The next test used was triangulation. Triangulation was used by taking the results and checking them against the existing literature on the topic of siblings. Throughout the results section, how the results of this study measured to the existing data was compared.

The next criterion is dependability. Dependability speaks to the ability of the study to be repeated in a different location and at a different time, and find similar results (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). One measure for this is a dependability audit. The dependability audit asks an independent person to view the process of the research and ensure the research followed the appropriate steps of the methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The research methodology for this thesis was outlined in Chapter 4, and is subject to the criticism of my committee.

Confirmability is another criterion. Confirmability is the capability of the research results to be verified against the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Confirmability can be measured by triangulation and a confirmability audit; both were used in this research. Triangulation, as addressed above, was completed when the results for this study were compared to the results from similar studies. The findings from this research were similar in theme to the results of other studies, as demonstrated in the Chapter 4. A confirmability audit was available for my thesis supervisor by allowing her the opportunity to read the transcripts and listen to the recordings to verify that the results analysis followed the appropriate procedure, and was completed accurately.

Another test of validity is saturation point. The saturation point is reached once the data collection fails to provide any new insight into the phenomena being researched (Creswell, 2007). The saturation point was reached in this study. The saturation point is measured through the participant interviews and the fact that the research participants provided similar answers to the questions, and repeated similar themes throughout. Because of the similar responses made by the participants, it is reasonable to assume that

further interviewing would have found more of the same results. Saturation point is a measure of validity and was successfully reached in this study.

The contribution of this research to the literature may be beneficial for northern social workers. This research contributes to what we already know about siblings and gives a distinct view of how parents treat siblings differently and similarly in abusive and neglectful homes as perceived by social workers. This thesis offers a social work perspective of siblings and families framed in a qualitative research study. The participants gave information about how abusive and neglectful parents treat their children differently and similarly and why the participants believe this occurs. Identifying reasons for scapegoating children could help social workers early on identify situations where the circumstances are right for abuse and/or neglect. The knowledge generated from this study may give social workers the tools to recognize differential sibling treatment and may give possible ways of how to work with the family when it is occurring. Social workers could use this knowledge to make observations when working with parents and families. Social work clinicians could use the knowledge gained for treatment purposes in family, or sibling therapies. Social workers and other helping professionals could benefit from more knowledge on siblings and families.

Phenomenological analysis and its logistics are important in understanding the data of the research. The participants were all social workers, who assess risk to families in northern British Columbian communities, which means the results may be relevant to social workers who assess risk to families who reside in northern, British Columbia. The contribution this research may make to the literature is beneficial for social workers and professionals working with families where abuse and/or neglect occur. The ability to

transfer the results makes this research relevant to helping professionals who work with families assessing risk.

The second section will discuss areas for further research. The research has brought up many questions and piqued my curiosity further about siblings who are abused and neglected by their parents. The differential and similar treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes and how it differs based on different factors is one area for further research. A second area is how northern examples of the phenomena compare with urban examples of the phenomena. Finally, an area where more research is needed is from the perspective of siblings and from the perspective of parents.

Areas for Further Research

The first area for further research is how the phenomena occurs based on different factors. This research looked at different and similar treatment of siblings in abusive and/or neglectful homes. It would be beneficial to research how culture, socioeconomic status, and other factors affect the similar or different treatment of siblings. Factors like culture, education, and socioeconomic status affect the lives we live and have an impact on parenting. Each factor, separated from other variables in the research, could greatly increase the insight academia has on the scapegoating of children based on culture, education, and socioeconomic status. Knowing how these factors affect parenting and abuse and neglect could impact or enhance the way child protection services are conducted.

A second area of further research is the phenomena in northern communities versus urban cities. How does the phenomena and other factors change based on the location of the families? Does location make a difference in how siblings in abusive or

neglectful homes are treated? The literature reviewed on siblings and abuse/neglect for the purposes of this research did not touch on differences between northern and urban centers. Because of the disparity between northern and urban life, it would be beneficial to learn more about how these differences relate to siblings and abuse/neglect. The phenomena as it relates to location and how it is relevant for social workers outside northern British Columbia is an area for further study.

A third area for additional research is the phenomena of different and similar sibling treatment in abusive or neglectful homes from the perspective of the siblings. Social workers were chosen as the participants for this research as they have a unique, perspective on individuals and families, and work on the front lines assessing risk. Children who have been abused and neglected by their parents may have a different view of the circumstance and why it occurred than social workers that view the situation from the outside. The literature that was reviewed contained some research completed from the viewpoint of the children in the abusive/neglectful situation, but none of these studies were Canadian. The lack of Canadian research on siblings who have been abused or neglected needs to be further explored.

One idea for a research project would have researchers interview each of the family members in situations where children are abused or neglected and compare the differences in experience of each family members. This study could offer insight into the family dynamics in abusive or neglectful homes. An area for additional research is different and similar treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes from the viewpoint of Canadian siblings. This thesis offers insight into the family dynamics in

abusive or neglectful homes. A wide range of studies in this area could benefit social workers and helping professionals.

This research has opened the door to many new and different questions about siblings and abuse and neglect. How culture, socioeconomic status, and education affect parental abuse and neglect and how northern experiences of the phenomena may vary from an urban phenomena experience are all areas for further research. The phenomena from the viewpoint of siblings could greatly benefit the literature on different and similar treatment by parents in abusive or neglectful homes as there are still many unanswered questions on this topic.

Treatment Option: Solution-Focused Therapy

The next section of this chapter will discuss a possible treatment option for siblings who have been abused or neglected. Siblings raised together in homes where one sibling may have been scapegoated can affect both children through childhood and into adulthood. One possible treatment method, as discussed in the literature when working with siblings in a counseling setting or with a family in the home, is solution-focused therapy. To begin, a definition of solution-focused therapy is required. Next, an explanation of solution-focused therapy, and its three step processes as it relates to siblings will occur. In conclusion, solution-focused therapy is one possible treatment approach for both clinical and Child Protection Social Workers alike when working with childhood abuse survivors of abuse and when working with families where abuse and neglect are occurring.

Solution-focused therapy was chosen to be examined as a potential treatment option for siblings based on a few different factors. One factor was the nature of child

protection social work. While Child Protection Social Workers do not work with siblings on their own in a clinical setting, they may work with parents who abuse their children, and/or scapegoat one of their children. As a Child Protection Social Worker, it has been my experience that the focus is on dealing with the client's symptoms that affect their parenting, such as alcoholism, or domestic abuse in a short amount of time, without spending years with the client discussing and analyzing the root causes of behaviours. When it is assessed the parent will benefit from longer term, in-depth therapy, the social worker will often refer to another agency. In this regard, solution-focused therapy may be used by Child Protection Social Workers as a way of finding solutions to problems that affect parenting.

A second factor in choosing solution-focused therapy as a potential treatment option for siblings came from the research participants. When asked about what she would like to teach emerging social workers, Liz encouraged social workers to look at the bigger picture, and therefore,

when you are working with a sibling in a family situation that has been in an abusive cycle or pattern in this family, you are looking at the family functioning, the family structure, the family system and within that family system the role each child and parent has in that.

When answering the same question, Nicole spoke about fostering positive relationships between the siblings and keeping them engaged with his or her family. These comments reminded me of solution-focused therapy as both Child Protection Social Workers and clinicians attempt to understand the family dynamics and family roles as a way of assessing the situation. Solution-focused therapy also works with the client's own strengths to deal with the goals of therapy, which may be to foster a more positive relationship with ones sibling, or to resolve a family dispute. Solution-focused therapy is

one avenue for helping professionals to consider when engaging in service with clients because it is compatible with the realities of different types of social work practice. Also, the research participants encourage social workers to use tools, which are often used during solution-focused therapy.

The definition of solution-focused therapy is the first section. Often, the goal of social work intervention is to address issues of functioning for clients based on theory (Turner, 2005). Solution-focused therapy is one such theoretical intervention. The premise of solution-focused therapy is clients should focus on problem solving and solution-focused exercises during intervention as opposed to focusing on the issue (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). This fits with the realities of some social work practice being short term and geared toward increasing functioning in the family. The clinician centers the attention on the strengths of the family and uses examples of family cohesion as learning instruments (Berg, 1994). This approach can be used with individuals or families and in cases of abuse toward children (Berg, 1994).

The prevalence of child abuse and neglect needs to be examined in this discussion of solution-focused therapy. As discussed earlier, child abuse and neglect is a persistent problem in Canada, and elsewhere. Children are particularly vulnerable to abuse by their caregivers, as they are dependent upon them for basic needs. There are agencies that specialize in assessing, and protecting children from abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect is an issue that will benefit from more research funding, assessment, and intervention.

Families are unique in dynamics and structure and therefore require individual treatment plans. Solution based family therapy is a strength based approach and looks at

each family member as playing a role in changing dynamics. As with all treatment types, solution-focused family therapy has limitations. Each family system is different, and needs family specific goals and exercises.

The premise of solution-focused therapy is to focus on the solutions, not the problems. To figure out what is working and repeat those actions is the premise (Berg, 1994). Building on activities, which elicit the desired response, is part of the intervention (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). Solution-focused therapy surmises that it is easier to promote positive activities the client is already doing than to teach all new skills (Berg, 1994). This approach is based on construct theory, which states that people construct their lives and the solution to problems is refocusing the attention from the negative to the positive (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). This approach is embedded in social work values.

Social work intervention should always be based on fundamental social work values. Clients need to feel their social worker has continual compassionate curiosity (S. Transken, personal communication, January 13, 2009). When clients feel respected, heard, and supported, the clinician can move the client to a place where the client can look at alternative approaches to their problems. Social work intervention should focus on self-determination and empowerment (Turner, 2002). Empowerment can be education, consciousness raising, and confronting. Clinicians and Child Protection Social Workers should not do for clients what they can do for themselves: this empowers people (Turner, 2002). In the client/social worker relationship, strengths of the client should be a focus and this is one reason that not all therapy is compatible with social work values. Problem solving theory, a contributing founder of solution-focused therapy, is one of the five basic

theories that social workers from the generalist practice may be familiar with. The other four are: developmentally based, cognitively based, crisis-oriented, and systems theory (Turner, 2002). The helping relationship is a delicate one, based on trust, respect, and compassion.

Speaking specifically for social work clinicians, clinical sessions for just siblings can be a powerful turning point in family healing. Solution-focused therapy is a fit with the discussion of sibling therapy in the literature (Freeman, 1993). Theories used in therapy in the sibling relationship, in the past and present, are bridging, mediation, problem solving, structural, and role theories (Freeman, 1993). Genograms that include labelling and roles in the family, social network analysis, and an ecomap are activities used in sibling therapy. There are several techniques and activities social workers can use with their clients under the solution-focused therapy approach. Theory in sibling treatment has evolved over time and seems to focus on changing the relationship by challenging roles and problem solving the issues. Corresponding, Child Protection Social Workers can also use many of these techniques when working with families. While these techniques will not be examined in depth with the family or in the same manner as in a clinical setting, I have personally found genograms to be a useful tool when working with issues of abuse and neglect in families in my role as a Child Protection Social Worker.

Each approach has limitations that need to be considered. One limitation of solution-focused therapy is that it discounts the notion that family conflict is more complex than just problem behaviours. Systems theory speaks of family roles that are entrenched, and can be changed as easily as one changes their own behaviours (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). Berg argues that solution-focused therapy starts with changes in

behaviour, which in turn affect the relationship and role of each member (1994). It is also stated solution-focused therapy is only good when working with relationships or families where there are one or two issues; it is not a good fit for families who have several complex problems. Berg counters that the therapist should have the family identify what problem is the most urgent, and focus on that first (1994). Bombarding the client with multiple services to address all of the issues at once will overwhelm and confuse the situation. Another critique is child abuse and incest may be difficult to treat with solution-focused therapy. Berg (1994) writes, in all families there are times when things are bad and when things are going better. Figuring out the “triggers” and the exceptions when times are going well is where the therapist should start. There are limitations to all therapeutic approaches that need consideration.

A general understanding of solution-focused therapy is necessary when looking at the benefits of this intervention with siblings and families. Social workers should always check the therapy premise against the social work profession’s values to ensure the highest standards are kept. The study of siblings and treatment is a relatively new topic in academia. The literature on intervention seems to focus on roles in the family, labelling, and problem solving. Limitations in solution-focused therapy are something to be mindful of when examining this approach.

Intervention in solution-focused therapy for siblings is the same as with all clients. Working toward completing the goals, using positive reinforcement, and using unsuccessful attempts as a learning opportunity are activities used in solution-focused therapy. During therapy, siblings may be given homework in between sessions, for example, one sibling giving a different reaction than usual in times of conflict. This

homework will help the therapist evaluate the progress and tailor the sessions to meet the goals of the clients.

In conclusion, this chapter discusses how the research results of this study may have implications for social workers who work with families where siblings are abused and neglected similarly and differently. Transferability and relevance of the research results were discussed. Solution-focused therapy was examined as one possible intervention type for social workers who are clinicians or Child Protection Social Workers. While the research sample was small, pieces of the framework may be transferred to the broader population.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the similarities and differences of parental treatment of siblings in abusive and neglectful homes, as experienced by northern social workers. In this thesis social workers were interviewed as a way of gathering their perceptions and insight into this phenomena. The data was analyzed, themes realized, and descriptions of the phenomena given. The relevance of the data for social workers and toward the literature was discussed. The research looked at differential treatment of siblings in abusive or neglectful homes; insight into these phenomenons was gained through the interviews of northern social workers.

During this thesis, the literature on previous research completed on the topic of siblings and abuse were examined. The research methodology chapter looked at the logistics of the research method chosen and the benefits of this study. The data analysis chapter discussed the themes and descriptions of the phenomena. During the implications section, the transferability of the results for social workers and whom the data may benefit was discussed. This final chapter gives concluding thoughts and final reflections from this research.

This thesis has studied the differences and similarities in treatment of children who were abused and neglected by their parents. The research found consistent themes throughout the participants' responses; the researcher put these responses into themes and descriptions of the phenomena, which may not only enhance the literature, but could help shape practice of social workers working with families where children are being abused and neglected.

Final Thoughts

The topic of siblings is of interest and relevance to me in both my social work practice and my personal life. Since exploring this topic in greater depth for this thesis research, I have begun to observe more closely the ever changing dynamics between siblings in families where abuse and neglect occur, and siblings who are in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Family dynamics are ever so important in assessing family functioning, and finding effective ways to work with families to promote positive change. The research completed in this study has changed my social work practice and has encouraged me to look deeper into family roles and relationships.

This research has influenced my practice with families and caused me to look closer at the family dynamics of each situation. Examining sibling relationships in abusive or neglectful homes during this research project has helped me to be a better advocate for siblings who come into the care of the Ministry. Recognizing signs of abusive sibling relationships and scapegoating allows me to provide this information to other helping professionals, such as counselors, and foster parents for monitoring and healing purposes. The ability to point out, to a parent, how a partner's actions may be affecting the behaviours of the children, or one child, is another potential outcome of this research. Since completing this research, I look more closely when children with mental health diagnoses are labeled as having behavior problems as there may be abuse or neglect reasons for this. One final change in my social work practice occurs when interviewing children for the purposes of investigating child protection concerns. During these interviews, I have begun to ask children about the experiences of their siblings as

well as themselves when asking about physical and emotional abuse and neglect. These minor changes in my personal practice, I believe, have made me a better social worker.

From a feminist perspective, the research participants have given insight into how women and men may abuse and neglect children differently, and how male and female children may be abused and neglected differently. The participants explain how in abusive situations, in their northern social work experience, the step father is often the physical abuser of the scapegoated male child. Alternatively, the participants explain in homes where the children are abused or neglected similarly, it is often the mother who neglects her children. Although this is not the focus of the research, I cannot help but reflect on why the participants answered this way. Perhaps the gender roles of male as physical abuser and female as passive aggressive neglecter are embedded in social work practice. Perhaps situations in the north reflect the make-up that mothers who abuse and neglect their children do so similarly for all siblings, whereas stepparents (stepfathers) who abuse or neglect their step-children do so differently for each child. It is interesting that the majority of the participants would give similar types of examples involving male and female roles for parents and children. These findings have possible implications for intervention, and may speak to traditional societal gender roles within families.

The participants also spoke astutely about what they believe emerging social workers need to be taught. These lessons may be important for all social workers, senior and emerging. Looking at the family system, roles, and functioning in each situation when making assessments; examining parental experiences of abuse and neglect when they were children; exploring cultural roots and utilizing resources from aboriginal communities; promoting strong family relationships when children are in care;

encouraging a sense of accomplishment in children; and developing personalized intervention for each family are all findings of this research.

There are still many areas where further research is needed. While there is a lot of interesting information on the topic of the sibling bond, and sibling contribution to personality development, it is clear that the literature on different aspects of siblings could benefit from further research. While this research sheds light on northern British Columbian social work practice in abusive and neglectful families, related areas would benefit from additional research. How siblings in abuse and neglect situations are affected by culture, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and geography are all areas for exploration.

In terms of reducing the risk of parental scapegoating and harmful differential treatment of siblings, social workers can make a difference. Social workers use skills that are encouraged by social work values, like self determination, and looking at every person as unique. Helping professionals often recognize the signs of abuse and neglect and tailor their intervention to meet the unique family situation. Helping professionals acknowledge the strengths of a family and may use these strengths to help the family. When helping professionals recognize the different family roles and can help the family identify them as well, for the purpose of positive change, the helping professional may make a difference.

Another step in understanding parental scapegoating and child abuse and neglect is the education of social workers. Educating social workers further in the area of siblings could go a long way in the understanding of, not only child development but family dynamics. It has been demonstrated how important siblings are to child development and

family functioning, therefore in the education of social workers it may be beneficial to focus on the topic of siblings and family dynamics. The participants also made insightful recommendations for what they believed emerging social workers should be taught about child abuse and neglect. A greater understanding of family functioning, and the importance of looking at the parent's childhood for indicators of how they will treat their children are two of the themes which emerged from the participants.

Another area which may be beneficial in understanding parental scapegoating and child abuse and neglect is creating an assessment tool, or redesigning the current one, to include a more in-depth assessment of family functioning and family roles. This tool could be able to more accurately capture the sibling relationship and measure, if any, the risk it may pose on each sibling and family member. As discussed in the literature earlier, siblings often learn abuse actions and behaviours from watching their parents' actions and relationship (Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007). Sibling abuse may be the mimicking of the home environment. If this is the case, removing the children from their abusive parents will only stop one aspect of the problem; the abused sibling may be re-victimized by their sibling in the new home as well. Social workers may choose to analyze relationship through tools used in solution-focused therapy, like ecomaps and genograms. These tools will open the door to dialogue about different family members and the person's relationship to each member (Nichols & Schwartz, 2005). This could also be a good tool to help point out to the family member the negative relationships which are formed and how they can help to change the pattern. Having a tool to measure the relationships between the siblings and each family member may help identify sibling

abuse and help the social worker to stop sibling abuse from continuing on in the family home, or foster parent's home.

This research could be an important step in a greater understanding of the sibling relationship. Family dynamics is useful in many areas of social work where assessment is required. Child Protection Social Workers particularly may benefit from a greater understanding of the sibling relationship in abusive and neglectful homes. Social work education and training can play an important role in teaching social workers about sibling and family dynamics and child development. Social workers could demonstrate an understanding of parental scapegoating and child abuse and neglect by acknowledging unique family situations and recognizing the signs. A tool which could be used to measure family functioning and family roles, in-depth, may go a long way in understanding child abuse and neglect. Children in northern British Columbia are abused and neglected by their parents in similar and different ways. Four northern social workers gave their perceptions and insight into how and why this occurs. Acknowledgement, recognition, and education were common themes throughout this study about siblings who have been abused and/or neglected similarly and differently.

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Appendix 1: RECRUITMENT POSTER

Attention:

Master of Social Work Student is looking for candidates to participate in a voluntary research study on social work experiences of parental abuse of siblings.

Successful candidates must have:

- a) A minimum four-year degree in social work
- b) Have spent two years working in a position assessing risk to children and families.

Interested persons or for more information contact Cathy by:

Phone: (250) 301-1189
Or by e-mail: ehlers@unbc.ca

Appendix 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Have you completed a minimum four-year degree in social work?
2. Have you worked for a minimum of two years in a position assessing risk to children and families?
3. Can you tell me a few situations that stand out for you where siblings, in abusive or neglectful homes, seem to be treated differently? As you tell me the stories, can you please protect the confidentiality and identities of the children and families. Why do you think the siblings were treated differently?
4. Can you tell me a few situations that stand out for you where siblings, in abusive or neglectful homes, seem to be treated similarly? Why do you think that is?
5. If you were going to teach emerging social workers about working with siblings who have been abused what would you tell them?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what we discussed today?

Appendix 3: ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

1. Researchers Name & Signature	Cathy Ehlers		
2. Complete Address	#104-106 McDermid Drive, Prince George, BC, V2M 4T6		
3. Phone No.	(250)614-9125	Email	Cathy.ehlers@gov.bc.ca

4. Supervisor's Name & Signature (if Researcher is a student)

Name & Position (Print)	Si Transken, Associate Professor
Signature	

5. Program

Social Work, graduate studies

6. Title of Project

How are siblings, raised in abusive and/or neglectful homes, treated differently or similarly: An exploration by Northern Social Workers.

7. Type of Project

- ☐ Class Project (Class projects are normally reviewed by professors after a protocol has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board).
- ☒ Thesis
- ☐ Faculty Research

8. Source of Funding (if any)

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9. Is this project a replication of an earlier project or protocol that received ethics approval?

☐ **Yes** (Attach copy of the Certificate or letter and submit to the REB. Please clarify (on a separate sheet) if there are any changes being made to the previously approved proposal or if the proposals are identical).

☒ **No** (Go to Question 10)

10. Purpose of Research

To examine, based on the opinion of Northern Social Workers, how parents treat their children similarly or differently in abusive or neglectful homes. The data will be obtained using a qualitative, semi-structured interview. It is hypothesized that the participants will give insight into the relationship between parents and siblings who were raised in abusive environments. It is estimated that the participants will provide similar themes based on their professional practice. Implications for social work will be derived from the responses from participants.

11. Project Dates:

Expected Start Date	May 1, 2009
Expected Completion Date	November 5, 2009

12. Does this project require any physically invasive procedures (e.g. blood tests), potentially harmful physical regimes (e.g. special dieting) or potentially harmful psychological or social experiments (e.g. illusory perception tests)?

☐ **Yes**

☒ **No**

13. Summary of Methods: In the text box below give us a brief summary. Sufficient information must be given to assess the degree of risk to participants.

1. Participation in this research thesis is voluntary. The participants will be recruited through posters placed at several locations frequented by social workers. The poster will ask interested social workers (who meet the criteria) to contact the researcher by phone or e-mail (see appendix A). Three to six participants will be chosen based on interest in the study and ability to meet the criteria. A time will be arranged with each participant separately for an interview.

2. Participants will be given the information sheet (appendix B), and have the opportunity to sign the consent form (appendix C) if they agree to the process. The interview will be audiotaped if the participants have consented, as per the consent form; to ensure confidentiality, participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym name before the audiotape starts recording. To promote confidentiality further, the researcher will transcribe the audiotapes. The participants will be asked six questions (in order one to six) by the researcher (see appendix D). The questions are designed to elicit a conversation about the participant's experiences as social workers working with abusive and neglectful parents who have two or more children. At the completion of the interview, participants will be offered a second meeting to look over their transcribed interview and ensure accuracy.
3. All participant information will be anonymous with no identifying information included in the discussion, or on audiotapes or transcripts. Signed consent forms will be stored separately from transcribed interviews.
4. All interview notes, recordings, and transcriptions will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. The notes, recordings, and transcriptions will be destroyed no longer than two years after the completion of data collection. Access to the research will be limited to the researcher, and the research committee.
5. The transcribed data will be analyzed and themes extracted according to the qualitative phenomenological approach. The themes will be discussed in the data analysis and findings chapter of the researcher's thesis. The chapter on implications for social workers will be influenced by the themes extracted from the participant interviews.

14. Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols or questionnaires.

Attachments:

- ☒ Research Project Proposal
☐ Interview Protocols
☐ Questionnaires

15. How will participants be recruited? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

Participants will be recruited based on criterion sampling. A poster asking for interested candidates who have: a minimum four year degree in social work, and have worked with children and families assessing risk for a minimum of two years can apply to be in a research study by contacting me by phone or e-mail. See appendix A.

16. Will participants be competent to give consent?

☒ Yes (Go to Question 17)

☐ No (e.g. Children and cognitively impaired people.) How will the issue of consent be addressed? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

17. Will participants be compensated?

☐ Yes How?

☒ No (Go to Question 18)
 In the text box below give us a brief summary.

18. Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded?

☒ **Yes** Please attach a copy of the Consent Form or the questions/statements to be recorded. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form at the time of signing.

☐ **No** Please attach information which will be provided to participants and/or participant communities.

Note: Checklist of items to be addressed in your Information Sheet or Consent Form is provided at the end of this Approval Form.

19. Does the project involve any deception?

☐ **Yes** Justify the use of deception and indicate how disclosure finally will be addressed.

☒ **No** (Go to Question 20)

20. What is your plan for feedback to participants? How do you propose to distribute results to participants?

Upon request of the participants, the researcher agrees to meet with participants to discuss the final results.

21. Will the research participants be from an institutional population; e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

☐ **Yes** (Go to Question 22)

☒ **No** (Go to Question 23)

22. If the answer to Question 21 is yes, attach a letter of consent for access from the institution: e.g. company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons etc.

☐ Letter(s) of Consent attached

23. Will the research participants be participating as representatives of, or on behalf of, an Aboriginal group?

☐ Yes Attach letter of consent from appropriate authority, e.g. Band Council, etc.

☒ No Go to Question 24)

24. Does this project require any other ethical approval, e.g. Northern Health Authority (Attach Schedule D), other Hospital, First Nations Band, etc.? If so, please ensure that all guidelines are followed.

☐ Yes Please specify the agency ___and attach letter of consent/ethical approval from the appropriate authority.

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☐ Letter(s) of Consent attached

☒ No

Appendix 4: APPROVED ETHICS LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

MEMORANDUM

To: Cathy Ehlers
CC: Si Transken

From: Henry Harder, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: June 8, 2009

Re: **E2009.0513.083**
How are siblings, raised in abusive and/or neglected homes, treated differently or similarly: An exploration by Northern Social Workers

Thank you for submitting the above-noted research renewal proposal and requested amendments to the Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Henry Harder

Appendix 5: INFORMATION LETTER

This research project is interested in northern Social Workers' experience of how parents in abusive and/or neglectful homes treat their children similarly or differently. Before you make your final decision as a participant, I would like to explain a few aspects of this collaborative research.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain knowledge about differential treatment, abuse, neglect and siblings from the point of view of northern social workers. As the researcher, I will be asking questions intended to elicit conversation about your practice experiences of siblings who were abused or neglected as children. What I hope to gain during this research is insight into the above stated phenomena. This knowledge will be used to develop recommendations for social work practice.

I hope that you will participate by being a part of this interview. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped to verify content. A secondary meeting can be arranged to examine the transcribed interview to ensure accuracy.

How respondents were chosen

You were chosen on the basis of eligibility criteria. The first criterion is that you have a minimum four-year degree in social work. The second criterion is that you have worked in a position assessing risk to children and families for a minimum of two years.

What respondents will be asked to do

Your responsibilities in this research project are to take part in a conversation of approximately 60 minutes with myself. The research will take place between May 2009 and August 2009. All conversations will be audio taped. You will have the opportunity to review the transcription of your interview and to provide corrections or further interpretation as desired.

Who will have access to respondents' responses

All records will be kept in a locked cabinet at Cathy Ehlers' home. The information will be kept until the final report of the research project is complete. Audiotapes and accompanying notes will be destroyed after two years. After the final report is completed, original documents related to your conversations will be shredded. Throughout the research project, Cathy Ehlers and UNBC will ensure that your identity is not revealed directly or indirectly. The information that you provide may be reflected in the final research report, however anonymity will be maintained.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary and you may choose not to participate. If you chose to participate, you have the right to end your participation at any time during the conversation. You may choose not to answer any question. If you decide to withdraw your participation, the information you provided will not be used. Fictitious names will be used, and your name and identifying characteristics kept strictly confidential.

Potential risks and benefits

The UNBC board of ethics will assess this research project. I believe this project presents no risks to respondents. This research project will allow participants to discuss and provide insight into the experiences of siblings who were abused and/or neglected as children.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity will be kept private. Your name, position, employer, and identifying characteristics will not be used in the research project. You will receive a copy of your signed consent form. Throughout the research process, Cathy Ehlers and UNBC will ensure your identity and/or identifying characteristics are not revealed directly or indirectly.

How information will be stored

Audiotapes and documents relating to our conversation will be kept in a locked cabinet at Cathy Ehlers' home. The information will be kept until the research project is complete. Audiotapes will be kept for no longer than two years before being destroyed. After the completion of the final research project, all original documents will be shredded.

Contact Person and research results

If questions arise at any time during the process, you can contact the researcher by e-mail at ehlers@unbc.ca, or by phone (250) 301-1189. Upon your request, a meeting can be arranged to discuss the final results of the study.

Complaints

Complaints about this research project may be given to the Office of Research through e-mail at reb@unbc.ca or by phone (250) 960-5650.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Cathy Ehlers, BSW, MSW Candidate

Appendix 6: CONSENT FORM

Differences and/or similarities of experience between siblings who were abused or neglected as children: an exploration by Northern Social Workers

I understand that Cathy Ehlers, who is a graduate student in the Masters of Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, is conducting a research project pertaining to siblings experience of abuse or neglect as children.

I understand the purpose of this research project is to increase knowledge and insight into the experience of siblings who were abused or neglected as children.

I understand that I was chosen as a participant for this research study because I have a minimum four-year degree in social work, and I have worked a minimum of two years with children and families assessing risk.

I understand I will be asked six questions that will be used to elicit a conversation on the proposed research topic.

1. My consent is given based on the understanding Cathy Ehlers and UNBC will make their best efforts to maintain confidentiality and anonymity directly and indirectly.
2. I have read and received a copy of the information sheet.
3. I am aware of the potential risks and benefits to this research project.
4. Confidentiality has been explained to me and I give my consent freely. I understand I may terminate my participation at any time.
5. I understand and agree that the information given during the conversations will be audio taped. The audio tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed after two years. The data will only be used for this research project. The data will be returned to me or shredded at the end of the research project.
6. I hereby waive any claim against Cathy Ehlers, Dr. Si Transken, the University of Northern British Columbia, its employees, administration, and board of Governors with respect to the use of said information, provided it is used in accordance to this agreement.
7. I understand that if I have any concerns, I can contact the researcher Cathy Ehlers, or the Vice President of Research at UNBC at (250) 960-5820.
8. I understand a copy of this agreement will be obtained and received by all parties who participate in the research project.

Name (Printed)

Signature

Date

Researcher name (Printed)

Signature

Date