

You have been chosen to review my documents to participate in my research project. As you know this is a highly specialised field and I need your input as expert.

**JHB group will be conducted
Fridays 10 & 17 July 2020
10h00-11h00.**

Please consider to be a participant so that YOUR voice as social worker in private practice could be noted.

**Best Regards.
Sarie Nell**





APPENDIX U

From: **Sarie Nell** info@sarienell.co.za
Subject: Sarie Nell Focus group Jhb 2
Date: 25 June 2020 at 17:42
To: sarie Nell sarienell@icloud.com



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When: Jul 17, 2020 10:00 AM Johannesburg

Register in advance for this meeting:
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Meeting Registration

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Topic SARIE NELL FOCUS GROUP JHB 2

Description Utilising the Best Interests of Child Standard in care and contact investigations.

Time Jul 17, 2020 10:00 AM in Johannesburg



First Name*

S

Last Name

Nel

Email Address*

sarienell@icloud.com

Confirm Email Address*

sarienell@icloud.com

Gender*

Age*

Racial group - (only for statistical purpose)*

Home Language*

Years of experience in private practice*

Years of experience in care and contact disputes*

Johannesburg / Pretoria / Other (Town)*

Area/s of operation*



APPENDIX W



Meeting Registration Approved

Topic SARIE NELL FOCUS GROUP JHB 2

Description Utilising the Best Interests of Child Standard in care and contact investigations.

Time Jul 17, 2020 10:00 AM in Johannesburg

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APPENDIX X

Self-reflexivity Report

Background

I am a white Afrikaans speaking, 51 year-old female who has been a social worker in private practice since 2009. My study title “*EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE IN CARE AND CONTACT DISPUTES USING THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD STANDARD*” was subconsciously created when I started with my private practice in 2009. I have previous experience at welfare organisations relating to statutory social work, and always loved the adrenaline the cases to save children gave me when working with court related matters. I learned a lot from these first interactions with the children’s court, and even in those days (late 1990s), I was involved in a High court matters conducting care and contact matters in collaboration with the Offices of the Family Advocate. I undoubtedly knew I had a passion for processes involving court related matters.

However, in private practice you are not protected, as you are when working at a government organisation. You have to learn on the job, whilst working on a case, and in hindsight, there is no other way, but it remains very dangerous. I had no one to turn to for supervision, as other colleagues in this field are highly protective of their own turf. I started up-skilling myself by attending courses which I believed would benefit my skills, and over the next 5 years I managed to up-skill myself to a level which was recognised within the family law community.

Moreover, in 2017 I completed a course through Unisa – Fundamental Aspects of Children’s Rights. I then realised that I can easily study on my own and at my chosen pace, and this motivated me to approach the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in

order to apply for a Master's degree in Social Work Research. My main aim was to conduct a study within the care and contact arena. Fortunately I was accepted by the UWC's Child and Family studies unit. Other than for my own enrichment, I wanted to conduct this research to help future students and peers in opening doors for exploring this highly specialised and essential field of study. Even though our role is clearly defined in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, I believe that the role of the social worker in court related matters is a vanishing profession.

Preparation for the research project

The recruitment process was conducted whilst we were in Level 4 of national lockdown related to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This was an extremely stressful exercise as our ethical clearance was changed from face-to-face to using online platforms. Moreover, I fully utilised this time to further educate myself, as I attended international and local training related to online consultations, as well as best practice in using various electronic communication / online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. When I started the online research, I was already conducting online sessions with my clients by means of Google Meet or Zoom.

It was challenging to recruit participants during a pandemic where people are scared to go out of their residence, to explore new challenging technologies, and to find hope and meaning for the future which overnight became totally unpredictable. Because I am well known within in my field of expertise within the Pretoria area, the participants responded after marketing and contacting them via WhatsApp, as well as telephonic invitations. I knew one participant from Johannesburg, who assisted me with names of other social workers in private practice, and eventually I managed to recruit the group.

Moreover, I struggled to recruit participants from different ethnic backgrounds. At times, I started questioning my own abilities as a researcher. Many times I recalled how difficult it was to set up my own private practice, and if I did not have financial backup from my husband, I would never have been in this fortunate position to be in private practice. This was one hypothesis I could think of as to why I could not find participants. The other factor is that dealing with high conflict family law matters is a specialised field, and without training and mentorship you will not professionally or emotionally last in this field due to the conflictual environment with the client and the legal systems. Other reasons which came to mind was that there is no official training, no mentorship, and also no support. So, am I part of the 'white supremacy'? I never saw myself in this way; and maybe my real typical Afrikaans name might portray this; but this is not me.

I suffered extreme guilt feelings in dealing with these thoughts. Feelings of shame and guilt were all over me, coupled with the utmost disgrace which emphasised the injustice done to people of other ethnic backgrounds. My ancestors did this and my parents who blindly believed what was taught to them by the Apartheid state and the church. I know they are the culprits for the price every white South African is paying today. We are carrying the burden of our ancestors. Fortunately, in this difficult time, I managed to obtain one African participant and she was so excited to be included in the study as she just wanted to learn from all the other participants which came from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

My preparation for the sessions involved self-awareness and critical self-reflection. I struggled to guard against personal biases concerning aspects to which I might agree with them if I were a participant. The emotional experiences I felt after each session

became very difficult to manage, as well as remaining objective, even though I could relate to the participants. I had to be mindful of predispositions of the participants, as most of them agreed on certain statements and were very aware of what my reactions regarding the answers to questions, and to what extent I could potentially affect the research process and conclusions.

I strongly believe that this process of awareness and self-reflection added to the integrity of the research. Before each session I would go through the semi-structured questions and aimed to be mindful of my role as the researcher whilst conducting a focus group or an interview. Before each session I would go through my ethics in order to be mindful of my neutrality and objectivity, and to remember that this is not about me but about my participants, their thoughts, their feelings, and their experiences. I always endeavoured to remain objective, although it was difficult not to partake in the participants' descriptions and opinions regarding their experiences in the research study, as I could relate to their emotions, frustrations and out cries for interventions to make their roles within the family law environment more productive. Therefore, being aware of all these challenges prior to the sessions assisted me as the researcher to remain unbiased.

I reflected and articulated personal biases related to aspects which I wanted to know from the participants, as well as my overall emotional experience after each session, as well as prejudices related to comments and experiences expressed by the participants in journaling throughout the research process. Moreover, applying mindfulness to triggered memories and feelings which arose during the focus group sessions and interviews.

During the sessions

I was extremely aware of my comments and my participation during the sessions. The participants were so eager to talk about the discussion points and elaborated on each question. I had to control the time, as during most of the sessions, the allocated time was not enough.

One of the topics which was not foreseen, is the challenges the social workers in private practice have with the SACSSP in being reported to the council for unethical behaviour and the subsequent emotional upheaval it causes. This was difficult to handle as I could identify with the participants, and I was emotionally triggered by the conversation. I just let them express their feelings and experiences, and they gave possible resolutions to these issues. This topic raised feelings within me that this is a common issue with all social workers specialising in this field, and I really did not feel alone when I knew that they also struggled with these battles. When you are in private practice you are isolated, and therefore the suggestions of peer group supervisions were welcomed by all participants.

During the data analysis process and final drafting of dissertation

During the analysis process, as well as the summary of the findings of the study, I was confronted with challenges related to selection of data. This was counter to the inclusion of data across all four group sessions, as well as the four individual sessions. Themes also emerged from the use of the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis computerised program, which displayed patterns to validate the objectivity in the data.

This was one of the most positive personal journeys I have ever embarked upon in my entire life. When I completed my Social Work degree in 1990, I just wanted a degree and be a social worker. This time it is different, as I want to contribute to the journey and success of my peers, and to be a voice for them within this field. I want to be an advocate for social workers going into the future. Moreover, I want to ensure that the social work profession remains a focal point within the Children's Act, and to uplift our service to the community.

Sussarah Maria Elizabeth Nell

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APPENDIX Y

Section 7

Best interests of child standard

7(1) Whenever a provision of this Act requires the best interests of the child standard to be applied, the following factors must be taken into consideration where relevant, namely

–

- (a) The nature of the personal relationship between –
 - (i) the child and the parents, or any specific parent; and
 - (ii) the child and any other care-giver or person relevant in those 30 circumstances;
- (b) the attitude of the parents, or any specific parent, towards –
 - (i) the child; and
 - (ii) the exercise of parental responsibilities and rights in respects of the child;
- (c) the capacity of the parents, or any specific parent, or of any other care-givers or person to provide to the needs of the child, including emotional and intellectual needs;
- (d) the likely effect on the child of any change in the child's circumstances, including the likely effect on the child of any separation from –
 - (i) both or either of the parents; or
 - (ii) any brother or sister or other child, or any other care-giver or person, with whom the child has been living;
- (e) the practical difficulty and expense of a child having contact with the parents, or any specific parent, and whether that difficulty or expense will substantially affect the child's right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with the parents, or any specific parent, on a regular basis;
- (f) the need for the child –
 - (i) to remain in the care of his or her parent, family and extended family; any
 - (ii) to maintain a connection with his or her family, extended family, culture or tradition;
- (g) the child's –
 - (i) age, maturity and stage of development;
 - (ii) gender;
 - (iii) background; and
 - (iv) any other relevant characteristics of the child;
- (h) the child's physical and emotional security and his or her intellectual, emotional, social and cultural development;
- (i) any disability that a child may have;
- (j) any chronic illness form which a child may suffer;

- (k) the need for a child to be brought up within a stable family environment and, when this is not possible, in an environment resembling as closely as possible a caring family environment;
 - (l) the need to protect the child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by –
 - (i) subjecting the child to maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exploitation or degrading or exposing the child to violence or exploitation or other harmful behaviour; or
 - (ii) exposing the child to maltreatment, abuse, degradation, ill-treatment, violence or harmful behaviour towards another person;
 - (m) any family violence involving the child or a family member of the child; and
 - (n) which action or decision would avoid or minimise further legal or administrative proceedings in relation to the child.
- (2) In this section “parent” includes any person who has parental responsibilities and rights in respect of a child.

(The Children’s Act no 38 of 2005, Government Gazette June 2006 : 32-34)



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APPENDIX Z

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10 January 2021

To whom it may concern

I am an experienced English language editor, accredited by the Professional Editors' Guild, South Africa.

I hereby confirm that I have completed a language edit of the thesis written by **Sussarah Maria Elizabeth Nell** titled: **EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE IN CARE AND CONTACT DISPUTES USING THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD STANDARD.**

The work was edited to achieve

- clarity of expression and style;
- accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation;
- consistency in all aspects of language and presentation.

The author was requested to attend to suggestions for improvement of the text, and is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the final document. References were not included in the language edit.

Yours sincerely

R Coetzee

Ruth Coetzee (Mrs)

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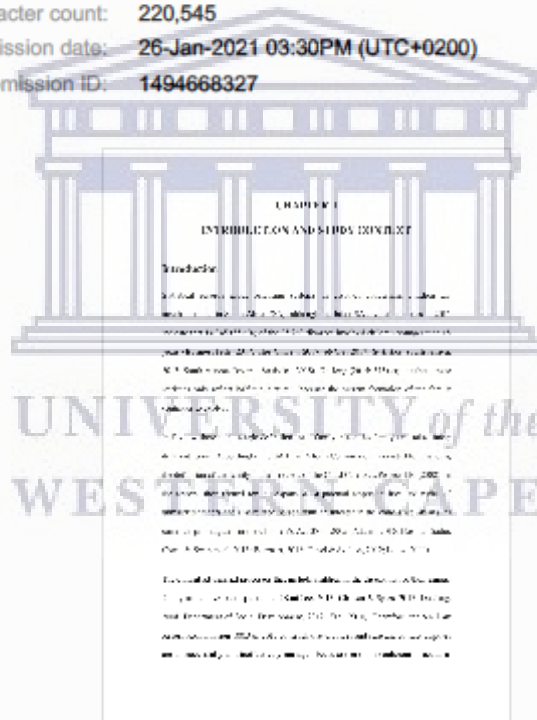
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APPENDIX AB

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Introduction

Statistical records about parenting systems in disputes concerning children are unsubstantiated in South Africa (SA), although the latest SA divorce statistics in 2015 indicate that 14 045 (55.6%) of the 25 260 divorces involved children younger than 18 years (BusinessTech, 2017; The Citizen, 2017; eNCA, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2017; South African Divorce Statistics, 2018). De Jong (2015: 515) argues that "these

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