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## Secondary school teachers and the emotional abuse of children: a study of three secondary schools in Gaborone, Botswana

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### ABSTRACT

*Teachers and other human service professionals have crucial roles to play in the provision of social programmes to support and protect children from violence and abuse. The objective of this study, therefore, was to find out the extent of the knowledge and understanding of emotional abuse held by teachers; their ability to identify children showing symptoms of such abuse, their personal feelings about, and experience with, emotional abuse and their awareness of support and other available services in the community. Thirty five teachers from three government community junior secondary schools participated. Overall, it was found that most teachers knew of emotional abuse and its aspects. However, about a third of them had no knowledge of emotional abuse or how to identify signs of abuse in children. It was also found that teachers do not consider their jobs entail providing support for abused children. From the data, it is evident that teacher training and in-service programmes must equip teachers with the skills to enable them contribute effectively to the prevention and management of emotional abuse of children.*

### Introduction

IN AFRICA CHILD abuse is a serious problem although some societies do not want to acknowledge this. Child abuse and neglect are triggered by

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a combination of forces at all levels of society, including that of the individual, the family and the community. Such complex causes require a multi-professional response that is sensitive to cultural diversity and other special needs. Thus the prevention and treatment of child abuse have become a shared responsibility between governments and services involved in the welfare of children, families and communities. The ratification by nation states of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has also brought the issues of child abuse and exploitation to the top of national agendas in many countries.

Teaching and childcare are a very important part of the human services professions and must play central roles in the prevention and management of child abuse. This is so because no other professional has such extensive contacts with child abuse victims on a day-to-day basis (Whitney 1996). Generally, the knowledge teachers have of their pupils and their families have been accumulated over many years and no other professionals are exposed, on a regular basis, to the warning signals given by both children and their parents. Teachers are therefore in a unique position to identify and help children who are being abused because most child abuse victims in the five to 16-year age groups attend school. Furthermore, the role of schools is not limited to academic achievement alone. It involves the development and well-being of the whole child. Staff in educational institutions are able to observe children and note changes in their appearance, their self-esteem, concentration, socialization, behaviour and progress. They are also in a position to seek specialist help for troubled children who exhibit developmental problems, emotionally disturbed behaviour or learning difficulties. Teachers are thus important in the identification, reporting and management of child abuse cases. They also play an important part in the support of child abuse victims.

This paper focuses on how teachers view emotional abuse. More specifically, it examines some teachers' knowledge and understanding of emotional abuse and the extent of their skills in identifying such cases among their students; their personal feelings about, and experience of, emotional abuse in their own lives and their awareness of the

existence of support and other services for emotionally abused children.

Emotional abuse is a subject that is not given much emphasis among all the topics comprising child abuse. Whereas physical and sexual abuse, neglect, child labour and maltreatment are easily identified and hence given primary focus, emotional abuse is not. Many of the signs and symptoms of emotional abuse are common to other forms of abuse. Briggs and Hawkins (1997) believe that emotional abuse by individual members of society often goes unchallenged. It leaves no visible scars, it is difficult to prove and has long-lasting consequences. They note that it is not only parents, unfortunately, who are responsible for emotional maltreatment and starving children of their emotional needs. Although child maltreatment and neglect are usually conceptualized and dealt with as if they occur only outside the school, studies have shown that teachers, for example, commonly maltreat children emotionally along with other punitive practices to "discipline" children for unwanted behaviour or to control them in school. Briggs and Hawkins (1997) observe that although teachers may be concerned for children, they tend to tolerate emotional abuse. Despite the fact that teachers play the role of responsible parents for the children in their care, they distance themselves from children's problems and maintain a narrow academic perspective, thus allowing victims to return home day after day to be further abused. For example, a study by Childline<sup>1</sup> (1998) in Botswana indicates that teachers report only about 7% of abuse cases that take place in schools. This is a very low figure. Reportage may be increased by making more teachers aware of emotional abuse and its consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> A non governmental organization established in 1990 to provide services to children in need of care and their families and to adults with a personal history of child abuse, and an educational outreach programme concerning child welfare to the society at large.

### **Definitional and conceptual issues**

EMOTIONAL ABUSE includes situations when a parent, a care-giver or other adult verbally assaults a child by using harsh words when communicating with the child, or withholding warmth and affection. It may be manifested by indifference, not showing an interest in what a child wants to say, or not listening to or teasing a child. Behaviour that constitutes emotional abuse includes rejection of the child, whereby a care-giver or other influential adult refuses to acknowledge a child's worth and needs. It also includes punishing positive, normal social behaviour, for example, punishing a child for exploring the environment, talking, laughing, seeking affection and being sociable (Briggs and Hawkins 1997).

Emotional abuse is also associated with discouraging children's self-esteem, particularly by constant scapegoating, putting down and belittling the child; using sarcasm or telling children that they are stupid, worthless, clumsy, ugly, unloved and unlovable; depriving children of opportunities to develop as individuals and punishing them for expressing opinions and ignoring their likes, needs and feelings. Putting unnecessary pressure on a gifted and talented child is also a form of emotional abuse (Briggs and Hawkins 1997, Mayhall and Norgard 1983).

It is important that teachers are aware of the problem of child abuse because of their links with schoolchildren. If they are skeptical of its existence, then the chances are that child abuse will go unacknowledged much of the time. Observations by Jones (1987) in the USA indicate an increase in the number of referrals of school-age children as a result of the prevalence of child abuse. This increase is attributed to the broadening of the definition of child abuse beyond the narrow concept of the battered child and not to any particular increase in awareness or incidence. The conclusion is, however, that teachers have inadequate knowledge about child abuse and how to respond to it.

Mayhall and Norgard (1983) express the importance of alerting ourselves as teachers to whether or not emotional abuse or neglect has occurred or is occurring, especially, when the following behaviour is observed: a child shows signs of withdrawal, depression, or apathy and misbehaves; and is considered by teachers and other adults to be

a behaviour problem in the classroom or in other situations where children need to follow rules and standards of behaviour. A child may show a disproportionate desire to conform to the instructions of the teacher or about his or her behaviour, which might indicate that he or she lives with constant criticism at home; or might exhibit signs of emotional turmoil such as repetitive rhythmic movements, lack of verbal or physical communication or an inordinate attention to detail; an inability to perform age-appropriate functions and antisocial behaviour or obviously delinquent behaviour (Mayhall and Norgard 1987:158). None of these are proof that emotional abuse has occurred but are possible indicators of abuse for teachers to watch out for.

Jones (1987) further stresses the need for teachers to remain alert to the possibility of child abuse and to know what to do if suspicion is aroused. Spackman (1991) adds that a teacher who is *in loco parentis* (in the place of the parent) may be the only source of help, protection or advice for a child undergoing a crisis. There are certain limits to the competence of the teacher. However, Roberts and Lynch (1982) observe that the school is one place where we can reach children from abusive families and make sure that they get the help they need. They found that teachers, for the most part, made assessments of the family based on ad hoc criteria which influenced their decision on whether to refer the child or not.

It seems that teachers are faced with the ethical dilemma of whether their loyalties lie with the child or the parents. This is especially the case where there is some doubt over the prevalence of abuse and a fear of losing the confidence of parents, together with a reluctance to interfere in family privacy (Whitney 1996). Some of the reasons are based on teachers' attitudes and beliefs. For example, it is believed that parents are solely responsible for their children and therefore have the right to punish them as they wish. There is also inadequate training and uncertainty about the signs and symptoms or the definition of abuse and a narrow perception of the role of the teacher together with resistance to any attempt to widen that role. This is not surprising, considering that teachers are so badly rewarded for an almost impossibly demanding job. Another problem relates to the internal structure of schools, with

the head-teachers or senior teachers normally taking responsibility for liaison with outside agencies whilst often being ill-informed about the subtle details of a child's behaviour and problems (Briggs and Hawkins 1997, Jones 1987).

### **Methodological issues**

THE STUDY WAS mainly descriptive. The main goal, in this respect, was to become familiar with the basic facts and concerns about teachers and emotional abuse of schoolchildren. (Barbie 1998, Fraenkel 1993). A sample survey was used and three community junior secondary schools were chosen out of a total number of 13 community junior secondary schools in Gaborone. A total of 35 teachers from these schools, was selected, out of a total population of 512 community junior secondary school teachers in Gaborone. Government schools were selected because most students attend them, and the majority of teachers work in government schools.

The respondents were drawn from Bonnington, Maoka and Marang Community Junior Secondary Schools in Gaborone. Data were collected from the respondents using a questionnaire. This questionnaire gave the respondents the opportunity to answer anonymously to ensure confidentiality. The sample was small compared with the number of teachers in the whole country and the study was in an urban area. Thus this may not be representative of the views held by all teachers as these might differ from rural to urban areas and even from school to school. This, however, does not diminish the importance of the study.

The main problem encountered was the presence of five different research groups in the same schools, including ours, also focusing on teachers. Thus, to ensure that teachers were not overburdened with different studies within the same short period of time, it was agreed with head of schools that the teachers be shared among the different studies. This meant that teachers who were available for one study would not be used in the other studies. As a result, this reduced the number of teachers and the size of the sample. The advantage of this, however, was that teachers could concentrate on the one study they were involved in.

### Background of respondents

AN OVERWHELMING majority of the respondents, 28 (80%), were female, whilst only seven (20%) were male. This corresponds with statistics for teacher training colleges' enrolment between 1996 and 1998, which show a range from 72.5% to 86.3% for females (Central Statistics Office, Statistical Bulletin 1998:16). The data (Table I) show that a large number of teachers, numbering 12 altogether (34%), are aged between 25 and 29 years. This is followed by eight (23%), in the 30–34 year-old age group, then seven (20%) in the 40 and above age group; six (17%) in the 20–24 age group and, finally, one (3%) respondent each in the groups aged 35–39 and below 20 years respectively. The data also show that the majority of respondents, 30 (86%), are Batswana, while five (14%) are non-Batswana, but mainly Africans, with one (3%) of non-Batswana origin being a non-African. Teachers' perceptions could be influenced by socio-cultural factors and it is possible that Batswana and non-Batswana, or even Batswana of different ethnic backgrounds may have significantly different perceptions of and experience with, child abuse.

Twenty-four (69%) of the respondents were married, ten (29%) were single and one (3%) was widowed. The majority of teachers were married. In most African cultures marriage is considered a sign of maturity and married couples are expected to have children. However, this does not mean that single people do not have children or that childless couples are not important in society with respect to child welfare. The data (Table I) show that many teachers, 15 (43%) in community junior secondary schools had a diploma-level qualification. Thirteen (37%) teachers had a degree and there were three (9%) with only secondary school education. Four (11%) teachers who were degree holders also had, in addition, a postgraduate diploma in education.

From the data (Table I) we see that many of the teachers, 12 or (34%), have taught for less than a year; four (11%) have taught for between 1–4 years; and ten (29%) have been teaching for 5–9 years. Three have been teaching for 10–14 years (9%); two (6%) have been teaching for 15–19 years; and four (11%) have taught for over 20 years. The factor of length of teaching is significant because the number of years that a teacher has spent in the classroom can explain the perception of emo-



**Table 1: Characteristics of respondents**

| <b>Sex</b>                      | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Male                            | 7                | 20                    |
| Female                          | 28               | 80                    |
| <b>Age</b>                      |                  |                       |
| Below 20                        | 1                | 3                     |
| 20-24                           | 6                | 17                    |
| 25-29                           | 12               | 34                    |
| 30-34                           | 8                | 23                    |
| 35-39                           | 1                | 3                     |
| 40+                             | 7                | 20                    |
| <b>Nationality</b>              |                  |                       |
| Motswana                        | 30               | 86                    |
| Other                           | 5                | 14                    |
| <b>Marital status</b>           |                  |                       |
| Married                         | 24               | 69                    |
| Widowed                         | 1                | 3                     |
| Single                          | 10               | 29                    |
| Divorced                        | -                | -                     |
| Cohabiting                      | -                | -                     |
| Separated                       | -                | -                     |
| <b>Level of education</b>       |                  |                       |
| Secondary                       | 3                | 9                     |
| Diploma                         | 15               | 43                    |
| Degree                          | 13               | 37                    |
| Masters                         | -                | -                     |
| Other                           | 4                | 11                    |
| <b>Number of years teaching</b> |                  |                       |
| Less than one                   | 12               | 34                    |
| 1-4                             | 4                | 11                    |
| 5-9                             | 10               | 29                    |
| 10-14                           | 3                | 9                     |
| 15-19                           | 2                | 6                     |
| 20+                             | 4                | 11                    |
| <b>Religion</b>                 |                  |                       |
| Christianity                    | 32               | 91                    |
| None                            | 3                | 9                     |
| Other                           | 0                | 0                     |
| <b>Children</b>                 |                  |                       |
| Yes                             | 27               | 77                    |
| No                              | 8                | 23                    |

tional abuse she has and, to some extent, the nature of experience and knowledge she has accumulated over the years, both formally and informally. However, in this study there was no attempt to correlate length of teaching with perceptions of abuse.

Thirty-two (91%) of the respondents were Christians, while three (9%) had no organized religion. Twenty-seven (77%) respondents had children of their own and eight (23%) did not. Most of the children of these teachers (16 or 59%), were aged below ten years; while 11 (41%) were adults aged 21 years and above.

From the data (Table II) it is evident that 19 (54%) were able to define child abuse comprehensively; eight (23%) gave definitions that are almost correct; that is, they showed that they had some idea of what it means, whilst another eight (23%) could not define the term "child abuse" at all. Some examples of teachers' definitions are: ill-treating children, forcing children to do what is not right, depriving children of their rights, anything that contributes negatively to the development of the child, cruel treatment of a child and not being fair to a child. Most teachers were able to list the different kinds of child abuse, which include emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and child labour. Twenty six (74%) were clear about this, five (14%) seemed to have some knowledge, and four (11%) had no idea at all about the different types of child abuse.

From the data (Table II) it seems that a majority, 26 (74%) of the sample of teachers knew what the different types of child abuse are and 19 (54%) could clearly define the term in their own words. Eight (23%) had some idea but could not define the concepts clearly nor list the types of abuse and eight (23%), could not define or did not understand the concept clearly enough to define it and list types of abuse correctly. Most respondents, 22 (63%), could define emotional abuse in their own words, nine (26%) showed that they had some idea what it means, whilst four (11%) could not define the term at all. Some of the correct definitions from the respondents were: making children feel negative about themselves; saying things that make a child feel unimportant, worthless or embarrassed; not giving children the chance to express

**Table II: Knowledge and understanding of emotional abuse**

| <b>Respondent can:</b>                             | <b>% who know</b> | <b>% with some idea</b> | <b>% with no idea</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Define child abuse                                 | 19(54%)           | 8(23%)                  | 8(23%)                |
| List types of child abuse                          | 26(74%)           | 5(14%)                  | 4(11%)                |
| Definite emotional abuse                           | 22(63%)           | 9(26%)                  | 4(11%)                |
| List situations in which emotional abuse can occur | 18(51%)           | 10(29%)                 | 7(20%)                |
| Give symptoms of emotional abuse                   | 24(69%)           | 6(17%)                  | 5(14%)                |
| Identify emotionally abused children               | 25(71%)           | 3(9%)                   | 7(20%)                |
| List effects of emotional abuse on children        | 26(74%)           | 9(26%)                  | -                     |

themselves; not caring for a child's emotions and denying a child love and care.

Eighteen (51%) of the respondents were able to identify situations and circumstances in which emotional abuse can occur, ten (29%) seemed to have some idea, and seven (20%) had no idea. The situations identified include: where a child fails to do as is expected, such as in cases of physical disability in a child; where a child is disobedient; when a parent dies; when the frustration of the adult is taken out on a child; and in a family where alcohol is abused. Among the respondents 25 (71%) felt that they could identify emotionally abused children, whilst ten (29%) noted that they could not identify them. Twenty-four (69%) were able to give examples of some of the symptoms or signs of emotional abuse, whilst five (14%) could not. The remaining six (17%) had an idea, but were not sure or clear about the symptoms. Examples of the symptoms given by teachers include: low self-esteem, insecurity, withdrawal, easily frightened when talked to in a loud voice, aggressiveness and stubbornness.

Based on the data (Table II) it is evident that 25 (71%) of the teachers could identify children showing symptoms of emotional abuse, based on their own assumptions and understanding of the concept. About

three (9%) showed that they might be able to identify such children but were not clear of many of the symptoms or signs and seven (20%) could not identify symptoms of emotional abuse in a child. The majority of teachers, 26 (74%), agreed that emotional abuse has effects on children. The teachers mentioned that abused children might grow up with a very negative attitude about themselves and blame themselves for things that are not their fault; and that such children might become rebellious and behave badly both at home and school. All these might negatively affect their school work and prospects in life. However nine (26%) could not explain in any detail the effects of emotional abuse on children.

Only five (14%) of the teachers admitted that they had had some kind of training in child abuse. Twenty-nine (83%) had no training in child abuse and most attributed their knowledge of child abuse to the experience they gained as teachers. Those who had training mentioned courses by UNICEF and workshops and courses attended while in training college. The courses covered topics such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, child maltreatment and child labour.

### **Personal feelings**

THE FEELINGS THAT people have on an issue affect their responses or reactions towards anything that involves that particular issue. Therefore the personal feelings of teachers are crucial to the way they manage emotional abuse. Twenty-five (71%) of the teachers considered emotional abuse to be as serious as sexual abuse. This is because both forms of abuse affect the child adversely and can damage the adult of tomorrow. Sixteen (64%) of those who considered emotional abuse to be as serious as sexual abuse felt that, even though they are both serious, sexual abuse was more damaging because it harms the body physically, for example, in a situation where tissues are torn and HIV and STDs are transmitted. The others felt that emotional abuse is more harmful as it is not easily detected and can go on longer than physical harm. Five (14%) of the respondents did not know which was more serious, while another five (14%) believed that emotional abuse was not as serious as sexual abuse because, in this context, there was nothing worse than coercive sex such as rape and defilement where there was

no mutual agreement or enjoyment, but instead the use of force and domination. Such an encounter might make a child very uncomfortable in adult sexual relations and might lead to sexual malfunction. Thus they saw the negative effects of sexual abuse as more intense than emotional abuse.

All the respondents agreed that emotional abuse is not just something that happens only in the West, but that is also present amongst Batswana as well. They also agreed that children have emotions regardless of their age or maturity and that children's emotions are important. However, as the data (Table III) show, a majority of teachers, 21 (60%), felt that emotional abuse is a domestic issue which should be handled privately. On the other hand 12 (34%) respondents felt that emotional abuse should not be considered a private issue, because it is this very notion of keeping things private which allows negative behaviour and practices to continue unchecked, forbids open discussion and keeps many harmful activities hidden.

Three (9%) respondents believed that educated people do not abuse their children, whilst the rest accepted that anybody may abuse a child. One (3%) respondent agreed with the statement that parents do not emotionally abuse children, 20 (57%) strongly disagreed, while 13 (37%) agreed, indicating that it is a common belief that parents do actually abuse their children. The data (Table III) showed that six (17%) of the respondents felt that all abuse is unintentional and 25 (71%) accepted that it is intentional. They believed that abusers know what they are doing and deliberately try to hurt the child. Most abuse is done with the intention of disciplining or teaching the child a lesson; in anger, frustration, or just to hurt or embarrass the child.

We return to the issue that most teachers consider emotional abuse to be a personal matter to be dealt with in private. Teaching, like many other professions, values privacy and confidentiality. Most cultures, including the Tswana culture, adhere to the principle of privacy in some measure. This means, perhaps, that child abuse may not be discussed as openly as it should.

### **Personal experience**

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES in life are usually the basis for most decisions that people make. People behave differently because of their various experiences and their influence on ways of thinking and doing things. The data indicate that only 13 (37%) of the respondents knew someone who had been emotionally abused. Of these, one (8%) felt that the person deserved to be abused. However, 14 (40%) respondents felt that generally, no one deserved to be abused. Sixteen (46%) of the respondents thought that they might have emotionally abused somebody unintentionally, seven (20%) were sure that they had emotionally abused somebody and ten (29%) were sure that they had not emotionally abused somebody unintentionally. From the data, it seems that nearly 70% of the respondents have or think they may have emotionally abused somebody. Thus a large number of people owned up to be abusers as parents, teachers and members of the community, even if unintentionally. Nine (26%) respondents definitely knew of someone who intentionally abuses a child. This may lead us to believe that there is a good deal of emotional abuse going on in schools and communities.

Twelve (34%) respondents thought that they may have been abused at some stage of their lives, while 21 (60%) did not think so. For those who have been abused, the main culprits were relatives and partners. Three (9%) of the respondents admitted to being emotionally abused right now in their lives by their partners. Amongst those who had been abused, the majority, about nine (75%), had no problems with it now and considered it over and done with. Most of them indicated that they could deal with any would-be abusers as they were now grown-up and could take care of themselves. However, three (25%) of those abused had not come to terms with it and indicated that they needed help, especially counselling. They expressed bitterness and anger towards the abuser and relatives who did not take their pleas for help seriously.

According to the respondents, emotional abuse is rampant in schools. Twenty-one (60%) were sure that it exists, five (14%) were not sure if it exists or not, seven (20%) had no idea, and two (6%) thought that it might exist. Of those who thought there is emotional abuse in schools, ten (48%) believed that everyone in the school environment is

**Table III: Personal Feelings about Emotional Abuse**

|  | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly | Don't know |
|--|----------------|----------|----------|------------|
| Emotional abuse is as serious as sexual abuse                          | 25(71%)        | 5(14%)   |          | 5(14%)     |
| Emotional abuse is a Western concept that has no place in our lives    | -              | 12(34%)  |          | 1(3%)      |
| Emotional abuse is a private issue and should be dealt with in private | 11(31%)        | 3(9%)    |          | 2(6%)      |
| Educated people do not emotionally abuse children                      | -              | 30(86%)  |          | -          |
| Parents do not emotionally abuse children                              | 1(3%)          | 13(37%)  |          | 1(3%)      |
| All abuse is unintentional   | -              | 25(71%)  |          | 4 (11%)    |
| A child is not mature enough to have emotions                          | -              | 12(34%)  |          | 1(3%)      |
| Emotional abuse is not limited to any class                            | -              | 3(9%)    |          | 2(6%)      |

a victim, that is, students, teachers and support staff. Three (12%) indicated that students were the main victims and only one (5%) accepted that teachers were victims. In the same vein, seven (33%) of those who admitted that emotional abuse was present in schools also noted that everyone in the school environment was a potential perpetrator. However, eight (38%) respondents felt that teachers, headmasters and parents were the main perpetrators. Thus, all in all, respondents who thought that emotional abuse occurs in schools, thought that teachers were involved in some way as perpetrators.

#### **Support systems and services**

SUPPORT SYSTEMS are very important for those experiencing problems and needing help. This is because such systems provide the support and care which enables people to prevent or manage their problems. Services for the abused are important in any community because they accord those who need help the chance to get it. In the study teachers

were asked what they would do to help a child suspected of being emotionally abused. Almost half of the respondents, 15 (43%) would talk to the child if they suspect the child is being abused; ten (29%) would talk to the child and then suggest guidance and counselling for the child; three (9%) would try to talk to the abuser and one (3%) would investigate and report the issue to the police. One (3%) person did not know what to do, and another one (3%) would ignore the child.

For most of the teachers children have to meet certain conditions before their admissions or disclosure of being abused are believed. Only three (9%) believed that a child would not seek out a teacher to lie about being abused. More than half of the respondents, 19 (54%), would believe children who told them that they were abused, based on the story and the feelings displayed, such as crying and being upset. Seven (20%) would believe the child if there were signs of apparent emotional abuse, one (3%) would believe the child based on the conclusion reached by looking at the child and the other one (3%) had no idea what would lead him/her into believing the child's story.

Teachers maintained more or less the same position when deciding what would make them disbelieve children who told them they were being emotionally abused. Nineteen (55%) would not believe the child if there was no evidence to support what the child said and if the story did not sound true; four (11%) maintained that children do not usually lie about such matters and so they would have no reason to disbelieve them; and five (14%) had no idea of what would make them disbelieve a child.

If a child told them that he/she was actually being emotionally abused, 19 (54%) of the respondents would suggest counselling for that child by the guidance and counselling teacher and by social workers. Eight (23%) mentioned that they would help the child with the child's consent. However, they were not specific as to the sort of help they would or could give the child. Three (9%) would talk to and educate the abusers, two (6%) would call the parents of the child and one (3%) would investigate the issue first before helping the child in any specific way.

If a child told the teacher that a friend was being emotionally abused, 19 (54%) of the respondents would talk to the child and ask the child to



bring the friend to them, eight (23%) would suggest that the child tells the friend to go for help from social workers or counsellors, three (9%) would investigate and try to counsel the abusers and two (6%) would ask the child or the friend to talk to someone he/she trusts. The data indicate that 17 (49%) of the respondents considered talking to the particular child being abused as an appropriate way of helping, 12 (34%) considered counselling either by social workers or the guidance and counselling teachers to be appropriate, and three (9%) felt that talking to the abuser or educating the abuser is the best way. However, it is not clear what teachers hope to achieve by talking to the child.

Twenty-four (69%) participants knew of someone from whom an emotionally abused child could get support, but nine (26%) did not. Of those who did know, the majority identified the guidance and counselling teachers as people able to give support, a few cited social workers, some mentioned Childline and only one teacher out of 35 noted that teachers in general are able to offer support. It is clear from the data that the majorities of teachers do not see themselves as part of a support system for a child in an emotionally abusive situation. Twenty-two (63%) of the teachers knew of services that are available for emotionally abused people. The services mentioned are those provided by the guidance and counselling teachers, social workers, Childline and Botswana Family Welfare Association. Ten (29%) had no idea of services available for the emotionally abused.

To render effective and helpful services to children, teachers need to know how to handle child abuse cases. They also need to know what services are available and how to link the child with such systems. Seventeen (49%) of the respondents knew the procedures to be followed when dealing with abuse or suspected abuse cases of children in their schools, three (9%) noted that their schools have no formal procedures and 12 (34%) did not know whether there were procedures or not. Among those who were aware of formal procedures there were differences, even among teachers from the same school. For most, the process starts with the class teacher, then the guidance and counselling teacher, the senior teacher for that group, and then the head-teacher.

The data show that most teachers did not actually know the procedure to be followed when handling abuse cases and in most cases, they used their own discretion. This also supports Briggs and Hawkins' (1977) assertion that the internal structure of schools might be a problem in itself. This is because the head-teachers and senior teachers have the responsibility for liaison with outside agencies. It is clear, however, that head-teachers do not share their knowledge on the existence of outside agencies, or procedures to be followed, with teachers.

### **Discussion**

THE DATA INDICATE that more than half of the respondents knew and understood the concept of emotional abuse. About 20 percent of the respondents, however, did not have adequate substantive knowledge and understanding of emotional abuse. This implies that about one fifth or more of teachers do not know much about emotional abuse. This makes it difficult for a large number of teacher to remain alert to the possibility of child abuse, as Jones (1987) suggests. Teachers are supposed to be educated and knowledgeable people. Thus one would expect them all to be aware of such dangers concerning the children who are in their care almost every day. If those who are educated are not aware, we can assume that a significant number of the population in general does not know about emotional abuse. It also raises questions with regard to educational policies that allow a significant number of teachers to enter the field without such important knowledge. This is, again, critical because most of the teachers do not have any kind of training in child abuse after completing teacher training. They attribute their knowledge and understanding to personal experience associated with teaching for a long period of time. Thus, there is no uniformity in knowledge, neither can what they know be trusted whole-heartedly.

About 70 percent of the respondents were able to identify children showing symptoms or signs of emotional abuse because they were able to give examples of such signs. However, 30 percent of teachers did not know the symptoms of emotional abuse and could not therefore identify children showing such signs. This indicates that there may be many children with problems who come into contact with teachers but

are not noticed and, thus, receive no help. One worrying fact is that some respondents may stereotype these children as delinquent and truants, as Briggs and Hawkins (1997) assert. Unfortunately, if these children are being emotionally abused they will not be helped, but instead punished.

About two thirds of the respondents knew of support and other services for the emotionally abused. This indicates that about a third of teachers had no awareness of support services available for emotionally abused children. Even for those who were aware of services, the majority knew only of guidance and counselling teachers within schools. Very few mentioned other services outside the school. This is a clear indication that most teachers are not aware or do not know of services available in their communities. Furthermore, it shows that they, as community members, are ignorant of these services, which leads us to assume that most other members of the community are unaware of these services as well. This shows in addition the limitations of teachers who may not want to expand their roles beyond just teaching. If they do not know of the existence of such services then they cannot refer a child who needs help. Thus, the school, in this case, is not an effective site from which children from abusive families can be reached. This is contrary to the conclusions by Roberts and Lynch (1982).

The teachers who had had some form of training had more understanding of abuse than those without training. This demonstrates the value of training in raising teachers' awareness of child abuse. Thus, it might be in the best interests of the schools, as service providers, to make sure that courses on child abuse are organized as part of in-service training for teachers. As child abuse and related issues become broadened and more complicated, new knowledge and skills are necessary in the process of helping children. Schools have to find ways to become more effective in helping children who are abused. Teachers need knowledge and expertise and must be linked to other service providers.

From the data only about a third of teachers had come across emotional abuse in their lives and they considered it part and parcel of growing up which was of no consequence to them now. In most cul-

tures, including Tswana culture, what is termed abuse even today, is, to some people, a normal part of bringing up a child. The child learns from such "discipline" and sees it as perfectly unacceptable. When such children become adults, they are likely to treat their own children or any other children in the same manner. As the data indicate, a large proportion of respondents admitted to being perpetrators of emotional abuse themselves. Although they had some knowledge and understanding of emotional abuse, it seems that very little was being done in the way of prevention. This might be due to the fact that there is no compelling obligation for teachers to identify and deal with emotional abuse cases. If teachers view emotional abuse, in some instances, as part of the process of growing up, and if some teachers see themselves as perpetrators of emotional abuse, then it will follow, as Briggs and Hawkins (1997) assert, that emotional abuse will go unchallenged in schools. This appears to be the case in the schools sampled.

It seems that although some knowledge of emotional abuse exists it is limited, in most cases, to a section of teachers and whatever information exists is not used to the benefit of the children and the community at large. In general, emotionally abused children in schools have a high chance of not receiving help from teachers who are considered more aware than most other community members. In other words, although abuse exists in the community there is little that teachers and, for that matter, most people, do to combat it. This may be due to the unwillingness to interfere in other people's private affairs (Whitney 1996); because they are unsure as to what constitutes emotional abuse (Briggs and Hawkins 1997 and Mayhall and Norgard 1983); or because they do not know how to proceed with emotional abuse cases (Spackman 1991). Education policy and the training of teachers should therefore include the different aspects of child abuse as a major component of the curricula. Each school should have a formal process showing how teachers should deal with suspected cases of child emotional abuse in their school. There should also be clear lines of communication between staff, regardless of rank, to facilitate proper handling of such cases.

Schools, as community institutions, should make sure that they pass on the knowledge they have on child abuse to the community. It may be

useful at meetings, such as those of parent and teacher associations, to discuss child abuse and its effects. This will give parents and guardians a chance to become aware of emotional abuse and might also help them to come to grips with the problem if there are abusive situations they know of, or come across. Schools should make sure that they run short courses and workshops on a regular basis on child abuse to enable teachers to learn what to do if they suspect or come across an emotional abuse case (Jones 1987). This will enable teachers to keep up with developments in child abuse as they come up, and also to renew teachers' motivation and their ability to educate the community. There should be a working link between teachers and other service and support providers to help teachers with their work and give the children the utmost help they can get.

### **Conclusion**

Schools, especially teachers, are important in the prevention, management and treatment of the emotional abuse of children. Whereas most teachers in the study were aware of and were able to play some meaningful role in these processes, there are still some major gaps to be filled. The number of teachers in daily contact with children but with no substantive education in, and skills associated with, emotional abuse is high. In general, most teachers appear not to be able to link emotionally abused children to services outside the school. Teachers also appear unable to influence their communities in any positive manner with respect to emotional abuse of children. Thus, there is need to improve teachers' skills in dealing with emotional abuse and to emphasize the role of teachers in community education for the benefit of all concerned.

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