ABSTRACT

This exploratory study drew primarily upon narrative interviews and projective tests and secondarily on collateral information taken from case files from a small sample of adolescents who were institutionalised as a result of neglect and abuse. The aim of this study was to explore and develop a better understanding of the nature of attachment patterns of institutionalised adolescents by looking at how attachment abuse, maternal deprivation and institutionalisation can be detrimental to forming close relationships. The data from the clinical interviews, the Sentence Completion Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) were subjected to a thematic content analytical process. The Kinetic Family Drawing Test (KFD) was analysed using Kaplan and Main’s classification system for children’s family drawings. The Draw-a-Person Test (DAP) was analysed qualitatively, using various literature on interpreting human figure drawings but largely drawing on Machover’s interpretive system. No quantitative analyses were used in this study. The results yielded a wide range of themes related to the attachment patterns of children in children’s homes. The results of the study clearly highlighted the attachment needs of adolescents. The overall themes present in the tests are of rejection, abandonment, isolation and deprivation. The results indicated that older children who have been separated from their caregivers and placed in a children’s home because they were abused, neglected or maternally deprived, tend to be insecurely attached. The literature highlights the importance of adequate caregiving that is necessary for the child to develop a healthy sense of self and the implications if this is absent.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The assistance and support of the following people and organisations are acknowledged:

My parents, for their precious support and encouragement. My husband, Mr. Cyril Adonis, who assisted with the literature-review, editing, as well as for his unwavering love, support and guidance. My sister, Ms. Maimuna Katz and my dearest friend Mrs. Eileen Thayser for their encouragement, help and support. Dr. Corinne Oosthuizen, my supervisor, for her guidance and help. The study participants of the Johannesburg Children’s Home, thank you for sharing your experiences with me. May you inspire others the way you inspired me. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.
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