

**EXPLORING THE HEALING PROCESS OF FEMALE ADULT SURVIVORS
OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE**

by

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My mother - my inspiration, my guiding light. You are my beacon of purity, wisdom and love. I love you more than words can say.

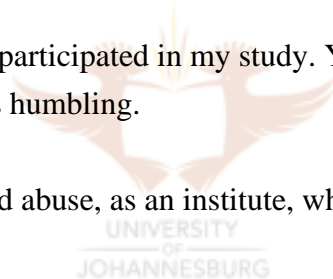
My father, you always believed, and yes we found each other.

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Abstract:

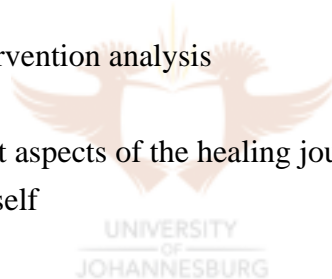
The incidence of child abuse in southern Africa is problematic to such an extent that it is described by Machel (as cited in Richter, Dawes & Higson-Smith, 2004. p. ix) as "*an assault, a war upon our children*". The numbers and estimates surrounding, not only sexual abuse, but also physical abuse seem to be rising exponentially. This leads to the obvious deduction that adult survivors are also rising exponentially, and as such need focus and care, since the aftermath of abuse is far reaching, impacting every sphere of their lives. Destructive behaviour and thought patterns characterise all aspects of their interaction with the self and others, which paints a bleak and painful picture for their futures. To compound the aftermath, very few studies have focused on aspects beyond the aftermath, few have gone on to explain and focus attention on whether healing can take place, and if so, how it can be brought about. This important source of hope for the survivors has been neglected for far too long, leaving the survivors struggling with the question of whether positive change is at all possible? This study aims to address that question and to focus on the experience of the process of healing.

The participants were members of a support group for survivors. A qualitative approach was followed with the focus on conceptual analysis. Two open-ended questionnaires were constructed. The first questionnaire was administered pre-intervention and the second questionnaire post-intervention. As a qualitative study, information is included regarding the researcher's experience, and is interpreted from the researcher's perspective.

It was found that growth and change is indeed possible. Participants showed more insight into their behaviour and actions and were mostly able to cease destructive behaviours, achieve positive goals set for themselves, or were at least in the process of changing some aspects they felt needed attention. Due to analysis taking place on a group, as well as, individual level, individual differences became very visible. In this study, those aspects participants still found problematic were also highlighted. It is suggested that those aspects be scrutinised in future studies. A reflection on the healing process also occurred and is viewed as a platform for future studies to build on.

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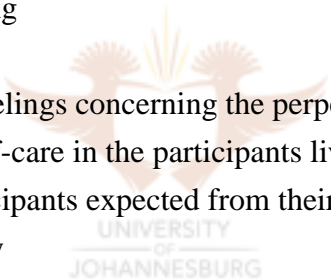



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