

IS THERE SOMEONE THERE?: Support in the Lives of
Adolescent Sexual Offenders

by

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Abstract

The increase in numbers of adolescents who sexually offend has become a public concern over the past 10 to 15 years. The literature regarding adolescent sexual offenders has given little voice to the youths themselves. One of the most critical times for decreasing the likelihood of recidivism in adolescent sex offenders is while offenders are reestablishing themselves in their communities after serving their sentence. Support, whether it is informal or formal, may be an important factor that helps determine if the youth will or will not re-offend sexually. To date little is known about the experience of support for sexually offending youths. This study explored the phenomenon of support in the lived experience of adolescent sex offenders. Specifically, the research question which guided this study was: what are the experiences of support of four adolescent sexual offenders in Saskatchewan?

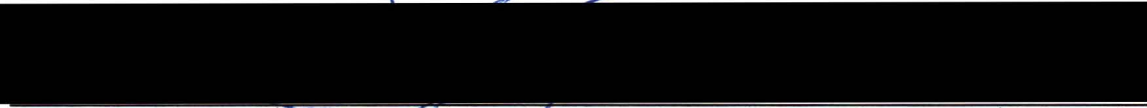
A phenomenological methodology was used to collect and analyze conversational data from interviews with four adolescent sexual offenders. The findings of this study describe the experience of support in these youths' lives. Four themes emerged from the interviews in relation to the experience of support. These themes were; *Living a Lie, Is There Someone There, I Take Care of Myself, and It all Takes*

Time. Findings indicate that *living a lie* permeates most interactions these youthful offenders have. Availability and accessibility of supportive people in these youths' lives are identified as essential to feeling supported as described in the theme *is there someone there*. Independence and sense of self described in the theme *I take care of myself*, are discussed by the youths as components of support. *It all takes time* addresses the process aspect of receiving and utilizing support.

The results of this study were compared to research in the fields of adolescent sexual offenders, social support and children and youths in care of the child welfare system. Comparisons revealed that many of the findings of this study are identifiable in the literature and research in the field. However, several new areas for research are revealed by this studies findings. This study includes the voice of youth and recommendations for further research, as well as implications for practice with respect to adolescent sexual offenders.

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DEDICATION

TO FOUR VERY IMPORTANT PEOPLE
WHO SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ME.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Identification of the Problem

Historically, adolescents who displayed sexually offensive behavior were dismissed as experimenting with their new found sexuality. Sexual behavior that was exploitative was considered a reaction to the adjustment of being in the developmental stage of adolescence (National Adolescent Perpetrator Network, 1988). The numbers of sexually offending youths became a cause for concern as a result of research done with adult sex offenders. Groth, Longo, and McFadin, as reported in the National Adolescent Sexual Offender Task Force Report (1988), found that 60-80% of adult sexual offenders reported offending as adolescents.

According to Dreiblatt (1989), "there is a profound bias against viewing minors as sexually deviant" (p. 22), and for this reason these youths have often been ignored. Within the past ten to twelve years the increase in victim disclosures, the realization that victims of sexual offences are seriously traumatized, and a shift in attitude regarding developmental phases of adolescent sexuality, have resulted in sexually offending youths becoming a focus of specialized intervention. I have used masculine pronouns in this research because to date the majority of adolescent sexual offenders that come to the attention of the criminal justice system are males.

Recommendations from a variety of researchers have been

made about what measures should be taken for sexually offending youths before, during and after treatment. There is agreement that once treatment is completed the youths will need ongoing support from the community (Mathews, 1987; Ross, 1990; Ryan & Lane, 1991; Stermac & Mathews, 1989).

Aftercare, as discussed in the literature, is seen as a way to provide the youth with a plan to ensure he does not re-offend. The literature describes aftercare as a treatment component (Bengis, 1986; Ross, 1990; Ryan & Lane, 1991). It has been suggested that aftercare be provided by a team of people involved in the youth's life. Members of the team may be therapists, parents, foster parents, extended family, school teachers, probation officers, girl friends, police officers or employers. The team members have the responsibility of providing external control until the youth can establish a level of internal control that will keep him from re-offending. The main function of the aftercare team is to monitor the youth, watching for signs of high risk behavior that may lead to re-offending. This team is part of the youth's support system helping him to stay away from offending behavior.

Unfortunately, however, little is known about the experience of support for sexually offending youths once they have finished treatment, or what "support" means to them. An "aftercare team" is not a reality in many rural areas. In the absence of a formal aftercare team the youth

is often left to his own devices to find support. We must understand what support means to these youths in order to enhance programming and support services to meet their needs.

Significance of the Study

The concern about sexually offending youth is growing, and the statistics in this area are alarming. In Canada, almost one quarter of all sexual offences are committed by adolescents (Mathews, 1987). Between 1979 and 1984 in Ontario, 1,388 convicted offenders between the ages of 16-19 had criminal records that contained at least one sexual offence (Mathews, 1989).

Victim numbers can be substantially reduced if the sexually offending behavior is treated in adolescence. Studies of adult offenders have reported that on the average each offender will have 380 victims (NAPN, 1988). In contrast, adolescents have been found to have on the average less than seven victims. This suggests that the time to address sexually offensive behavior is during early adolescence (NAPN). The reduction in numbers of victims that would occur during adult life is reason enough to focus research in the area. According to Mathews and Stermac (1989), the most hopeful strategy for the prevention of sexual abuse, is early remedial intervention with adolescents who sexually offend.

Context of the Study

In my professional practice in Saskatchewan, I have worked for the past six years as a child and youth care worker and, currently, as an adult probation officer. In these roles I have dealt with both adult and adolescent sexual offenders. There have been few treatment programs available for sexual offenders in Saskatchewan; however, this is changing. As a service provider in a rural area my concern is with the aftercare provided for youths once they have completed their outpatient treatment program. It has been my experience that young persons in Saskatchewan who have been convicted of a sexual offence are most often given a custodial sentence and treatment is recommended as a part of the probation order. The treatment is provided in one of a few urban centres on an outpatient basis. During treatment while the youth is re-establishing himself in the community, it is my observation that support may be one of the factors in further reducing the risk of sexually offensive behavior.

Social support has been defined as the exchange of resources between two or more people, seen by the provider or recipient to be intended to add to the wellbeing of the person who receives it (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). The purpose of the support is to provide information to a person that they are cared for, loved, believed in, and belong to a mutually obliging communication network (Cobb, 1976). The

amount and type of formal support provided by professionals to youths who are involved in treatment currently varies regionally, depending on availability and accessibility of resources. From the time formal charges are laid, the youth has been sentenced, the sentence is served and treatment has been provided, the youth will have been exposed to one or more youth workers, a crown prosecutor, a defense lawyer, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others. The systems the youth may have been involved with during the process are Mental Health Services, the Department of Social Services, and often the Child Welfare System. Lacking is an integrated approach for dealing with these youths. The numbers of people involved and the lack of consistency in the youth's life may affect the quality of support the youth receives.

Youths who sexually offend are labelled by the justice system and the community usually knows that they have been convicted of a sexual offence. The label of sexual offender may affect how these youths are treated upon return to the community, given the discomfort of people in discussing the sexuality of children (Ryan & Lane, 1991). This discomfort, along with fear for their personal safety, or the safety of their children, may affect the amount of support available to the youths within the community. The people who usually provide support for youths such as friends, teachers, family and other adults, may be uncomfortable dealing with a youth

who is known as a sex offender. Normally supportive people, who are easy to approach and talk to, may not know what to say to this youth or how to talk about sexual issues. Parents of other youths may discourage their children from being in the company of a known sex offender.

The perspectives of sexually offending youths are absent from the literature. To date they have been identified as objects of research, rather than as participants from whom important experiences and insights can be gained. The approach to research I have pursued within this study is not **about** adolescents who sexually offend but **for** and **with** them (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). As Kirby and McKenna point out, further exploration needs to be grounded in the experience of marginalized people; "we believe research must begin to reflect the experience and concerns of the people who have traditionally been marginalized by the research process and by what gets counted as knowledge" (p. 22). Adolescent sexual offenders are a marginalized group in that they have little input into the system that deals with them and makes decisions about their lives.

The image of the sexually offending youths as liars and deniers may discourage researchers from listening to the voices of youths. The motives for denial in the life of adolescents who sexually offend are often based on avoidance of punishment (Barber, 1989). Wanting to deny or minimize

the horrifying behavior of sexual offending would be a natural response in most people. The research I have conducted does not involve asking the youths about types and numbers of offences. I am interested in the experience of support for these youths and have explored this phenomenon through their stories. Divergence from the traditional way of seeing adolescent sexual offenders as "liars and deniers" means trusting these youths in a new sense. From this perspective "multiple meanings, multiple interpretations coexist, like the many facets of a cubist portrait" (Yanow, 1987, p. 109). I have explored four adolescent sexual offender's perceptions, and interpretation of support, as each youth presented their understandings to me.

Understanding the youths' experiences and what constitutes support, where they find it, and what part it plays in their lives have important implications for programming and policy in the area of aftercare. The findings of this study may highlight the need for elements of a workable continuum of care not currently available in rural areas of Saskatchewan, as well as elsewhere. As indicated by Ryan and Lane (1991) "repeated experience with treating the adolescent sex offender has shown that previous patterns of behavior typically begin to reoccur as the offender reenters the community..." (p. 388). Support within the community after treatment may impact repeated sexually offensive behavior, only if the support is

perceived as useful by the youths themselves.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the convicted adolescent sexual offenders' experiences of support. The research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of support of four adolescent sexual offenders in Saskatchewan? My intent was not to prove or disprove theory, but to understand an experience. In doing this research the hope was that we would be one step closer to understanding how these young people experience their worlds. As policy is developed in the area of aftercare it will be important to have an enhanced understanding of how youths experience support.

The knowledge gained from this study has the potential to increase the understanding of the experience of support for youths who sexually offend and the professionals who work with them. This study is the starting point for including the voice of the youthful offender in treatment strategies.

Values, Beliefs and Experiences

No one can claim to approach a subject without preconceptions, particularly when one is dealing with a subject of current interest and concern in both the professional and public discourse. My impressions about adolescent sexual offenders have been influenced by experiences I have had in the field and by literature I have

reviewed. For several years I have worked with victims of sexual assault, both in practice and as a foster parent. I have seen that sexual abuse has serious short and long term effects for the victims. I later became aware that some of the sexual offenders I dealt with had also been victims of sexual abuse. This discovery pointed to a cyclical pattern in which some victims become offenders (this view is also supported by the literature).

Community support would appear to be very important when working in a rural area, as I do. When the weekly visit from or to the social worker is over, the community is left to deal with issues on its own. Where will adolescents who have been labelled as sexual offenders find support? What will that experience of support be like?

All research is to some degree, a reflection of the researcher's standpoint (values, beliefs and experiences). Given that the researcher chooses certain participants, asks certain questions, and draws particular conclusions, I believe the researcher's standpoint needs to be articulated, and acknowledged. The personal qualities of the researcher differ depending on previous exposure to literature in the field, and professional and personal experiences. For me professional experience brings with it an awareness of how the system that deals with adolescent sexual offenders, works in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is also where my research has taken place.

I am aware that my standpoint has influenced my research. One of my beliefs is that relationships and interactions are what give meaning to life. Relationships are unique and in a constant state of change. Each person gives their own meaning to the interactions in which they are involved. This has led me to examine the concept of social support in my research.

My standpoint based on my experience is that support is rarely talked about as being divided into different kinds as can be found within the social support literature. The literature in the area of social support distinguishes between formal support (paid professional or advice giving), informal support (friendships, or family systems), natural (evolving), or contrived supports (created, arranged by a professional or someone else) and positive and negative social support (Callaghan & Morrissey, 1993, Whittaker & Garbarino, 1993). The research in the area of social support generally points to the positive outcomes derived from having strong social support in one's life, despite where it comes from. Much of the research on positive consequences of support is involved in measuring emotional or physical health indicators. My interest is to understand the lived experience of support for adolescent sexual offenders.

In my experience, support in everyday life is not seen in categorical ways. I rarely divide supportive people into

formal or informal, natural or contrived. The adult and adolescent sexual offenders I have worked with over the years are looking for supportive others who will not judge them, regardless of their position in life.

Support may be from one person (a friend or professional), or a group of people (a family or self help group), some of who know each other, some who do not. Within these supportive relationships there is a type of give and take that goes on. This reciprocity allows for more or less support to be given at different times in a relationship. In a supportive relationship a certain level of involvement on each person's part is expected. If a person takes but does not give, eventually in my experience, the relationship weakens. There is an assumption that people in general know how to give and receive support. Given the often troubled family history of adolescent sexual offenders these youths may not have the necessary skills and/or opportunities to learn those skills.

The family is seen as the place that initial socialization skills are taught and the place where a person learns about support. For many young people the family is not the nurturing place we would like to believe it is. At times familial interaction may be negative. When I refer to negative interactions, I mean the kind of information or encouragement that brings a person in conflict with beliefs, values or norms of a society. This type of support often

ends in negative consequences for the person who grows up with it. As a society we assume families can and will provide supportive environments for children that are positive and will enable the child to successfully develop other positive supportive relationships.

In the case of adolescent sex offenders, my observation has been that many of them are not able to get support from their family, given the level of dysfunction within some of the homes. In these cases the youths may be able to turn to other adults for support. A recent event which I witnessed, provides an example of an alternate source of support when a family does not provide what a youth wants or needs. A bus driver who was formerly a police officer, was talking to a young person at a bus stop where local youths gather. I overheard the driver telling the youth to go home and watch a movie, relax and think about what they had been talking about. The young person agreed, got off the bus and headed down the street. I asked the driver what they had been talking about. The driver explained to me that the youth was from a divorced family and had turned to the streets in order to avoid choosing a parent to live with. The driver had known him for two years, through drug, relationship, and family problems. The driver would take the youth with him on some of his bus routes, in order to talk and listen to him. The youth soon started to initiate contact with the driver and sought support from him.

A supportive relationship had developed where the youth could discuss his problems, be heard and ask for advice. This source of support may not be one of the conventional sources of support, however research reveals that many people feel supported by their barber, hair dresser, or bartender, in comparison to the people (family and friends) we typically see as supportive (Garbarino, 1983).

Support, in this research, was not defined in advance for the participants, as I was interested in learning about their perceptions and experiences of support. The knowledge I have gained from the literature on social support was used in the analysis portion of my research. I have attempted to acknowledge my standpoint in my research, which includes what I have absorbed from the literature. A strategy I have used to acknowledge and identify my standpoint is one suggested by both Kirby and McKenna (1990) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984). I have kept a separate journal for my own beliefs, ideas, experiences and thoughts. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest going back over this journal to see where and how one's beliefs, ideas, experiences and thoughts have influenced the research. McKenna and Kirby (1990) refer to this process as layering. The researcher re-reads their "conceptual baggage" notes and then rethinks their ideas, and records any new insights and ideas.

The last area I want to address, connected to a belief I hold, is about being a researcher. I believe that as a

researcher I am not an authority on the participants' experiences. The adolescents who sexually offend are the experts on their experiences in this situation. I became closely involved with these youths by interviewing them three times each during this research project. As Moccia (1988) states: the problem is how to become more closely involved in the participants' lives, not distanced from them. This close involvement stands to enhance the quality and depth of data collected from the youths which is an essential component of the phenomenological orientation.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Approach to Literature Review

This literature review starts with a review of the literature dealing with adolescent sexual offenders. This part of the review provides some information about the youths participating in this research. The review also highlights the way in which support is conceptualized by researchers and writers in the area of study of adolescent sexual offenders. Following the review of literature on adolescent sexual offenders, is an overview of the literature dealing with social support. Perceived social support is discussed as it relates directly to the phenomenological orientation which seeks to study the life world of people as they perceive it to be.

Terminology regarding adolescent sexual offenders used in this review of the literature have been defined to provide operational definition for the concepts discussed. These definitions can be found in Appendix A.

Review of adolescent sexual offender literature.

The literature reviewed in this section includes a profile of adolescent sexual offenders, and this will be followed by a review of the literature on aftercare and treatment provided to adolescent sexual offenders. These components represent the time when these youths return to their community following custodial or residential care.

Over the past few years considerable interest and concern have been expressed by society regarding adolescents who sexually offend. Research and theory development have focused on demographics, etiology, consequences of sexual offending, intervention, treatment and prevention. Much of the literature in the field is based on insights from clinical practice. Not all of the theoretical literature is supported by empirical research.

Public concern about the numbers of adolescent sexual offenders is well justified. As reported by Knopp (1982), a study in St. Paul Minnesota in 1981 showed that 43% of the number of people arrested for sexual offences were juveniles. The National Adolescent Perpetrator Network (1993) reports the findings of Showers, Farber, Joseph, Oshins, and Johnson (1983) and Rogers and Terry (1984), that child sexual abuse reports have indicated that over 50% of the molestations of boys and at least 20-25% of the sexual abuse of girls is perpetrated by adolescents. Groth (1979) has made a connection between adolescent sexual offences and later adult sexual misconduct. By studying incarcerated adult sex offenders, Groth indicates that as many as 20% of the offenders had a record of a juvenile sexual assault. Many men admitted to sexual acts committed as adolescents for which they were never apprehended.

Previously, adolescent sexual misconduct had been charted as developmentally appropriate experimentation,

sexual curiosity, situational in nature, or as an expression of a normal aggressiveness of sexually maturing males (Groth, 1979). This type of diagnosis is no longer valid, as research suggests that over eighty percent of adolescent sexual offenders have had previous sexual experience (Groth, 1977; Knopp, 1982). Victims sometimes in turn become offenders. Many offenders have been victims of sexual abuse themselves (Groth, 1977).

In Canada there is a dearth of research in the area of adolescent sexual offenders. There is concern about the lack of appropriate services for these youths. "Our past failure to take serious note of sexual aggression in youth had left us in a position where there are few social services capable of meeting the needs of adolescent sex offenders" (Mathews, 1989, p.1).

There are many definitions of sexual assault, and much debate about who is an adolescent sexual offender. NAPN (1993) produced a report from the National Task Force on Juvenile Sexual Offending that has provided definitions to use in the area of adolescent sex offenders. This task force reviewed virtually all related documents and literature available in the field up to 1987. In 1993 a revised report was published. The definitions were derived from consensus building with a large group of professional practitioners in the field. To define adolescent, the network stated that an adolescent is between the age of

puberty and majority. Sexual abuse is seen as "engaging in sexual behaviors which constitute an offence; sexually violating or exploiting; sexual behaviour without consent" (NAPN, 1993, p. 11). One commonly used definition is provided by Ryan (1986): "The juvenile sexual offender is defined as a youth from puberty to the legal age of majority, who commits any sexual act with a person of any age, against the victim's will, without consent, or in an aggressive, exploitative or threatening manner" (p. 125).

The adolescent sex offender, offences and victims.

Even though the population that commits sexual offences as an adolescent is heterogeneous (Dreiblatt, 1989) there are similarities evident in research findings. The similarities create a profile leading to insight into who had been apprehended, treated or incarcerated. Characteristics of adolescent sexual offenders are studied to assist practitioners in discovering causal factors, and the most effective treatments with this population.

The majority of adolescent sexual offenders coming to the attention of the public are males (Groth, 1979). The mean age of the offender is just over fourteen years (Fehrenbach, Smith, Monastersky, and Deisher, 1986; Mathews, 1989). Research cited will be with regard to male adolescents.

Adolescents who sexually offend come from a variety of backgrounds and have in many cases been abused themselves.

In the June 1987 newsletter produced by the NAPN, Ryan, Davis, Miyoshi, Lane and Wilson report results from the Uniform Data Collection System. This system has 51 network members in 30 American states. In 73.6% of the cases, the adolescent sexual offender was living at home with the parent at the time of the offence. In 38% of the cases, the youths molested a blood-related child in their household. On intake, over 30% reported being sexually abused previous to their sexual offending behavior and 40% reported being physically abused. The majority of the physical and sexual abuse happened within their family.

Fehrenbach et al. (1986), conducted a large descriptive study of adolescent sexual offenders and their offences, and victims. The study was undertaken at the University of Washington between 1976-1981, by the Juvenile Sexual Offender Program. Fehrenbach et al. describe 305 individuals, under 18 years of age who were evaluated by this program. All had been accused of committing a sexual offence. Less than half of the adolescents had been adjudicated at the time of the study. Of the 305 individuals, 297 were males. The study revealed that adolescent sexual offenders were often socially isolated and had few friends. While falling within the normal range of intelligence these youths often had a history of poor academic achievement.

The most common type of offence found by Fehrenbach et

al. (1986) was indecent liberties or fondling (59%), followed by rape (23%). Exhibitionism (11%) and non-contact offences (7%) were the least likely offence to be committed.

It has been found that the victim's age may be related to the type of sexual offence committed. Groth (1977) studied 26 incarcerated adolescents who had committed a total of 81 sexual offences between them. The results of his study indicate that intercourse was less likely when the victim was a child than when the victim was an adult. Rape or attempted rape was involved in 67% of the offences where the victim was of similar age or older than the offender. Of child victims, 53% of the offences involved indecent assault, and 24% involved rape. Fehrenbach et al. (1986) found that 21% of the offences against children involved rape and 69% indecent liberties. The findings of Groth (1977) and Fehrenbach et al. are similar, suggesting that the victim's age is related to the type of offence committed. The younger the child, the less likely rape (including penetration) was involved.

In their research, Fehrenbach et al. (1986) found a large percentage of the victims of male adolescent sex offenders were younger children (62% were less than 12 years old). Over 70% of the victims are female (Groth, 1977; Fehrenbach et al., 1986). The victims are most often known to the offender (Groth, 1977, Fehrenbach et al., 1986). In many cases the offender is a relative of the victim.

Physical force, threats and coercion are often used by the offender in order to commit the offence. In 45% of the cases studied (N=173) by Fehrenbach et al. (1986), where victim reports were available, some physical force, a verbal threat of harm, or a weapon was used on the victim by the offender. Almost half of the sexual offences against children took place in the victim's home, while the offender was babysitting.

One of the few Canadian studies was conducted by Mathews (1989), in Toronto. He studied 38 adolescent males between twelve and fifteen years of age who had been charged under the Criminal Code of Canada for sexual offences. The results of his study revealed that 24% of the youths reported having been sexually abused themselves. The average age of the victim was ten years; 67% were female, and 70% were from outside the offender's family. Mathews also found that a sudden increase in sexual offences happens at about age fourteen.

Practitioners do not agree on profiling adolescent sexual offenders. Some believe it to be counter productive because it encourages stereotyping of youths. This stereotyping then becomes the image society has of this adolescent group. The danger of this socially constructed image is that youths not fitting into the profile can often be overlooked as potential abusers and vice versa.

Aftercare and follow-up.

Literature regarding the treatment of adolescent sexual offenders has focused on the integration of theory and method (Breer, 1987; Ryan & Lane, 1991), the specific components of treatment programs (Ross, 1990), and to a lesser extent, aftercare and follow up (Bengis 1986; Greer, 1983; Ryan & Lane, 1991). Aftercare and follow up provide the youth with a plan that helps him to avoid re-offending out in the community after treatment. Most aftercare components include a team approach to ensure monitoring of the youth. The results of a study done in 1984 on follow-up of re-offence behaviors of adolescent sexual offenders; by Schram, Malloy and Rowe (1992) suggest that offenders presented the most danger to public safety upon their first year after treatment and release. The NAPN (1993) maintains that aftercare is the part of treatment that most directly connects with the client's future. Aftercare occurs during the time the adolescent sexual offender is practising the skills he has learned in treatment. It is the time when the integration of therapy and practice must happen in order to provide the youth with the skills to behave in a more appropriate, socially acceptable manner.

Reviewing the literature regarding aftercare and follow-up provided some insight into the beliefs of professionals in the field who provide support to sexually offending youths. Ultimately the test of success of

treatment is the ability of the offender to control his sexually offensive behavior in the community.

The concepts of aftercare and follow-up are used interchangeably in the literature. However, aftercare is most commonly referred to as the time following custodial or residential treatment. The period of time after the youth has had treatment as an outpatient in his community or in a neighbouring one, may be referred to as aftercare or follow-up. The basic components of aftercare/follow-up are similar, as are the goals.

The goal for aftercare/follow-up is to have the youth make the transition from a residential or closed custody status and environment to a community based one (Lane & Ryan, 1991). Youths that have been controlled in custody need to learn the skills of self-control within the community. Outpatient treatment provides the youths with the opportunity to integrate newly acquired skills, while still in the program. According to Mathews (1987), emotional support should have been provided consistently by the outpatient therapist during the treatment and reintegration phase. Unfortunately, due to changes in personnel and large caseloads, this is not always the case.

The two other goals of aftercare as described by Ryan and Lane (1991) also fit the follow-up concept. Aftercare (as well as follow-up) reminds the offender that he continues to be at risk for re-offending.

According to Ross, (1991) the offender's problem behavior has not been cured but can be controlled through continuous behavior management. This behavior management can be provided and supported by a number of community people, including professionals. A client leaving a residential program may have difficulty maintaining his self-control due to the lack of consistent structure, control, treatment intervention and types of support in the community (Ryan & Lane, 1991). A youth in an outpatient program has not had the closed, supportive environment offered in a residential treatment program. The youth may however, have established supports within the community.

The last goal of aftercare as discussed by Ryan and Lane (1991) is to provide an effective method of monitoring the offender's behavior after release. This goal of monitoring also fits for follow-up according to the NAPN (1988). This Network says that both aftercare and follow-up monitor the offender and look for indicators of the behaviors that could lead to a re-offence.

The overall purpose of aftercare and follow-up is to keep the offender from re-offending (NAPN, 1993). It is a time when family and friends could play a big role in supporting the youth in his attempt to remain crime free. It is assumed that there will be a gradual decline of contact, support and monitoring by the authorities to the youth. This will encourage the continued daily application

of skills the youth has learned in treatment (Bengis, 1986; Mathews, 1989; NAPN, 1988, 1993; Ryan & Lane 1992). The formally mandated supports that have been provided to the youth may begin to drop away at this point and time. The hope is that the informal supports will take over to provide the youth with some guidance and structure. Who provides support for the adolescent sexual offender during and after the follow-up period?

Aftercare services.

The literature indicates that coordinated service by way of a treatment team should be established from the onset of the adolescent sex offender's involvement in the system. This team should include one person to coordinate services to the youth (Bengis, 1986; Mathews, 1989). A trained sex offender specialist should supervise aftercare for adolescents who sexually offend, according to the NAPN (1988). "A case manager is needed to assure compliance with the aftercare plan and to take responsibility for timely and open communication among all the professionals involved" (p. 37). Bengis (1986) goes as far as to say that the staff/youth/peer group relationships should be consistent from secure custody through to the youth's independence. Ideally, there would be one person having a primary and consistent relationship with the offender as he moves through the system. In my experience this ideal situation rarely happens, especially in rural areas where outpatient

treatment centres are miles away.

It is believed that the consistency in case management through the system provides both support and sanctions by the same individual and is the model of choice (NAPN, 1988). This case manager or field supervisor as referred to by Ryan and Lane (1991) ensures information sharing, continued communication, supportive confrontation and monitoring of participation in the plan is done.

An inter-agency approach is seen by practitioners to be the most effective means of supporting adolescents who sexually offend. The support of the youths in the community requires close coordination of services and agencies (NAPN, 1988; Ross, 1990,). Upon completion of treatment there may be several services involved in the youths' life. The therapist may remain minimally involved providing the opportunity for youths to reconnect when necessary. The probation officer/youth worker may be the professional with the most contact with the youth and should be directly involved in the assessment and planning stages. Protective services should also be directly involved to protect victim and community interests (Mathews, 1989; NAPN, 1988). Other professionals involved in the treatment team may be law enforcement officers, private practitioners, mental health workers and school personnel. Parents, substitute care givers, and girl friends are necessary participants in the treatment team also, according to Mathews (1989). A peer

support group or help line is also indicated as a potential tool in follow-up programming. The NAPN (1993) believes that indefinite access to a self-help support group is a necessary component of aftercare.

The issue of confidentiality is addressed in much of the literature regarding treatment and aftercare (NAPN, 1991; Mathews, 1989; Ross, 1991). The policy of waiving confidentiality is discussed as a strategy to provide consistent information to the people involved in the treatment team. Mathews (1989) believes that without the free flow of information between treatment providers there can be no effective and responsible way to treat the offender. According to social control theory, the youth must be monitored in many different settings and by different people to ensure he does not re-offend (Ross, 1988). The youth must be made aware of the need for inter-agency contact. According to Ross (1988) this departure from the traditional client/ therapist confidentiality is necessary because it is believed that these youths use secrecy and manipulation when they offend. These secrets must be brought out in the open in order for the youth to explore his offending behavior.

The secret of sexual offending is often addressed in the literature as minimization and denial. A complete study of admitters and deniers among adolescent sexual offenders has been conducted by Sefarbi (1990). The Uniform Data

Collection System that collects data from practitioners in this field in the United States and Canada, notes that adolescent sex offender evaluators felt that the youths were open and honest with them less than one quarter of the time (Ryan, Davis, Miyoshi, Lane & Wilson, 1987). However, It is to be noted that only 55% of the evaluators had read the victim statements, thus had little on which to base their belief about dishonesty among the youths. According to practitioners in the field, the sharing of information traditionally considered confidential will take away the chance for secrecy. This will provide the youth with external controls, through monitoring, until he has established internal controls.

Aftercare and social support for offenders.

Ross (1988) proposes, in his Correctional Sex Offender Treatment Program Guidelines, that upon release from treatment there be a sex offence specific aftercare group. Along with this group he encourages the use of other necessary therapy or treatment, necessary safeguards in the home and community and a written discharge plan. The responsibility is placed in part with the offender to find ways of getting the types of help he needs. Knopp (1985) indicates that one of the treatment goals should be to have each offender have access to post treatment groups for assistance in maintaining a safe lifestyle. Backup assistance can be provided with the help of a hot line,

access to former group treatment sessions and/or their individual therapist, and the opportunity to attend self help groups. (Knopp, 1985; Mathews, 1989; NAPN, 1993).

The family is often seen to be the place where one gets positive support and help. In the aftercare component of treatment the parents or care givers of the youth, play an important role. In A Guide for Parents of Young Sex Offenders (Gil, 1987), parents are encouraged to support their youth by letting him know that what he did was wrong while at the same time reassuring him that he is loved. Further advice to parents is to let the youth know that they will be on the youth's side through the process. Gil recommends parents set up good support systems for themselves. A support group for parents is recognized as a program component in some treatment programs (Knopp, 1982). In Colorado it was noted that the parents involved in support groups became much more positively supportive of their youth's treatment involvement (Isaac, 1986).

In outpatient treatment programs the family will have most contact with the adolescent during and after treatment (Ross, 1988). The parents are expected to monitor and supervise the youth. For this reason, families who are evaluated as being supportive can be included in the treatment process. According to Ross, if the family is unable to provide support and cooperate, alternative arrangements should be made. Alternative care givers may

include foster families, or extended family. According to Mathews (1989), family members encouraged to participate in all aspects of treatment enhance the treatment process. They will help treatment providers extend their resources to provide consistency between the counselling sessions and the adolescent's home life. In order to prevent relapse the family must understand the youth's abuse cycle and the risk indicators in relation to offending (Ryan & Lane, 1991). Parents agree to cooperate with the treatment process by their willingness to change family behavior patterns that negatively affect their child.

According to Ryan and Lane (1991) one family problem that often needs work is the lack of emotional support provided to the youth. Families themselves may need to seek out the advice of other parents with similar experiences. Peer counselling for families gives family members a chance to see a family that is coping successfully and helping to prevent a relapse. These peer counsellors provide hope for families that there is life after treatment (Ryan & Lane, 1991).

Friends become increasingly important in the lives of adolescents as they mature. Friends may provide a forum to be heard when parents seem unapproachable. Unfortunately, adolescents who sexually offend often lack supportive friendships and are isolated from their peers. In a study conducted by Fehrenbach, Smith, Monastersky and Deisker

(1986) it was noted that 65% of the 305 adolescent sex offenders studied showed evidence of significant social isolation. Almost one third reported having no friends at all and another one third reported having a few friends but none they felt close to. Generally the results of the study indicated that social, school and family environments did not provide successful experiences. Poor self esteem was apparent in these youths. Most youth find that support is provided by either friends or family, but for the youth who sexual offends this may not be the case. Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, and Mann (1989) studied four demographically matched groups of adolescents (N=60) including; sexual offenders, adolescent offenders, non-violent offenders, non offenders. They found that sex offenders felt estranged in their relations with others. Parents of the youths who sexually offended felt their sons were less emotionally bonded with their peers than did the parents of the other groups of adolescents studied. These researchers point out that the feelings of estrangement could be either the cause or the consequence of the sexual offending.

Many treatment programs include a peer group atmosphere either through group therapy or residential programming. Ongoing access to this peer group upon completion of treatment is seen as an asset in aftercare/follow-up planning (Knopp, 1985; Mathews, 1989; Ross, 1990; Ryan & Lane, 1991). This ongoing access to the peer group may be

provided in the form of a long term support group, providing "treatment boosters" (Ryan & Lane, 1991).

In Canada, literature about adolescents who sexually offend is "not well developed" (Mathews & Stermac, 1989, p. 3). In the mid 1980's, Mathews and Stermac conducted a tracking study on adolescents who sexually offend and concluded this about aftercare:

...incarceration and treatment is incomplete without a planned aftercare component built into the sentence... Provision needs to be made so that upon release from prison or upon completion of a community based program, adolescent sex offenders can obtain back up assistance in the form of a help-line; access peer supports, or return to the group when necessary (Mathews & Stermac, 1989, p. 22).

Summary of adolescent sexual offender literature.

In conclusion, there is a growing body of literature in the area of adolescent sexual offenders focused primarily on causation, treatment modalities and demographics. I have found little reference to, or research regarding, support during and after treatment in the literature. Support in the literature on adolescent sexual offenders is talked about as monitoring and consistency of an aftercare team. Support is about getting parents to help the youth maintain his changed behavior in order to avoid re-offending. There is recognition of the importance of a continuum of care that provides service for the youth from the time he comes to the attention of the authorities, through to the time he is returned to his community after custodial care and/or treatment. While monitoring may be one form of support for

these adolescents, there are many other aspects of support to be considered. What we do know about adolescent sexual offenders is that they are not well regarded in society, and therefore their support may be compromised. In the literature the youths' perception of what is supportive to them is not discussed. What is their experience of support? How do adolescents who sexually offend get the support they need? What does support mean to them? I turn now to the literature on social support and particularly to the research on the adolescent's perception of social support in order to understand how support is conceptualized and what research findings exist.

Social Support Literature

The literature regarding social support is reviewed to provide a theoretical basis to my research on support for adolescent sexual offenders. The concept of social support will be discussed followed by social support research and literature specific to adolescents.

Conceptualization of social support.

Social support is a concept that has many definitions, methods of measurement and expected and unexpected outcomes. It has been written about in social work, medical, sociological, and psychological journals for the past 15 years with the majority of literature being written in the mid 1980's. Despite conceptual difficulties, research indicates that social support protects us from or even

directly reduces the impact of life's stressors (Bronfenbrenner, Moen & Garbarino, 1984; Cobb, 1976; Gad & Johnson, 1980).

Social support is defined by Cobb (1976) as information that leads a person to believe that he or she is cared for, loved, valued and a member of a network of mutual obligation. Shumaker and Brownell (1984) defined social support as " an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or recipient to be intended to enhance the well being of the recipient" (p. 11). The concept of exchange, according to Shumaker and Brownell, refers to the perceptions of at least two participants. As the outcome of the exchange is tied to the perceived intention of either participant, the actual effects of the support may be positive, negative or non-existent. This definition differs from that of Cobb (1976) in that it notes that the outcome of the exchange of resources may not always be seen as positive.

Social support may be explained in a structural way by describing the size of a support network, the density, or the frequency of contact between members. Support is explained in a functional way by looking at emotional, informational or material support (Callaghan & Morrissey, 1993). A number of researchers in the social support field have been interested in "social networks" that provide social support (Barth, 1983; Belle, 1989; Mitchell &

Trickett, 1980).

Minkler (1987) defines social networks as a web of interpersonal relationships in which people are embedded. People derive social support in the form of resources from the networks. She contends that a large body of literature supports the hypothesis that the sort of "patient who has the disease is likely to be one who is not immersed in a strong supportive network..." (p. 2). Garbarino (1983) describes a social support network as "a set of interconnected relationships among a group of people that provides enduring patterns of nurturance (in any or all forms) and provides contingent reinforcement for efforts to cope with life on a day to day basis" (p.5). For Mitchell and Trickett (1980) social networks are a way to cut across the boundaries that divide (ie. formal networks versus informal networks) in order to examine the total social field within which the person is embedded. Social networks are further categorized into a number of dimensions, according to Mitchell and Trickett, that include size (the number of people encompassed by the network), density (the extent to which people in the network know and contact each other independent of the focal individual) and multiplexity (indication of whether relationships were characterized by one or several types of exchange).

"Personal support networks" (Cochran, 1991) evolve from social networks. This type of social network is anchored to

a specific person or family. Personal support networks are generally defined by Cochran to be a specific set of linkages among defined sets of people. These linkages range from information sharing and emotional support, to tangible help and access to role models. "These networks consist of relatives, neighbors, co-workers and other friends who are directly linked to a family member and who may be linked to one another as well" (p. 46). Cochran says that personal support networks are more than social supports and may be both stressful and supportive. They provide opportunities and security as well. Cochran conducted research regarding personal support networks and found that generalizations cannot be made across ecological niches. The networks of poverty stricken and less educated people are socially constructed for them by their life situation. "Our model conveys the power struggle between cultural and social structural forces on the one hand and the individual on the other for control over the content of the personal social network" (p. 51). Cochran's view of the personal social network is from the ecological perspective where socio-economic, and cultural influences are considered to be the context of each persons support system. Social networks provide the framework in which social support can be accessed. Social support goes beyond the framework from which it is organized in the form of a network, to identify available resources and determine the providers of these

resources.

Despite how social support is talked about - social networks or personal social networks - the focus is on human relationships (Griffiths, 1985). These human relationships may take place in natural settings or in formal settings. Within the support literature there are two broad categories identifying the systems that provide most of us with support: informal social support systems or formal social support systems. According to Morosan and Pearson (1981) formal support systems include networks and teams made up of trained, and usually professional helpers. These support systems may be a part of a larger institutional program and may be made up of an eclectic array of professionals who provide service independently or as a team. Baker (1977) believes there is a growing recognition amongst human service professionals that there are natural help giving systems already in existence that operate separate from professional service delivery. He notes a number of roles professionals may play to complement natural support systems. These roles include professionals making referral to self help groups, or establishing self help groups for certain populations. Along with these roles professionals can offer consultation to already established natural support systems. Literature that refers to formal and informal support systems often makes a plea for the collaboration of informal and formal support systems and an

acknowledgment by professionals that informal systems are vital components of people's lives (Baker, 1977; Gottlieb & Todd, 1979; Whittaker, 1983). Summers, Dell'Oliver, Turnbull, Benson, Santelli, Campbell and Seigel-Causey (1990) were looking for procedures that were both helpful and positively perceived by both families and practitioners in dealing with special needs children. Focus groups produced findings that were divided into several categories. One of these categories addressed the issue of formal and informal support. In speaking about formal support (knowledgeable, capable and professional), and informal support (emotionally responsive) it was found that professionals in the field of early intervention viewed emotionalism and professionalism as incongruent. The professional's view that formal and informal support were entirely separate entities was not shared by the families. Whittaker (1983) points out that the blending of formal and informal helping is possible and desirable given that social support networks serve a variety of functions rather than a single purpose.

Informal support takes place within naturally occurring networks of family, friends, neighbors and peers (Gottlieb & Todd, 1979). Baker (1977) identifies natural support systems as groupings which provide attachment among and between people and groups so that one's ability to adapt to crisis and life change is improved. He uses the word

natural to differentiate professional caregiving systems in the community from systems which include family, friendship groupings, local informal caregivers, voluntary service groups.

Gottlieb and Todd (1979) point out that people have always solved problems, addressed life's challenges and joys, completed tasks, and dealt with collective issues through an ongoing exchange of resources and skills with members of their personal communities. They go on to say that it is likely that the "vitality, richness, accessibility, and sensitivity" (p. 4) of these naturally occurring support systems have a significant impact on the adaptation of a person and the community as a whole. This perspective is seen by these researchers to be a shift from the dominant view that individuals are responsible for their psychological health and that when help is needed one should get it from a trained professional. Gottlieb and Todd believe there is a role for professionals to play but it must be considered from within the context of natural support systems. Formal social support may only serve to supplement what already exists in people's every day lives.

Gottlieb (Gottlieb & Todd, 1979) developed a classification system that described informal helping behaviors. He developed this system by interviewing forty sole support mothers regarding their experience of informal helping. Twenty-six categories of helping behaviors arose

from these interviews. These categories were further divided into four classes of influences. The first class referred to "emotionally sustaining behaviour" which described personal qualities and behaviors of the helper that promoted emotionally supportive conditions for the helpee. Categories under this class include talking (non-focused), reassurance, encouragement, listening, reflecting understanding, respect and concern, trust, intimacy and companionship. The second class was labelled "problem solving behaviors" which include categories that describe ways in which the helper supplements the helpee's coping resources. This is done by giving new information or reframing existing information and by intervening on a personal level in a problem situation. These categories include talking (focused), clarification, suggestions, direction, information about sources of stress, referral, buffering helpee from sources of stress, and providing material aid. Class three refers to "indirect personal influence" which reflects unconditional access (unconditional availability), and readiness to act (conveys readiness to engage in future problem solving). The final class Gottlieb describes as "environmental action", where the helper intervenes in the helpee's environment to reduce the source of stress. Gottlieb's classification system (Gottlieb & Todd, 1979) provides insight into the way in which these sole support mothers describe their experiences

of receiving help from informal sources. He hoped to encourage professionals to look at how they could supplement and strengthen the ties that already exist among people in the community. At the same time Gottlieb hoped his findings would "lead to improvements in the well-being of individual members and to a sense of collective esteem and power" (p. 184).

Gottlieb's research may fall under the category of perceived social support as opposed to verified support because his inquiry looked at support from the perception of sole support mothers. The literature includes a large body of research on perceived social support. This concept will be further discussed under perceived support in adolescence.

Adolescents and social support.

This section will explore the social support literature in relation to adolescents. There will be a special emphasis on the area of perceived social support for adolescents, as my research is concerned with the perceptions of adolescent sexual offenders as they experience support in their lives.

Adolescence is seen to be a stage of development characterized by individuation, hormonal changes, and the increased importance of friends. While youths are seeking independence and developing their sense of self, they look to family members, peers and friends for support. At times relations between parents and adolescents may become

strained. Burke and Weir (1979) examined the experience of adolescents seeking help with problems from parents and peers and found that a significant proportion of adolescents find limitations in the help and support provided to them. They state that a review of the literature connects the quality of adolescent's support networks with self-esteem, suicidal behaviors, delinquency, emotional illness and psychosomatic symptoms. Adolescents must have access to supportive people and groups in order to move through adolescence with as few detrimental effects as possible.

Belle (1989) expresses a concern with the lack of social support research done with children and youths. She speculates that methodologies that employ questionnaires and interviews may be seen a problematic with children. Also, it seems that some researchers believe that children's support networks are merely an extension of the parents (Belle, 1989).

Research regarding adolescents and social support is increasing. Areas of research include examining social support from a developmental perspective (Cochran & Brassard, 1979; Feiring & Lewis, 1991; Furman 1989), to an ecological perspective (Gottlieb & Todd, 1979). Other research looks at adolescents' social support and the specific area of psychological well being (Burke & Weir, 1979; Compass, Slavin, Wagner & Vannatta, 1986), delinquency (Hawkins & Fraser, 1983; Windle, 1992), suicide (Griffiths,

1985), and high risk youths (Cauce, Felner & Primavera, 1982). Much research focuses on social support in relation to family and/or friends (Berndt, 1989; Burke and Weir, 1979; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest & Gariepy, 1988; Cauce, 1986; Parish & Parish, 1991). Particular exploration was done in the area of gender differences regarding support to adolescents (Camarena, Sarigiani & Petersen, 1990; Fischer, Sollie & Morrow, 1986; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992) and more specifically gender, ethnicity and age (Vaux, 1985). Research in the field of adolescents and social support is as broad as the interests of each particular researcher.

The notion of perceived social support surfaces frequently when looking at the social support literature on adolescents. (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Gad & Johnson, 1980, Gottlieb & Todd, 1979; Griffiths, 1985; Love, 1992; Procidana & Heller, 1983). Procidana and Heller (1983) describe perceived social support as the impact social support networks have on the individual, and "the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled" (p. 2).

In his doctoral work on adolescents and suicide Griffiths (1985) defines perceived social support "as the perception of the supportive nature of the social support system" (p. 62). He states that "it usually denotes a subjective assessment of the helpfulness of the social

support at play on the part of the person being supported" (p. 62). Griffith notes that an axiom of social psychology is that events or circumstances in the every day world affect a person "only to the extent and in the form in which they are perceived" (p. 62). Without the perception that one has support or access to support, opportunities to utilize these systems may be missed.

Procidano and Heller (1983) conducted three studies to validate a measurement tool to be used to study perceived social support for adolescents from both family and friends. They propose that clarification around social support networks and perceived social support is one way of defining the social support construct. According to these researchers, social networks "refer to the social connections provided by the environment and can be assessed in terms of structural and functional dimensions. On the other hand perceived social support refers to the impact networks have on the individual"(p. 2).

The perception of social support is just one element in a person's assessment of and ability to cope with stress. The search for support often results from the perception that there is a threat one needs to respond to, a way to respond to it, and the belief that there is someone within one's support network who can help (Procidano & Heller, 1983). According to Procidano and Heller perceived social support and support provided by networks are not the same

things. "Perceived social support is influenced by within-person factors, including both long-standing traits on the one hand, and temporal changes in attitude or mood on the other" (p. 2). Both of these factors may influence the perception of whether support is readily available or has been provided.

In the research conducted by Procidano and Heller (1983), they measured the extent to which a person perceived that his/her need for support, information and feedback were fulfilled by friends and by family. They measured this support by trying to induce changes in mood regarding both family and friends. Findings from the three studies conducted with subjects in their late adolescence concluded that perceived social support was seen to protect a person from the adverse effects of stress. The researchers considered that "symptomatic" people either perceive less support, or due to their pathology actually receive less support from others. The researchers stated that for the youths studied it appeared that lack of family based social support was related to reported "psychopathology". Further, Procidano and Heller found that perceived social support from family was not affected by positively or negatively induced changes, while perceived social support from friends was vulnerable to negative induction. This may mean that college youth friend-networks are often new where as family relations are of longer duration. Longer duration relations

suggest stable social support which is less susceptible to temporary changes in attitudinal set. In sum, these researchers state that youths with high social support are more open in talking about themselves to companions. The support these participants perceived was probably not only as a result of support from others but in an interactive way also influenced by their own ability to link to others (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

It appears from the research that support as perceived by adolescents and young adults has an effect on psychological well-being. Compass, Slavin, Wagner and Vannatta (1986) looked at the relationship between major life events, perceived social support and psychological disorders in 243 adolescents from 16 to 19 years of age. They hypothesized that lower levels of perceived social support would be associated with higher levels of disorders in these youths. It was found lower levels of satisfaction with social support were significantly related to symptoms of depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity and somatization while the available numbers of people as sources of support were not related to those problems. Thus, the actual numbers of people available to provide support was not a determining factor in predicting the symptoms. The perception of social support was a determining factor however. These findings were confirmed by Love's (1992) research. Love suggests that social

support levels and satisfaction are predictors of the adolescent's ability to attain desired goals and expectations regarding the responsiveness of the environment to the attainment of one's goals. Love found that when students were satisfied with their social supports, the level or number of relationships seemed to make little difference. "Satisfaction may be a more powerful predictor than the social support measures more frequently used, which generally focus on level or amount of support" (p. 12).

Some studies reveal that perceived social support may be connected to the personal characteristics of the youths and their history. Cauce, Felner and Primavera (1982) studied 250 students from grades 9 to 11 in an inner city school in the United States. The researchers studied highly stressed, lower socioeconomic youths and their relationship to structures of social support. Findings revealed that there are definable dimensions of social support for these youths. Both the perceived helpfulness of that support and the relationship to measures of adjustment may vary according to the personal characteristics of the youth and the concerned area of adjustment. Cauce (1986) had similar findings in a later piece of research when he examined how one's perception of support affects one's social competence. He did this by studying the effects of early adolescent friendships. He suggests that an individual's perception of available social support is influenced by that person's

prior history of supportive interactions, as well as individual differences and styles of coping. Stress levels and demands of the environment were also factors affecting perceptions of social support. This environmental perspective is important when trying to understand what affects the support network of an adolescent.

Family and friends are important aspects in the every day world of the adolescents. Social support is sought from both parents and friends depending on the circumstances of the situation, and the age of the youth seeking the support. Furman and Buhrmester (1992) studied 549 youths from grades 4, 7, ten and college and found that same sex friends were perceived to be as supportive as parents in the 7th grades and were the most frequent providers of support in the tenth grade. In college romantic partners along with friends and mothers received the highest rating for support.

Burke and Weir (1979) also studied what kind of support was provided by parents and peers. They examined the experiences of adolescents when they seek help with their problems and concerns within their natural support systems. The researchers interviewed 275 adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 20 and found that peers, mothers and then fathers were the choice for helpers. They examined four aspects of helping relationships with each participant as experienced with his/her mother, father, and a peer. The four aspects of helping relationships that were examined were likelihood

of informing helpers; typical helper reactions; satisfaction with help received; and the number of problem topics discussed with helpers. Results indicated that adolescents were more likely to let their peers, than their parents, know when they had a bad day or were feeling tense or anxious. However, when they went to their parents it was more likely to be their mother than their father. These adolescents were also more satisfied with their peers' help than their parents' help. The findings also indicated that the response behaviors of the helpers had a direct relationship to certain interpersonal behaviors of the youth's well-being. The helper's response had the effect of either increasing or decreasing the likelihood that the adolescent would disclose problems. The way the helper typically responds can impact on the range of problems the youth is prepared to share with that person. The importance of this research to people who work with or live with youths is that the response of the helper may determine the level of satisfaction for the adolescent with the treatment they receive. The way in which one responds to an adolescent can have the effect of either limiting or encouraging the range of actual problems the youths will reveal and discuss. This in turn will influence the amount of information the youth is willing to share with the helper.

Summary of Social Support Literature.

Social support networks continue to be an important

human resource for people of all ages. Today, more than ever, professional or formal support services are available in great numbers in most communities. Despite easy access to formal support services, informal supports are preferred by many people. In time of need family and friends are sought for advice, comfort, material aide and care.

Adolescence is a time when one seeks to define oneself; to move away from family-centered activities to become increasingly involved with friends and peers. Social support networks provide the adolescent with access to adults and peers for support. Many youths from dysfunctional homes find it difficult to seek support as they lack the necessary social skills to do so. This may be due in part to poor parental modelling, however no one cause can be identified to explain it. Issues such as self-esteem, availability of support, and ability to seek help when needed may stand in the way of a youth developing an adequate social support network. The youth's perception of support would seem to be more important than the number of people actually available to give support. Some researchers have chosen to investigate social support by looking at what one perceives as available within their social support network and how this network is used.

The concern that I wish to examine here is one addressed in many research studies and in much of the literature on social support. The concern involves a

problem with the conceptualization of social support. Social support, according to many, has not been operationally defined and therefore is surrounded in conceptual vagueness (Alloway & Bebbington, 1987; Bronfenbrenner, Moen, Garbarino, 1984; Callaghan & Morrisey, 1993; Procidano & Heller, 1983). "For example, few researchers have defined 'social support' explicitly. The very label conveys an intuitive sense of the phenomenon, and its apparent obviousness may be a major reason for inadequate theoretical work in this area" (Brownell & Shumaker, 1984, p. 5). From the literature it is apparent that there are many conceptualizations of support, however I was unable to find the youths' experience of support in this literature. Most research was intended to study certain people in the youth's life or certain aspects of social support or networks. Most often preconceived definitions of support were part of the research design. My research intends to ask about support without providing any definitions or conceptualizations. This study intended to find out about what support meant to the youths.

The phenomenological orientation which I have chosen for my study attempts to understand a phenomenon through the everyday experiences of the study participants. The perceptions of the youths becomes the starting point for my research with adolescent sexual offenders.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Design

The research question that guided this study was: what are the experiences of support of four adolescent sexual offenders in Saskatchewan? I drew upon the methodology of phenomenology to guide my inquiry, recognizing that there are many different types of phenomenology. The use of phenomenological methodology allowed me to understand the experiences of support in the lives of four adolescent sexual offenders. Social change research articulated by Kirby and McKenna (1989) also informed this study.

According to van Manen (1990),

Phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld - the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it. Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (p. 9).

It intends to articulate what happens in the everyday life of people, before reflection or theory is added. Thus it is the study of the life world or the natural attitude of everyday life. Phenomenologists intend to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning in everyday experience. This study is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of support in the everyday experiences of adolescents who sexually offend.

One of my concerns regarding adolescent sexual offenders is the lack of voice given to these youths. I

have chosen phenomenology as the orientation for this inquiry since one of the tenets of phenomenology is the inclusion of the original voice of the people (van Manen, 1990). In this research my aim is to let the youths speak for themselves.

In the following pages I will describe the selection of participants, data generation, data analysis, ethical considerations and the means of attaining methodological rigor in this study.

Participants

The point of phenomenological research is to 'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning of significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience (van Manen, 1984, p. 55).

Participants chosen for this study were young people who were able to articulate their experiences of support as they lived them in their everyday life. Participants were purposely selected to include male youths who: were convicted of at least one sexual offence; were between the ages of 14-17 at the time of their offences; and were participating or had participated in an outpatient treatment program for sexual offenders in Saskatchewan.

Males were selected for this study because research with adolescent sexual offenders reveals that 91-93% of reported offenders are male (Ryan & Lane, 1991). The age group of 14-17 years was chosen as these youths are at

similar stages of development and fall within the jurisdiction of the Young Offenders Act.

Sexual abuse is a crime, constructed legally, based on societal norms and values (NAPN, 1993). There are a range of sexual offences and sexual offenders, defined in Canada, vis the Criminal Code. For the purpose of this research, sexually offensive behavior is based on the legal construct of the behavior. An adolescent offender is defined as anyone convicted, pursuant to the Young Offenders Act in Canada. In the Young Offenders Act (Rodrigues, 1991) a young person means:

a person who is or, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, appears to be twelve years of age or more, but under eighteen years of age and, where the context requires, includes any person who is charged under this Act with having committed an offence while he was a young person or is found guilty of an offence under this Act (Rodrigues, p. 616).

This research explored the experience of adolescent sexual offenders in depth. I interviewed three youths on three different occasions, allowing me to have prolonged contact with these participants. By the third interview redundancies in the data were noted. However, saturation was not achieved by continued selection of new participants into this study. Further, these youths were located several hours away from where I lived thus accessability became a consideration in choosing the sample size. Originally, in this study I intended to interview five youths; however, one youth who agreed to participate did not attend the mutually

agreed upon interviews and a second youth completed one interview and then moved out of province. Thus, three youths were interviewed three times each and the fourth youth on one occasion only.

The youths were attending (the fourth participant had finished) an outpatient adolescent sexual offender treatment facility on a weekly basis. Their attendance in treatment was court ordered and monitored by a youth worker from the Department of Social Services.

Study participants were recruited through the treatment personnel at the outpatient clinic. I wrote to the clinic to ask if I could access participants through their adolescent sexual offender program. The ethics committee of the clinic agreed to allow me to recruit participants from the clinic's program. I was assigned an on site supervisor at the clinic to provide me with names of possible participants. A list of 25 names was given to me. These possible participants were screened for age and ability to communicate based on treatment staff's close and frequent involvement with the youth. I then attempted to contact eight youths; two chose not to participate and I was unable to establish contact with one. The youths who refused to participate felt that they did not want to discuss anything to do with their sexual offending and indicated they were trying to get on with their lives. One explanation for the refusal of some youths may be that they were in a different

stage of the therapeutic process regarding their sexual offender treatment. Five youths agreed to participate and initial meeting times were set up for these youths. One youth did not attend any of the interviews and a second attended only one of the three interviews agreed on. The three youths who remained were given twenty dollars upon completion of the interviews. They were not expecting pay for their involvement; the gift of money was given out of appreciation for their participation.

Generation of Data

Data were collected with four adolescent sexual offenders through in depth conversational interviews, which were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Three youths were interviewed three times each and one youth was interviewed once as he moved out of province before the second interview. Conversational interviews were used to "develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to one hour each and took place over a three month period (September to December, 1993). They were held where most convenient, either at the clinic or another agreed upon location.

The initial conversations were guided by some pre-established areas of inquiry (see Interviewing Guide, Appendix E). I wanted to start with similar information

from each youth, thus an interview guide ensured initial consistency. The intention of the first conversational interview was to establish rapport, while gathering initial data on the meaning of support from the youth's perspective. I used the interview guide in a semi-structured (Patton, 1980) format leaving room for probing and exploration of subjects that arose from our conversations.

In order to gain experience in phenomenological interviewing I conducted a pilot conversation with a sixteen year old youth (non-sexual offender). I had known this youth for some time and he was able to give me useful feedback about the conversational interview process. I learned three important things from the pilot: to use less lead in conversation to the question as my question got lost in the lead in; to let the participant direct the conversation; and to keep quiet and listen. I did not become an immediate expert at phenomenological interviewing and struggled with all these areas through out the conversations. The pilot experience made me more consciously aware of my own interviewing style and what needed to change in order to get rich data from the youths.

Before data collection started and during analysis I took time to record my assumptions and thoughts about support given my experience and the literature that I reviewed. This "bracketing" of my own knowledge made me consciously aware of connections I had made regarding

support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders. Bracketing according to van Manen (1990) is "to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories" (p. 47). Van Manen discusses the need to explicate one's assumptions and pre-understandings in order to "come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealed character" (p. 47). This process allowed me to hear what the participants had to say rather than what I expected them to say. The activity of bracketing my pre-understanding and recording these thoughts in a journal gave me an available reference to my own preconceived thoughts and beliefs. I re-read these bracketed thoughts to ensure that I was not unconsciously including them as part of what the youths were telling me.

After the initial conversation there were two subsequent ones with three of the youths each month over a three month period. The subsequent conversations were informal and were intended to obtain a greater amount of rich data by developing a close relationship with the youths. Subsequent conversational interviews were based on initial interpretations of prior interviews recognizing that each youth had different life circumstances influencing

their support. Each youth had their own definition of support, a number of different expectations, and different experiences which guided each subsequent conversation. I transcribed each interview upon completion and explored the contents to identify the youth's experiences that could be discussed in greater detail upon the next interview. From the data several different themes emerged which I pursued in greater depth at subsequent interviews.

After the three months of data collection I invited the youths to participate in an optional, informal debriefing session to discuss the initial findings from my research. Only three of the four youths were able to attend as one youth had left the province and was unavailable. The debriefing session was held at the clinic after initial data analysis was complete. There were three purposes of the debriefing session. First, I presented the three youths with the themes that had emerged from the data to find out if the youths recognized their experiences in the themes as I had described them. Secondly, I asked the youths if there was any further information they wanted to add to what I had presented or pieces of it with which they did not agree. The third purpose of the debriefing session was to allow the youths opportunity to talk about their experience of being a research participant. After minor adjustments were made to the themes, as presented, the youths agreed that the interpretations and descriptions I had presented them were

indeed reflective of their experience of support.

Analysis of Data

To analyze the conversations I had with the youths I used Hycner's Guidelines for Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data (1985). Initially I transcribed all conversations verbatim and noted on the transcript any non-verbal communication that was part of the conversation. I left a margin on the right side of the data to provide room to note the units of general meaning taken from the transcripts.

I listened to each conversation twice and re-read each transcript twice for a sense of the whole. After becoming familiar with the conversational data I went over each word, phrase, sentence and paragraph of the transcripts to discover the units of meaning expressed by each youth. At this time I did not address the research question to the data as I wanted to be able to consider the total conversation within its context. This openness allows the researcher to consider the meaning in all parts of the conversation, not just the ones that are directly connected to the research question. These "units of general meaning" evolving from the data are described by Hycner (1985) as "the words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows" (p.

282). Units of general meaning were extracted from all conversations and listed along side the transcripts.

After the units of general meaning were recorded, it became necessary to find the units of meaning that were relevant to the research question. In order to discover these units I addressed the following question to the general units: "Is this an essential constituent of the experience of support as experienced by this youth?"

After addressing the question to the general meaning units it reduced them to ones that were relevant to the phenomenon of support. At this point I invited an independent person to verify the units of relevant meaning. The reader I asked to help is an experienced practitioner who has provided support and treatment for adolescents who sexually offend over the past ten years. He was able to verify my findings by reading over the transcripts and discussing them with me. He reviewed the meaning units I had defined and then confirmed the clusters of meaning units I had delineated. We then discussed the themes that best fit with the clusters. His comments are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four of this thesis under the researcher's experience. According to Hycner (1985) when there is significant agreement between the researcher and independent reader then there is reason to believe the "researcher has bracketed his/her presuppositions and has been rigorous in his/her approach in explicating the data" (p. 286).

After removing the units of meaning that were redundant, given their repetition of others previously recorded, I clustered the units of relevant meaning. I found that some units of relevant meaning had shared characteristics thus they were clustered together with others. Common threads or themes united several discrete units of general meaning. These themes were tentatively established to give some way to express the core elements of these clusters. The process of clustering involved both a logical and intuitive component. The word emerge will be used to describe this process.

I then returned to the youths in an optional, informal debriefing session. The three youths who provided the bulk of the conversational data participated. During the informal debriefing session the youths were presented with three of the themes. The three themes were validated by the youths as being essences of support. After I introduced each theme to the youths, we discussed the core elements of the theme. The youths told me they recognized their experiences of support within the themes. I made one modification based on the feedback from the youths. It focused on the relationship between time and support. The youths identified time and support as a deeper issue than I had described it. During one of the conversational interviews one of the youths had told me that the amount of time one spent with another person was related to the amount

of support he received. When I asked about this he and the other two youths indicated it was not that simple. Time could not be viewed as a single factor in how supported they felt. The connections between time and support were explored a bit further during the informal debriefing session and the results can be found under the theme *it all takes time*. From one of the three themes emerged a fourth.

Finally, a composite summary of all the interviews was prepared that described the phenomenon of support, grounded in the youths' experiences. Each theme was summarized in order to provide the connections and paradoxes involved in these youths' experiences of support. Of essential importance in phenomenology is that the study accurately represents the experiences of participants; this is what some qualitative methodologists have described as "credibility". "A qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful description or interpretations of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 30).

In final preparation for writing this thesis I identified both general and specific themes for all the conversations. From the data themes were articulated that ran through most of the conversations. Further, there were themes that provided variation from the general threads. Similar themes from all interviews were clustered to form a

general theme that fit the threads emerging from the conversational data. Then the themes that were unique to individual conversations were explored. Titles for the themes were chosen from the participants' own words.

At this point the general and specific themes were placed back into the overall context from which they emerged. Each theme interconnects with the next. One theme is taken from the rest and talked about individually only to allow the reader to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of support. However, it must be returned to its original place in order to be understood in context. One theme without the other does not represent the full experience of support for these youths. Each theme is part of the whole. This contextualization is important in recognizing the unique experiences of participants. In no way does the sum of these themes represent the total experience of support for these youths. Rose (1990) expresses it well when she described her phenomenological findings related to women's psychological health "it is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that transcends the sum of its parts" (p. 61).

The description of my data analysis process may leave the impression that this was a linear process. In fact I found that analysis starts even before I began collecting data, in reading relevant literature, and carries on well after you think you are done! It seemed that almost daily I

had new insights or interpretations of the data the more I read and reread the transcripts and the more I talked to people about my findings. Of importance was keeping track of my decision trail so that others would be able to follow it.

Rigor

Research, regardless of the orientation, must meet standards of methodological rigor. In phenomenology a balance is needed to allow researchers to do relevant research about a phenomenon without being held to a rigid set of instructional steps. "No method can be arbitrarily imposed on a phenomenon since that would do a great injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). I have used Sandelowski's (1986) criteria of rigor to ensure that this research is a meaningful product. She says this about methodological rigor: "the debate surrounding the methodological rigor of qualitative research is confounded by its diversity and by lack of consensus about the rules to which it ought to conform and whether it is comparable to quantitative research" (p. 29).

Sandelowski (1986) has used the work of Guba and Lincoln (1981) to identify four factors relating to tests of rigor and thereby presenting a framework by which to assess rigor. These factors are: credibility, applicability, consistency and neutrality. I will discuss each of these factors as they apply to my research in order to consider

the rigor of this study.

Credibility is the first factor considered in this research study. In qualitative research, truth is an elusive goal (Sandelowski, 1986). The truth value of a qualitative study generally lies in the discovery of human phenomena or experience as they are lived and seen by participants rather than when verified by previous conceptions of the experiences. For this reason Sandelowski suggests that credibility rather than truth value of qualitative research be evaluated.

A qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own. (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 30)

This study is credible as it provides an accurate interpretation of the experience of support in the lives of four youths who are adolescent sexual offenders. Its credibility is enhanced by the process of taking the information back to the youths in the informal debriefing session to see if they recognize the interpretations as their own experience. Another test of credibility is that other readers can recognize the experience after only reading about it. I have had two readers during the process of this research, one who was asked to explore my decision trail and another who read the final product of my study. Both provided me with useful feedback and were able to recognize the experience of support within my findings.

The credibility of qualitative research is enhanced by a deliberate focus on the influence of the subject and researcher on each other. In Chapter Four there are two sections that describe and interpret the experiences of both myself as the researcher and the youths as research participants. The experiences of being a researcher were recorded by myself in a journal I kept separate from the interview data. This journal was used to explore the experience of being a researcher. This deliberate focus on how the researcher influenced and was influenced by the participants addresses the concern that the researcher will become "enmeshed" with the participants (Sandelowski, 1986).

The second factor Sandelowski (1986) considers is applicability or fittingness. This research was conducted with four adolescent sexual offenders who have had experiences of support. The findings of this study are confined to the space and time in which these youths were living their experiences of support. While many qualitative researchers believe that the general can be found in the specific there has been no attempt to make these findings generalizable. Instead, what is hoped is that the findings of this research fit into contexts outside of this study situation and that other adolescent sexual offenders can recognize the experiences of these youths as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experience. Sandelowski refers to this as "fittingness", a criterion by which the

applicability of this study be evaluated.

Sandelowski (1986) discusses participant selection under this fittingness criterion. She suggests that the subjects be selected who can illuminate the phenomenon being studied. Hycner (1985) states

It should be remembered that the phenomenological researcher is seeking to illuminate human phenomena...therefore randomness, or participants unable to articulate the experiences, might, in fact, keep them from fully investigating the phenomenon in the depthful manner necessary (p. 294).

I have identified how the four participants for my study were chosen. I chose five adolescents who had been convicted of sexual offending and who told me they would be willing to discuss their experiences of support. Finding five adolescent sexual offenders willing to participate in my study was a relatively straightforward process. While I was doing my research two other youths were interested in being participants also. They had heard about my research from professionals in the field and were interested in what I was doing. Unfortunately, this was the near the end of my data collection period thus I did not contact them. However it would seem that other adolescent sexual offenders have experiences of support they would like to share.

I have included verbatim examples from the transcripts to allow the youths to speak to the reader through my research. The title of the themes were taken from actual phrases of the youths participating in this research. I

have also included contrasting examples, verbatim, to ensure my findings represent the data. "The findings are well grounded in the life experiences studied and reflect their typical and atypical elements" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 31).

There are three major threats to the applicability of a qualitative study according to Sandelowski (1986). These threats are: the holistic fallacy, the elite bias, and enmeshment with participants. The holistic fallacy "tends to make data look more patterned or regular or congruent than they are" (p. 32). It did become apparent in my research that while these youths had very different experiences of support, there were similarity in the essential themes. Some youths were more articulate than others however their experiences of support were congruent with the others. Where there were contrasting experiences I identified them and included them in the findings of my research.

The elite bias is the second major threat to qualitative research. The elite bias according to Sandelowski (1986) "is a particular problem in qualitative research, because subjects who act as respondents or informants in studies are frequently the most articulate, accessible, or high-status members of their groups" (p. 32). Participants in this study were chosen for their ability to articulate and explain their experiences of support. The limitations of participant selection and involvement in this

study are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Qualitative research is dependent on people with stories to tell. However these stories must be placed in their proper perspective in order to guard against the elite bias. In this way I included the verbatim experience of these youths in the context from which this experience arose in order to make them readily visible. Along with this I compared my findings with current research and literature collected and written by others in the field. This triangulation of data, the literature in the field and my own experiences established the congruence of findings. Where there were incongruencies they were identified.

Enmeshment refers to the danger of the researcher becoming so enmeshed with the research participants that they have trouble identifying their experiences from that of the participants. I addressed this threat by keeping a separate journal for my own thoughts feelings and experiences throughout the research process. I read and re-read my journal to ensure that I remained consciously aware of what my opinions and thoughts were and what the participants' perceptions were. I then included a discussion of my experience of being a researcher as part of the findings.

The third factor Sandelowski discusses refers to consistency or auditability. Auditability according to Sandelowski is "the rigor or merit relating to the

consistency of qualitative findings" (p. 32). A study become auditable when another person can follow the decision trail left by the researcher of that study. This person should be able to come up with similar or comparable findings given the data and the study situation. To address the auditability of my study I asked an adolescent sexual offender therapist to read my transcripts and consider my decision trail. He was able to come up with similar themes from my data. This reader was also able to give me a treatment perspective on the data as he is involved in providing therapy for adolescent sex offenders. This perspective is found in Chapter Four in the section on researcher's experience. This study, along with my decision trail has been discussed with a phenomenological researcher for her comments and reactions. Further, another researcher in the social work field read one complete set of interviews in order to give me feed back and follow the initial stages of data analysis. Along with having a person read the research data and study the decision trail, I have made every attempt to describe my decision trail in this chapter of my thesis. This description about what I did and why I did it are an important part of the rigor of qualitative research.

The final factor Sandelowski (1986) explores regarding rigor in qualitative research is that of neutrality or confirmability. Neutrality refers to researcher bias.

Qualitative research aims to discover the essence of one's experience by reducing the distance between the researcher and participant. There is no belief in objectivity as it is said that a study and its findings "are at least as much a reflection of the investigator as of the phenomenon studied" (p. 34).

It is suggested by Sandelowski (1986) that confirmability be the criterion of neutrality in qualitative research. Confirmability is seen to be achieved when auditability, credibility and applicability are established. I have established these three criteria above to ensure confirmability of my research.

In conclusion, I have used a framework for ensuring rigor as presented by Sandelowski (1986). I have made clear the steps I took to ensure this study is credible, auditable and confirmable. I have identified the three major threats to credibility and fittingness of this study and the process I undertook to address these threats.

Ethical Considerations

In this study ethical considerations were addressed and dealt with as they relate to human subjects. Human subjects approval was obtained from the University of Victoria Human Subjects Review Committee. All research participants were volunteers and were able to discontinue involvement at any time in the project. They were informed of this in writing and verbally (see samples of consent

forms, Appendix B & D). It was explained that their participation was in no way connected to their treatment program. The participants indicated they understood that participation in the research would not stand to gain them any extra credit in their treatment program. Participants were told that if for some reason my research brought up emotional issues for them that a therapist would be made available to meet with them. All but one of these youths were involved in ongoing therapy at the clinic that provided the participants' names. Therefore, any necessary referral would have been made to those therapists. The fourth participant was able to call the clinic if any emotional issues that he needed to discuss arose from my research. This did not become an issue during the time of the data collection.

Prior to participation in the study consent was obtained from the parents/guardians of the youths. This was necessary as the youths were minors and were not legally able to provide consent for themselves. Parents were told that the youths could discontinue involvement in this study at anytime and that the youths' participation would not positively or negatively affect the youths' participation in treatment. As well, approval was granted to me by the Mental Health Services Branch Research Ethics Committee, in Regina, Saskatchewan, allowing me access to the clinic from where participants were recruited. I was also given verbal

permission by the Department of Social Services, Central Office, Regina, Saskatchewan to talk to youths who were in a facility run by the Department.

The youths' names have been changed and pseudonyms used in all recorded materials. All transcripts and tapes were coded with labels that did not include names. The only person who is aware of the subjects' names and addresses is myself and that information was kept confidential. I locked the list of names and addresses in my desk. Care was taken to keep the transcripts in a secure place. The reader who studied the transcripts to follow my decision trail agreed to confidentiality. The tapes and the master list of names and addresses of the participants will be destroyed upon the completion of this study.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experiences of support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders. The research question that guided my study was: What are the experiences of support of four convicted adolescent sexual offenders in Saskatchewan?. This chapter has been divided into four sections to present the results. The first section gives a description of the participants and explores some background and helps the reader get to know the participants. The second section is a description of the experience of support divided into four essential themes. The third section describes the participants' experiences of being part of a research project. The final section describes what it was like to be a researcher and what I learned during the research journey.

Description of Participants

All participants will be referred to by fictitious names, as agreed upon by the participants. Descriptions of the youths were based on the information they offered to me during our conversations. I met with Mark, Taylor and Kevin three times each and Cory only once as he left the province to look for work. Subsequently, Mark, Taylor, Kevin and I met together once after my initial data analysis was done for an informal debriefing session. I found it difficult to provide a brief description of each of these youths as they

are so much more than a description can provide, however I have attempted to give the reader a "snap shot" of each participant.

Mark

Mark was age fifteen years old at the time of the first interview and turned sixteen shortly after. He had been in foster care since the age of eleven. He came into care because his adoptive father was physically abusing him. Mark states he created a fantasy world to live in when he was a child. He wanted to believe everything would be all right and that the world was a great place to be, despite his experience which told him something else. Mark had lived in a number of foster homes and/or young offender facilities over the previous five years. He had been in trouble with the law a number of times over the years and was moved to a young offender's home during the time of our conversations. He was on probation, attending group treatment for sexual offenders on a weekly basis and going to school during the time of our contacts.

Mark's name was provided to me by the clinic I was affiliated with while I was doing my research. I contacted him by phone to ask if he would participate. He agreed immediately, and his mother also gave her permission for him to participate. We met twice at the clinic and once at another office to have our conversational interviews. On a few occasions I gave Mark a ride home and we were able to

just visit with each other. He also joined two other participants in an informal debriefing session to talk about the experience of being a research participant.

Mark wanted to participate in this study because he felt that it was important for people to talk about sexual offending. He has had trouble trusting others, given his background, and wants to help other youths who might be sexual offenders by talking about his experiences. He hopes his story will make the public more aware of issues related to sexual offending. Mark said the following, during our third interview:

I'm really glad I got to come and do this. Like because there isn't a lot of support for me, there isn't. As much as I would like to believe there's support, there isn't. I haven't had much in my life, so I like to be able to talk about my experience. Like maybe it will better somebody, like maybe you going back doing your report showing it to other people is going to benefit. I sure in hell hope so. You know like I just want other people to understand where I come from so that's why I'm glad I got to do this. Like I volunteered right away, I didn't have to think about it much you know, so it is good that I'm doing this.

Mark was a sensitive, thoughtful, and kind youth with a view of the world that reached far beyond his everyday life into an interest in global issues. He had dreams for himself that included finishing school, and attending university. Mark was very much interested in helping other people. At the times of our conversations Mark fulfilled a helping role by being available to talk to friends at school when they wanted to discuss problems.

Taylor

Taylor was fifteen at the time of our conversations. A year earlier he had lived with his mother and step father in another province. Taylor described his life, with his mother and step father, as being one filled with physical and verbal abuse. He was very unhappy with his mother and step father, and went to live with his father in Saskatchewan. He was not there long before he was sentenced to custody on charges of sexual offending. He had finished his custody time and was in a young offenders facility when I met him. He remained in the facility during the time of our conversations. Taylor was attending group treatment for sexual offenders, on a weekly basis, and attending school while we were in contact.

Taylor's name was given to me by the clinic I was affiliated with during my research. I contacted him by phone to ask if he would participate and he eagerly agreed. I met with Taylor's father and he gave his son permission to participate saying Taylor was very excited about being part of the project. Taylor and I met three times in the clinic and he attended the informal debriefing session with two other youths at the end of all the interviews.

Taylor told me he wanted to participate because it provided him the opportunity to prove he was reliable in the community. He said he took every opportunity available to get out in the community in order to show others he was not

a risk to society.

Taylor was a quiet, sometimes shy fellow. After he got to know me his wonderful sense of humour became evident. He admitted to being a bit of a thrill seeker and talked about adventures with his friends and cousins.

Future plans for Taylor included returning to live with his father. He, and some family members had a dream of owning a restaurant. He values his family highly and talks about the importance of spending time with them.

Kevin

Kevin was seventeen years old at the time of the conversational interviews and turned eighteen just before our informal debriefing session. Kevin's parents are separated and he lived most recently with his mother. His first out of home experience happened when he was about sixteen and he was placed in custody. He had been in custody and was on probation, living in a young offender facility when I first met him. Just after our third meeting he was charged again and was given another term of custody.

Kevin's name was given to me by the clinic I was affiliated with during my research. I contacted him by phone to ask if he was interested in participating in my research. Initially, Kevin was suspicious and very angry that I had been given his name and knew he had committed a sexual offence. He contacted staff at the clinic and talked with them about it. He agreed to meet with me to discuss my

research, and how his name was made known to me. As Kevin and I talked his anger dissipated and he found reassurance in the procedures I planned to undertake in order to keep each participant anonymous. He agreed whole-heartedly that sexual offenders' voices were rarely heard and that this might be an opportunity for him to make his experiences known. Kevin agreed to participate, and became an enthusiastic participant. He attended the informal debriefing session with both Mark and Taylor after the conversations were concluded.

Kevin was an introspective youth with a high energy level. He thinks deeply about matters close to his heart and explains them with ease. He often felt alone in the world and at the same time valued his independence. He was disappointed in himself for getting a further term of custody when his probation had almost expired. However, Kevin explained, he knew that he had not done all he could in therapy and was almost relieved to be mandated back to treatment.

Kevin said he enjoyed "our little talks" as he felt he could speak without being judged.

It seems these little talks that we have here usually change my perspective on something. I can talk about my true feelings, bring them out in the open without anybody arguing with me. Once you have no one arguing then you can bring out fourteen different opinions and work through them that way and pick the right one. But when you got someone arguing with that, then you have no way because you just get angry. You say 'well don't argue with me because I'm just trying to sort

through them. I'm brain storming right now'. Here I can do that, and there I can't.

I visited Kevin on a few occasions while he was in custody. The visits were coincidental and unplanned as I was at the facility for other reasons.

The focus in Kevin's life was pretty much in the here and now. He was concentrating on finishing his term of custody without incident and was looking forward to resuming his participation in group therapy. When I saw him last, he was not going to school or attending treatment but had been working on those as goals. Kevin described himself as having lots of friends, however he never felt he could talk about his sex offending with them. He began to believe that his secretiveness around his offending had been detrimental to his attempts at changing his behaviors and attitudes regarding sexual offending.

Cory

Cory was eighteen when I met with him. He moved out of the province to find work after our first meeting. He had been raised on the family farm and worked hard as a child. Cory felt he had never been appreciated by his parents for the work he did. At times he felt like he was invisible to them. He was living with a family member at the time we met.

Cory's name was provided to me by a mental health clinic that was in the same department as the clinic I was affiliated with during my research. I called him to ask if

he would participate in the study and he agreed right away. We had our meeting in his home. Cory loved the outdoors, and rural life. He had recently found acceptance in living with family members who appreciated and cared about him. After our first interview Cory left the province to seek employment.

Experience of Support: The Themes

Four essential themes emerged from the data to describe the experience of support in the lives of these four sexual offenders. These themes were: Living A Lie, Is There Someone There, I Take Care of Myself and It all Takes Time. The themes are talked about as if they are separate entities, but in reality they are interconnected and interdependent. Each theme can be talked about separately only long enough for it to be understood before it must rejoin the others; without one theme there would not be the other three. Writing about themes became very difficult as it felt unnatural to talk of pieces of a whole. When writing about individual themes became difficult I referred back to Kirby and McKenna (1989) who said:

If you can increase the understanding of an issue or a circumstance, illuminate one experience, portray one person's story in a new light, you will have helped others to understand the social world a little better. This is what research is all about. (p. 96).

The themes, as they emerged from the data, are bound by the space and time in which I collected them, and the youths who opened their lives up to me. The experience of support is

constantly changing, and as Kevin said when I asked him what support was for him:

At this point in time, which could be different in two days for all I know, the way my life is going, but at this point right now support to me is someone to be there to at the least listen to you...

Mark also talked about the multiplexity of perspectives:

I guess you have to be in my shoes, I guess to understand it. I can't really explain it. It all has to do with the way that the person feels. Like support means something to me, when it means something totally different to somebody else. Like you have two other people besides me and I'm sure that they have given you different types of interviews as far as support goes, right? So you know you have to be in my shoes to understand. It all has to do with experience I guess. If you experience things you understand them.

These themes I am presenting represent a slice of the life worlds of four adolescent sexual offenders who continue to change, evolve, and discover more about themselves and their worlds daily. In presenting the themes I have used the voices of the participants wherever possible, as it is their voice that speaks the experience.

"Living a lie."

The theme *living a lie* is a complicated blend of keeping the secret of being a sexual offender and at the same time being silenced by society about who they are. It leaves these youths' lives in a compartmentalized state where they rarely show their "whole self" (which includes their sex offending self) to anyone. The importance of truth and honesty were brought up repeatedly by the youths.

They feel that in order to get support one needs to tell the truth and be honest about their offending. Paradoxically, these youths felt unable to be honest with friends and peers about their offending. The youths said that they could not tell their friends about their sexual offending as the fear of rejection and/or physical harm was too great. Taking the risk of telling someone only becomes possible after a trusting relationship is built with another person. Being able to trust others and having others trust them, is a big part of these youths' experience of support.

Kevin talked about his experience of keeping the secret of his sexual offending from his friends, and the pain it causes him.

Even all my friends, they don't know what [I'm in for]. They think I'm in for something totally different. They hear something about a sex offending case and they'll make jokes about it and they'll laugh and they'll just mock everyone involved. I just kind of sit there and don't do much and a lot of times they look at me and say 'why aren't you laughing' and I just say 'I don't think that's funny and I don't find that humorous'. They don't understand why that's why...That's where I think it should be talked about. Sex offenders and rapists; I mean it's a crime that shouldn't be done but it is. It's done everyday and people need to understand that we're normal people...It hurts me, it really hurts me really bad because they're [his friends] sitting there for coffee with me, we're having a good conversation just talking around and they come up with this little thing [a sex offending case in the media]. They start laughing about it and making big jokes about it and they're making about me and what I've done and I don't appreciate that at all...It's very unsupportive, it's scary. If they ever find out what I did, I swear, if it ever got out on to the streets here that I was a sex offender I would get the living shit beat out of

me. There would be people after me right now and they'd find me and beat the hell out of me...A lot of my friends - a lot of teenagers out there, are supportive in a lot of ways but they're all close minded. We're all close minded and a lot of them, you can tell which ones for sure, would be like 'ya, you're an asshole', they'd kill you right there. And there's some that you think well maybe you could tell them and get away with it, But you just can't take that chance with anyone.

Kevin spoke many times, throughout the conversations, about not being able to tell any of his friends about his sexual offending. He was afraid his friends would either reject him or cause him physical harm. The fear Kevin lived with was with him day and night. He described planning his day around the chance that someone might find out about his secret and try to hurt him.

Mark talked about living a lie and explained his experience of struggle to live two lives. One life included his sexual offending and one did not. He expressed indignation at having to live this way.

I base my life around a lie. We go to group [sex offender] every week [he and another one of his class mates]. We live such a huge lie that nobody can tell the difference. Which is unfair to us. Like I had to live a lie at the young offender facility because of what people would think of me and it would end up out on the street. I have to live there [on the street] when I get out. I got to deal with that. I had to create a lie because three years is a fairly hefty sentence. I mean that's not fair to me, I shouldn't have to live a lie.

Kevin, Mark and Taylor, during our debriefing session, all agreed that they had never told friends about their sex offending. They received support from their friends in all

parts of their lives except that which had to do with their sex offending (Taylor). This would seem to indicate they work hard at separating this part of themselves from the rest of their life.

The silencing that occurs around sexual offending is a reality for these youths. They have experienced much pain and rejection as sexual offenders. Taylor told us this:

When I was in a young offender facility some guys found out what I was in for. They said 'child molester' and guys went around saying that I raped my sister. Some guy [who knew I was a sexual offender] got off his bike and smacked me across the face.

Mark empathized with Taylor and relayed his own painful experience:

Outwardly, guys do that to me everyday [name calling]. They'll say things like 'skinner' and I'll laugh and say 'whatever, guy'. It's laughing outside, but...lots of things run through your mind when you get called names.

Kevin knew what Mark was talking about and related his own experience of name calling:

When I get called names - I'm walking down the street and some guys say 'skinner' or something like that. I think to myself why couldn't I have done something else; broken into a house. I wouldn't be getting this shit thrown at me right now.

Mark commented on keeping the secret of sex offending from his friends and the type of support he received. When he was asked "if your friends don't know what your issue is, can they give you support?", he replied:

No, well around other things [they can]. Like this friend I've known him for about four years

and I gave him the same bull shit lie about why I was in jail like I gave everyone else. Well he believed me because he's my friend. He still gives me support in other ways, you know.

Taylor agreed with Mark and said "my friends give me support in any other way except for with sex offending". Friends can provide support for almost anything in these youths lives but their sexual offending secret. The necessity to separate the sex offending aspect of their life has been reinforced by society. Kevin says it this way:

I didn't tell a lot of people because I was scared to tell them. It held me back from a lot of things. It held me back from some relationships and good friendships that could have been. I mean it put those to a dead stop, that's what it has done.

Mark agreed with Kevin and said:

Society has managed to work themselves around to saying that alcoholism and drug addiction is a sickness. But they look at sex offenders and say 'you're a fucking idiot, you're screwed in the head'. That's it man...People sit back and think this is the most disgusting thing. It's a sickness just like everything else is and there's a cure. Like AA is for alcoholism; they get help; they get better with support. You go to the clinic and you go to group and they give you support and they help you in ways that you can learn to rehabilitate yourself. Society hasn't learned to accept the fact that people make mistakes such as sex offending and that they can change their ways. It's sad and it kind of makes me sick.

Kevin followed this by saying:

I have to agree with that. I'm having problems with people not accepting what I've done...It's like I have the plague or something. It's like I'm walking down the street and someone knows I'm a sex offender and they split to the other side of the street in fear that I might go out and do something to them. I'm a sex offender, not an animal.

This compartmentalized existence becomes very stressful at

times. Ensuring that the youth keeps his secret requires his constant monitoring of conversations with friends. Kevin talked about how this leaves little "realness" in his relationships with his friends.

Outside of the place I live, like with my regular friends from around school and what not, it [secrecy] really affects it [support]. I mean I have friends I can talk to about everything. Like they think I'm telling them everything, because they tell me everything that happens in their life. Well they might have something in the closet, too, I don't know. But to my knowledge they're telling me everything and to their knowledge I'm telling them everything. So, it makes me feel weird inside because they're really good friends and I can tell them almost anything that happens in my life, but this is one thing I might be able to tell one or two of them and they wouldn't flip out, but I don't want to take that chance. I don't want to take that risk because sex offenders aren't exactly well liked around the community...I don't know if it (secrecy) really affects the support, it affects me which I guess could affect the support they are giving me because I'll be kind of side tracked. I'll be kind of preoccupied saying ok I can go up until this point, I can't go after that because that ties in with this and if I tell them that - they catch wind of that I'm dead. So it affects me and I guess it would affect the support because I'm thinking about other things while I'm talking to them. They're listening as hard as possible, it seems like anyway, and I'm just kind of blathering on and on and trying to make sure I don't blow it. So I have a lot of things on my mind and so I don't get the full effect of the support they give.

Kevin went on to give examples of times when his friends were trying to help him through a rough time associated with his sexual offending. He ended up telling them a fictitious story because he could not bring himself to tell them about the real issue of his sex offending.

Trust was brought up frequently in conjunction with secrecy. These youths talked about some of the reasons they could not trust people enough to tell them their secret.

In my eyes I don't trust anyone, I don't have full trust for anyone in this world because I don't know, you could say something wrong and it might offend them and it's just their up bringing but it can get you in a lot of trouble...I don't trust anyone fully in my life. I don't know I've learned not to. That's just how I've been brought up. I've trusted people with my life and they've screwed me around. That's happened to me too many times and those bad times overdo the good times and it's just lead me to believe you can't trust a lot of people (Kevin).

Mark also speculates on why his trust level is low.

Well my trust level with people isn't very high. I don't trust too many people due to the past experiences with handing someone down my trust and I don't know, like I spent time in foster homes. After I left that one place [I spent] two months at the most [in the others]. So I really didn't get the chance to know anybody...I guess it would be everything pretty much mixed together. Being told for years from my dad that he is going to quit drinking. Every time he'd come running back to me to apologize for beating me up and saying things were going to change. You know he was going to get help. He's still saying those sorts of things. What can I have to do with him. I can't phone his place after six o'clock at the night because I know he'll be drunk. What kind life is that? So a lot of that came from my dad, a lot of distrust like how can you trust other people when you've got one person around you always beating you up? Like it's not just that I take certain people and say I hate them, and I won't trust them. I don't trust anybody, just because of one experience. And that's a lot of how the way the world works, one guy screws it up and it affects everyone down the line. So you know my dad affected what happens today. My trust towards people that I love, who I care for, it affects it all.

Despite the difficulty Mark had trusting others he still

worked hard at building trusting relationships. Taylor's trust in people had been shaken by physical and verbal abuse by his mother and step father. He felt he was often blamed for things that were not his fault. This left Taylor feeling hate towards them. Taylor described his relationship with a cousin saying he had told her things he does not tell his father. "I could talk to her [his cousin] practically sometimes more than I could talk to my dad". Taylor saw his relationship with his cousin as being a good, strong one.

Mark saw the importance in working on his ability to trust.

I don't know...support's a major thing for me, if I don't have it I fall apart. But the little stuff that I do have I try to make bigger. Well I'll do my best because like I don't have a lot of it as it is and my trust can only go so far. Like I've been hurt too many times to be...All support builds over time. It just goes along with how you trust people, pretty much. If you trust them then you know their support is there...I don't trust too many people and I guess that's something I have to work out...If I can't trust someone, I can't trust their support, and I can't believe the things they say to support me.

For Mark without trust there is no belief in others' support. He struggles to trust others and often found his trust level slipping backwards.

After going to custody and being told different things and being where I am now my trust, I don't know, seems to keep falling farther and farther away from people than it would be rebuilding. You'd think I'd spend more time trying to look for trust and be more trusting, but it seems to keep falling backwards as my time goes on. I don't know it's just that I've been lied to and bull

shitted back and forth for years now...You know it takes along time to go ahead and change around. And I don't know I just don't trust a lot of people with things and support has a lot to play with that.

Mark continued to struggle with trust building throughout the time of our conversations.

Kevin moved several times during the time of our interviews. He was able to talk about the experience of building a "good stable relationship" at a new home and how trust must build over time.

In order to get a good stable relationship going with this lady - I mean I'm new there, she's new with my type of person...I have to get used to those rules - some of the things she's used to but she's also got to get used to some of the things that I'm able to have, some of the rest of the freedoms I'm able to have than the rest of the kids that she gets in there. So that's going to take a long time. That'll take at least a month plus the fact I'm not good with trusting people, especially after what's happened. I can't trust people much any more so it's a matter of we have to build up trust for each other. She's got to be able to trust me and I have to be able to trust her, so that's going to take a while, too. Like everything's going to take at least a month, from what I've found it always takes about a month to build everything.

Kevin believed that trust was a reciprocal thing; he needed to trust her, but she also needed to trust him. Kevin explained the necessity of having trust in someone that he could ask for help from when he was feeling at high risk to re-offend. Kevin said his friends could not do that because he could not trust them enough to tell them.

It's quite hard sometimes because lately I've been getting really close to a lot of people I've known for years. There's a lot of people I've know for

four or five years and we weren't really good friends. Now we're getting to be really close, good friends. I think it's just the age thing now; we're at the point where we want the good friends not just partying buddies. So it's getting really hard because we're talking about things that no one ever knew, that you wouldn't imagine that would happen. But I still can't say this (that he is a sex offender) because I don't know if there is anyone that I can tell that won't take this 'ok, he's a pig, he's a jerk, let's kill him'. You see I don't know these people all that well. I've known them for years, but still don't know them. That's the really hard thing is that I still can't trust them totally. There's one or two out there that I really trust, I will trust them with my life, but I won't trust them with this one thing. So there's always that one secret. And I'm afraid that's going to live with me for the rest of my life. I don't think that I'm ever going to be able to tell anyone that.

Kevin said he would trust one or two of his friends with his life but not with his secret that he is a sex offender. The very people that he would expect to save his life became a risk when he considers telling them about his sex offending. Kevin talked about the difficulty he anticipated in selecting friends to tell his secret to:

I mean you have to be able to pick and choose really well, more than the average guy off the street has to do. Being a sex offender I have to go out there and I have to wait for months, maybe a year or two years before I actually get to know someone well enough that I could tell them. I mean I'm at the end of my two year sentence and I haven't told a single friend yet what's gone on for real. They all think it's some stupid story I made up.

These youths looked forward to a time when they could stop worrying about people finding out why they were on probation. Somewhere in the future Kevin felt he could "quit living a lie".

I'm just waiting for my probation to be up, that way people can't say 'so what are you on for?' See once that is over no one is going to care because no one is going to want to know...So once my probation is up no one will ask me that question and I can quit living a lie, which is going to be great.

Kevin was looking forward to being off probation, in order to stop lying about why he was on probation. However, living a lie, is about being a sex offender and not being able to tell anyone, not about being on probation. Once his probation had expired he hoped people would not ask why he was on probation thus Kevin would not have to create a lie to justify his probationary period. However he would still have to live with the reality of his offending.

Mark, during our informal debriefing session, also expressed his anticipated relief at putting that part of his life behind him.

Ultimately, healing might come when you die; worries are gone. Until then life is just sort of a big wall, you spend your life climbing up. Everybody is going to experience obstacles. I mean like this is just one small part of my life that's going to be gone in a couple of years. Obviously, in the back of my mind, there will be a knowing of abuse I got and I gave is always going to be there. But the guilt feelings and the hurt feeling and the fears is all going to be gone. So it's just a faint memory in the back of your mind. Like you don't spend nights crying over something that happened. I guess you won't dwell on it.

The theme *Living A Lie* is a huge part of the experience of support for these youths. Paradoxes are evident in many aspects of this theme. The complicated mix of secrecy and being silenced, of wanting to be trusted but not being

able/or willing to trust others, and of needing to be dealt with honestly but not being able to be honest (about being a sex offender) emerge from this theme.

All participants made some reference to wanting to conceal their sex offending self from others. Yet they all have expressed disappointment at having to do so. These youths are constantly on guard. They desire to take their sex offending self and bundle it away in a box to be opened up only in the safest circumstances, and only after a significant period of time had elapsed. Taking the risk of telling someone about their offending is a long and painful process and happens rarely. The fear of physical harm or rejection at being discovered is not unrealistic. Physical harm may well be a real consequence for exposing oneself as a sex offender.

Living a lie is a reality for these youths during every waking moment. The development of a persona that doesn't include the sex offending self affects the way in which they view others and the way others view them. It also affects the quality and amount of support they might have available to them. This secrecy closes them off from many prospective relationships and friendships, while protecting them from their worst fears.

"Is there someone there?"

This theme is about the availability and accessibility of supportive people in the youth's life. Being able to

access someone who is willing to spend time with them whether it be to talk, listen, help, provide advice, or just do activities, is vital. Along with being available and accessible the youths described personal qualities that were essential in a supportive person.

Taylor described a supportive person as someone who was willing to spend time with him "if people are going to use up their time for me, I think that is support". These young people's experience of support is dependent on the availability of supportive people.

The proximity to supportive people is important. Living with someone who is supportive is easier than having to look for that person outside of your home. Kevin talked about his experience of living with people that initially were supportive but then stopped being there for him.

Well the house I was at I was able to get support from them whenever I really needed, it wasn't a hard thing. I could just tell them I was having a problem and they'd be there to listen. But, lately they weren't there at all, they were doing their own thing and they were never around so when ever I had a problem I had no one around the house to talk to. I had to like go out. I had to make phone calls and try to get a hold of people in order to talk to them. And that was sometimes hard, well friends aren't always around when you need to talk.

Kevin talked about needing someone to talk to and not being able to rely on the people he used to rely on. This indicates the changeable nature of support in his life.

Sources of support change frequently for these youths. Relationships of longer duration such as with family members

were somewhat more stable. However, for the youths who have moved through the continuum of young offender's institutions there are rapid fluctuations in their sources of support. One week youths may have several supportive people around them and the next week none. Each youth identified at least one family member who was there for them throughout the court process and resulting placements. Kevin described his experience of being supported by his parents.

Both my parents were really supportive of me. They both didn't know what was going on and they were both scared and they didn't know what was going to happen, but they were there with me the whole way through the courts and everything. They were always by my side and they never backed down. I loved that!

Taylor talked about his cousin and his father as always being there for him because they were family. He said that it was not hard for him to talk to any member of his family. He believes they will always be there for him. For Taylor kinship relationships were reliable sources of support. He believed that because they were related his family would always be accessible.

Mark was a young man who had a history of several placements in different foster homes. He talked about the second home he was in and wished he could have remained in it. He remembered that they really cared about him. "It started to look like a long term plan, like that I'd be there for a while. One day, I don't know, they went to a funeral or something and I never ended up going back". Mark

experienced many foster home placements of short duration after that.

I just didn't get to know the people. They didn't serve any purpose in my life besides a roof over my head and meals. Other than that they didn't serve any other purpose. I knew that I'd only be in these places for a short time so.... Knowing that you don't look for support."

Mark learned who to seek support from by considering the length of time he was going to spend in each home. Given the emotional energy needed to develop a relationship with each new foster home, he was discouraged from getting attached by short term placements.

There were five personal qualities identified by the youths that were important characteristics of a supportive person. Not just any person would do when it came to looking to someone for support. Essential personal qualities included, caring, understanding, being a good listener, nonjudgemental and unconditionally accepting. These personal qualities made that person easily accessible and emotionally available.

Caring was one of the qualities identified by the participants. It was described in many different ways. Mark was able to identify many times when he felt unsupported, and thus uncared for. He described it like this; "Like no one cares, I guess, no one really gives a shit if you're having a bad time of something. If your having a bad time or something it's like go cry on someone else's shoulder". Taylor described support as "someone that

has at least some feelings for you, like cares about you". He identified a caring person as someone who cares enough to be with him, talk to him and spend time with him. Taylor also described an incident where his father defended him from a fellow who hurt him.

He [dad] went looking for the guy which was my cousin's friend, he almost killed the guy, like he went to my cousin's house 'cause he knew he was there yet and it took about 15 people to hold my dad back. Like he just wanted to kill him for doing that to me, so that's showing that he cares. Like if I get hurt he's going to go after that person.

Caring as identified by Taylor was having his father protect and defend him. Mark also described protection as a sign of caring. He was often physically abused by his father and his older sister would protect him as best she could by confronting the father.

For Kevin caring came from a totally unexpected source. He talked about a time when he and his parents were sitting in court waiting for him to be sentenced on a sexual offence.

I was scared there and then this guy walks in the door, and I turned around to see who it was and there he (youth minister) was. He came and sat down and I just had this big weight lifted off my shoulders, it was like o.k. somebody else knows exactly what went on, exactly what is happening, but still cares enough to show up in court to be with me until I get sentenced. That really meant a lot to me because I had only known him for a few weeks. He cared enough to show up to say 'look I'm here, this is going to be a rough time and if you need anything give me a call or show up at the church'.

Kevin was so moved that this minister "showed up there out

of the blue", not only because he hardly knew him but because this minister accepted him unconditionally.

It was really good because he is a pastor, it wasn't just Joe Blow off the street, it was a pastor and in that sense it made me feel good, because I'm not really a religious person. Knowing I had all these differences that I do that really weren't accepted in the church yet he still came and was there. Just like I was any regular person.

The trait of caring in a supportive person was seen as important by these youths regardless of what they believed represented caring in their experience.

A second personal quality the youths identified as important in a supportive person was understanding. They talked about people who could understand what they were going through. Not that these people should understand all aspects of being a sex offender but at least "try to understand to the best of their ability" (Kevin). Understanding was often closely connected to the length of time one had known the youths. Taylor talked about his cousin as being understanding; "she knows how I am, she knows what I'm like, she understands me, I've been around her enough times".

Understanding was often linked to experience as Mark noted people who have dealt with a lot of teenagers understand them better. But most important these youths said that people who had similar experiences as them would understand them better. Each youth talked about the importance of having someone to talk to who had similar

experiences. For these youths this support most often came from other sexually offending youths within their treatment group. Mark said "the guys in the group understood the way that I think 'cause they've been through the same stuff".

He goes on to say:

why would I believe somebody that hasn't been through it, 'cause they don't understand me. I guess that is maybe what's positive about having a sex offenders group is that everybody there as far as the kids has experienced that same thing that you have, so they're easier to talk to, because you can relate your feelings.

Taylor noted that "guys in the group, they've been in similar situations where they were sexually offending. So I think it would be a little easier to talk to them than just someone out of the blue". The peer therapy group is often the only place these youths feel free to talk about their sexual offending. This causes some problems for the adolescents in that they live what they describe as a double life. This was discussed in detail under the theme *Living A Lie*. Mark and Kevin also identified people in their lives who had been victims of sexual abuse just as they had been. Having access to these people was very important to both youths. Mark talked about having someone he could talk to who had been sexually abused as he had.

Change all comes from experience. If you haven't experienced the kind of stuff that other people or myself have then you're not going to be able to do a hell of a lot for too many people. Like you can go to school and read all of the text books you want it still isn't going to make you experience it. Like my home now she's been there. She's been sexually abused, you know I've been sexually

abused. She knows where I'm coming from, she knows where my stress comes from, where it shows up, you know, how she might deal with certain details, what I might do to work on things. She's been there.

Another quality of a supportive person that made them more approachable was someone who was a good listener. When the young person wanted to talk they hoped that there would be someone who was "right there listening" (Kevin). Kevin described support by saying:

At this point right now, support to me is someone to be there to at least listen to you, if they can't say anything about it just be there. They can just be there and listen and then just walk away.

For Kevin sometimes it was just enough to be able to "get it off your chest". The ability to listen to what the youth has to say increases the likelihood the youth will go back to that person again. As Taylor said if someone doesn't take the time to listen to you why would you bother to go back to that person?

Another quality of supportive people was that they were accepting of the youth and did not judge him. Mark expressed a global view to do with judgement:

In today's society everybody judges everybody else, it's a stereotype. I don't think that you can judge anybody unless you know them. If people get to know me and if maybe they did know my past about my sex offending and stuff, I'm a pretty nice guy. I don't like to bull shit. I don't like to dump on anybody for trying to be different or for being different. I just find that you can't judge a book by its cover.

Kevin expressed relief in that his "family didn't look down

on me for what I've done, they don't judge me". He described a home he was living in where the caregivers knew what he was on probation for but accepted him without judging him for what he had done.

These five personal qualities of a supportive person as they emerged from the data are intimately tied to other aspects of those people. The personal qualities were enhanced when people were supportive unconditionally. Also people who had an ability to intuitively know when the youth needed support were described by the youths as very helpful. The importance of "unconditional" support and "knowing" are described in last part of this theme.

Supportive people in these youths' lives showed them that their support was unconditional. They would care about the youth, listen to him, and accept him without judging him. Their support was not a condition of the youth's behavior. The withdrawal of support was never used as a punishment. The unconditional aspect of a supportive person contrasts with the notion of "being pushed" as discussed in the theme *It all takes time*. Being pushed to talk about issues in treatment was also experienced as supportive by these youths. Being pushed to talk often included the youth being told he was not telling the whole story or that he was minimizing an incident. This type of support was often not realized until after the actual interchange where the youth felt pushed had taken place. This type of confrontation

does not seem to fit with the notion of unconditional support however was seen in a positive way by the youths. The youth felt the need to be accepted unconditionally, however his behavior could be challenged in a supportive way. Separating the person from the behavior is an important part of being pushed.

The last common thread in this theme was one that the youths described as "to know me". Mark talked about the people he lived with "I think they know me a lot better than I know myself sometimes". This knowing is intuitive at times; "she always knows when I'm troubled, when I'm upset. I don't even have to say anything. I wouldn't even have to come to her, she'd ask me, she'd say 'is there something wrong'. She just knew" (Mark).

One of the ways that these youths experienced someone being there for them was when that person was in fact cut off from the youth. Kevin described people who had moved away from the town where he lived as being cut off from him. For Mark and Taylor however the people who were cut off from them were taken away against their will. Mark remembers a former counsellor who turned into a friend as time went on.

He worked at a group home and he stayed beside me for the longest time. He had a lot of questions about why I was the way I was and how my life was lived and why I see things the way I do. But, he never judged me, because of the things that I did or the way that I saw things. He always understood what I had to say. He was a major part of my life for the longest time. A little while ago some stuff happened and some words were exchanged between my mom and him and the place

where I was living and I ended up getting a phone call one night saying that I wouldn't be able to see him again or talk to him. I cried, it was like losing my best friend, you know I didn't want that to happen.

In summary the theme *Is There Someone There?* describes the faceless nature of support. These youths do not describe particular people who are supportive as often as they talk about personal qualities of a supportive person. The changing nature of support is represented by the frequent movement of supportive people in and out of these youths' lives. The change in players who provide support varies the youths' experiences of support.

"I take care of myself."

Just trying to keep my self confidence up. I mean if you're self conscious about yourself then that's another problem you have to go through and you got to try to keep yourself on kind of a pedestal I guess. You say 'I might have done this, and I might have done this, but I'm still a good person'. And if you can do that then your going to have a fighting chance...A lot of the times I am my own support...[I say] I've done some things wrong in my life, I'm not perfect, but I still am a good person. I still have good qualities and if you have to list your good qualities on a piece of paper...I've done that many times (Kevin).

This theme is comprised of the notions of independence and sense of self. Each one of these youths have been separated from their families by the social services and/or criminal justice system. Unfortunately independence is often experienced in the form of abandonment for these youths. A positive sense of self became a critical component of support for these youths, given the

inconsistency in the availability of supportive others. In the above passage Kevin described how he works at keeping himself "on a pedestal" in order to have a fighting chance.

Mark described his experience of independence.

Until this day I still don't understand why my mom sent me away instead of my dad. Because my dad left, my mom and dad split up, you know, ten months later. I could [have gone home]. I haven't been home in four years and I don't expect to go home ever again. Right now the family situation isn't there, I don't have support from my mom. My mom's trying to raise my little sister, get her through counselling. She's trying to go to school, provide for the family that she has and worry about herself. She doesn't have time for me. I have a place to live, a roof over my head, three square meals a day, a place to stay and somebody who loves me. She doesn't need to play that role any more and it's not that it has been taken away from her. It's that she doesn't need to play it any more, I have somebody else to do it for her, a kind of substitute. So my mom's support was important to me when I first left home and then when I was going home on home visits and things started to get bad and stuff. Her support was important to me then. Now I have kind of learned to take care of myself, you know, I am able to do the support that she gave for myself.

Mark was forced to be independent by his placement in foster care and later in custody. Being sent away by his mother had weakened Mark's belief in his self worth. He talked about his mother choosing to send her young son away instead of her abusive husband and how that hurt him. He became his own support out of necessity and sense of survival.

Taylor sought some form of independence in being able to make his own choices. He describes an "unsupportive" experience that left him feeling uncared for.

Once before there was a whole bunch of guys after

me about my clothes; like what kind of clothes I used to wear and that. Some guys used to bug me about that and I went home and told my mom 'I want new jeans, 'cause all those guys were beating me up because of the clothes I wear'. And she said 'no you have to wear your jeans'. And like they were practically bell bottoms, almost. She says 'no you got to, you're wearing what you got'. I hated them for doing that! Like if I am going to get bugged just because of the clothes [I wear]... They picked my clothes out, they picked what kind of hair cut I had and that, so I blamed it on them. Because like if I had my own choice I would probably pick better clothes. So like they didn't give a shit about what people thought about me. So right there that was no support.

Taylor wanted to make his own choice and saw his mom and step dad as unsupportive because they refused to let him make those choices. Taylor's relationship with his parents was complicated. As a result of this exchange Taylor was left with the sense that his parents did not care what people thought of him. Taylor's experiences of being uncared for and on other occasions of being "in the way" had left him with a low self image. He would often describe the experience of support as having someone who was willing to give up their time for him even when they probably had more important things to do.

These youths struggled with their sense of self much of the time. The sense of themselves was defined by their self concepts and by others' opinions of them. According to Kevin, when one comes to believe that one is a good person then one is better able to know what one wants and needs from other people. The belief in himself as "a good person" was the way in which Kevin kept a positive self concept.

If I didn't want it (support) or even if I did want something but not know what, then it's a matter of whatever someone tells you, you try to be that person. You try to do that thing. I can be walking down the street not knowing anything I want; someone will come to me and say 'this is what you should do, this is what you want'. Well hey great, I don't know what that means because I don't know what I want, I don't know what makes me happy. So, as long as someone is out there saying 'this is what will make you happy, this is what's going to make you comfortable, this is what is going to make you keep on', then sure go hard and do that. That doesn't work though, you got to think for yourself. Until you start believing that ya you're a person, then you can't do anything. You have to know you're a good person until you can do anything.

As adolescent sexual offenders, these youths' sense of themselves was closely tied to their offending. "It's easy for someone who knows about your history and stuff to say well you're not a bad person, people don't hate you for that, but that's what you think, you can't help it" (Mark). The weight of being a sexual offender gnaws away at their self concept and they often use self talk to bolster their image of themselves. "Like telling myself if I screw up, it's o.k., you can fix it and stuff like that" (Mark). Cory told about hunting as being a way he got a good feeling about himself.

If you're a good shot, you feel good about yourself, you get something. They (the animal) go on the run and you crack 'em right through the neck, they go straight down and you say o.k. good shot and you try the next time.

Mark described how his own goal setting was an important aspect of his sense of self. Hopes and dreams kept him working towards "a light at the end of a tunnel"

(Mark).

It took a long time for me to stop telling myself I'm stupid, but I did stop that. That's why I get very upset when people tell me I'm not going to get anywhere in life. I really detest hearing that and I hear it a lot of the time. I get angry over that saying you know I'll prove you wrong. And I will you know. I'm going to prove everybody wrong and I sure as hell hope my dad is going to be around when I graduate from university because I'm going to be telling him 'kiss my ass, I'm not as dumb as I thought I was'. So looking towards the future has brightened my hopes and my goals, you know, made the light at the end of the tunnel seem a little brighter.

Mark described how his sister provided him with support by getting him to look towards the future. This looking forward helped Mark feel better about himself and his situation. It made him feel worthy of support.

While there were times in these youths' lives that they were left to rely on themselves to bolster their self concept there were also other times that people outside of themselves contributed to their sense of self. The intertwining of self respect and respect from others affected these youths' sense of self. Those other people could either damage their self concept (as in Taylor's case) or improve it. Kevin talked about people in his life who left him feeling good about himself.

When I need the support is when I'm going through a really rough time and when I'm going through a hard time I don't feel...I feel like I'm a low scum of the earth. Like I'm really happy about my self or really down on myself, like there is no in between for me. It's one or the other and when I'm down I'm really down and when people come and try to get me out of that then...If they can help me out of my slump there, and get me at least

feeling decent about myself then I can look at it a different way. I can look at the whole situation differently. Just everything changes. Once you feel good about yourself, once you know inside you there is a good person, no matter what you've done on the outside, you are still a good person, then the whole world changes. Like everything is just great out there. You got the whole world to conquer and without the people...without those other people I would be no where. Actually, I probably wouldn't be here right now I probably would have killed myself already...So that means a lot to me. I'm indebted to all those people for the rest of my life because they are the ones that gave me that sense of myself that I have right now; feeling good about myself; knowing that I've done a lot of rotten things in my life but I'm straightening out and I'm still a good person. I still have a long time to prove to myself and everyone else out there that I am good.

I take care of myself includes the multi-layered aspects of independence and sense of self. Independence is thrust upon these youths at early ages and puts strain on the youths' ability to define themselves. Given the unpredictable nature of the availability of supportive others in the youths' lives they were often left with no one but themselves to bolster their self concept. These youths emphasized the importance of a positive sense of self in feeling supported in their lives as sexual offenders.

"It all takes time."

This theme is about the process involved in looking for and receiving support. Five essential components of this theme that emerged from the conversations were: getting ready to receive support; working for support; using the support; the realization of support; and the harshness of

support.

"Getting ready to receive support" is best explained by Kevin. He talked about the stages he went through in order to get to a place where he was ready to accept help for his sexual offending:

Well wanting support, anyone can want support but it's really important to receive it, the only thing is there is a lot of people out there [thinking] 'ya I want support, so I'll just pout around and people will just flock around me and help me out'. Well that's bull shit, that's not going to happen. I tried that, [it] didn't work. You try everything under the sun when this first happens. At first you lie, you say 'I didn't do this, you guys are idiots'. I even said I'd take one of them lie detector tests. I said 'put me on one of them machines, I'll prove to you I didn't do it'. Well I never went on those damn machines because I wasn't that stupid. I kind of brained up after a half an hour of trying to lie my way through this. They didn't believe me. So I brained up and I told them the whole story. But that's the first thing you do. Once you're past the lying thing, that could go [like this]; you could go straight to court [and] you could actually fight it in court. I've seen people do that. But I didn't go that far. That's one step. Once you're through the lying thing you go to the 'I'm confused, I don't know what happened, it's so hard to remember'. And you get confused and you do the angry thing. You put all your emotions into confusion and anger, you have no remorse, you have no happiness, you have no sadness, you have anger. And that takes a long time to get through that. I'm still getting through that one. Jesus, it's been almost two years and I'm still getting through that damn [one]. Once you're past that one, or as good as, or even when you're in the middle of it you go to other ones as you start letting go of your feelings. You start letting go. 'Ya I'm angry but what's bringing on the anger is because I'm sad, I'm happy, I have all these mixed feelings going on. I don't know how to deal with it so I get angry'. That's the one step you do, and once you're through that then...Well I'm not through that one yet so I don't know. I can't tell you after that, I'm still working on all

those steps you know. So once that's over, I don't know what happens. It's all a big cycle and it takes a long time to deal with it. In getting support, like see you can want it and go through all these steps and think people are going to come to you because you are having a hard time, but no. They keep on giving you a hard time until you give them the truth. Once you do that then they are there for you.

Kevin described a process he went through regarding his sexual offending. He talked about the denial, confusion, anger and letting go of feelings. Mark described getting ready to receive support as relationship development. He had just moved back into a home where he had lived two years before.

Mark: Well I've had a lot of talks with the woman, you know we've sat and discussed a lot of things. I'm still having sort of a hard time adjusting and I think I've said this before, that'll all just take time. Time is what counts.

Susan: But you did say that you trust her again?

Mark: Ya, just not with everything. Only because of the fact that she's proved herself before and doesn't need to prove herself again.

Susan: So then what's the level of support there right now?

Mark: It's starting to build up, but it takes time.

Susan: Time and what to build this?

Mark: Just time and I guess that comes as things go on. I guess that it'll be not so much her trying to convince me that her support is true, or that what she says is true. It's not that I don't believe that, it's that I can't trust that. So that's how belief and trust work, you know. It's not that I don't believe it, it's just that I can't trust it at this time. As thing progress I'm sure that I'll change my view of her. It has to come from me.

Mark believed "all support builds over time", and he knew time was important in building supportive relationships. He felt himself getting more "relaxed" with the people he lived with. This was the start for him of being able to trust and believe in their support and care.

"Working for support" is a big part of this theme.

Mark connects this work with time: "The place I'm living at, I'm working in getting support from them, that'll take more time". Kevin states:

My view of support; you got to work at it. They give it to you but you have to want it. You have to work for it. Nothing comes cheap or free in this world, you got to work for everything you get, including support. No one is going to come to you and say the exact right thing at the exact right time, out of the blue. Sometimes you got to ask for it and then when you get it you got to say which part is me, which part isn't me. You got to work through that and that takes a lot of time and a lot of effort.

Mark and Kevin described the pain and difficulty involved in working for support. Kevin said it this way:

You have to work for what you want. If you want it you have to go get it. It's not going to come to you on a silver platter, you got to work for it. It's going to be really hard; it's going to take a long time; and it's going to hurt, but it's not going to kill you. You have to keep on working until after you have it, or it will go away. People will think this guy doesn't want it. You have to keep on saying what you have to say.

Kevin goes on to tell about a time he quit his group treatment sessions and how he has to work to regain what he had before.

I have less than two months left of probation. I mean I have like four or five groups left to go

to. I have to go to something and then it's all up to me and I'm basically throwing it all down the toilet right now and that's a hell of a job to get that back. I mean I have to work my ass off now to get back what I had before - the little bit I had before. Now all my credibility is gone and I have to work to get it back.

Working for support describes a process which takes time and energy and is emotionally risky and difficult. These youths struggle to make a way for themselves with their care givers, their families and within their community.

"Using the support" described what happens when one actually finds or receives support in some way. The process Cory talked about described positive changes in himself that occurred because of counselling.

Cory: About a month, two months after I started going to my counsellor then they [school friends] started to notice a change in me and then I started getting more friends.

Susan: What kind of change?

Cory: I have no idea. It changed so slow over time that you don't remember what you were like before. I knew before I started counselling I didn't care what I looked like, but afterwards I do now. I like to look good when I go to school.

Taylor described the process of being taught what to do if he did something wrong. He told about the importance of having someone point out what he is doing wrong, and "then trying to learn why it is wrong" and having someone teach him that he "shouldn't do that".

Kevin talked about the process he undertook when people gave him advice. He said he "needs people to say this is what's up" and how they would deal with it. He got "a whole

bunch of different opinions" on how to deal with it and then he worked it through in his own mind. Kevin processed support he received by taking from people what made the most sense for him and leaving the rest. "This is basically one of the laws - the law of the way I live; people can talk to me, they can tell me what ever they want and I'll take what I want and the rest of it I'll scrap".

Using support is described by each youth in a different way. There are similarities in the way each youth processes support. Process also meant change over time to these youths. Relationships must be developed in their own time. Youths must expend effort to do the work necessary to ready themselves to receive support, and then to use it.

"The realization of support" is about the invisibility of supportive interactions that sometimes occurs. Kevin talked about the process of realization:

Ya, somewhere a long the line you do get the support you need. A lot of times you don't see it right there, you just got to like wait two weeks, maybe a month down the road, you say 'hey look at this, it was a bitch back then but it worked out'. sometimes you got to think about it, you got to dig for it, and until you dig for it and find it you don't see it.

Kevin described a realization he had about the support the group was giving him around the disclosure of being sexually abused as a child.

It happened when - well one meeting I went home and when I sat there I just sat at home, like a lot of Tuesday nights. I just go home and sit there. I just sat there and listened to my music, and it was just kind of there. It's like well

look these guys aren't - this wasn't painful. they weren't hurting me. The only thing that was hurting me was the memories. So this is like - they are there to help me, not there to hurt me...I was being eight years old again and they were trying to help me through it.

This realization of support often came from an "echo effect" that Kevin described like this "so in a way when I went back [home after group session] I was still getting the counselling in a way during the week because I was thinking through it". The benefits of the counselling and the support of the group continued to be a part of his conscious and unconscious thinking through the week.

The fifth aspect of this theme is "the harshness of support". The harshness of support is best described by Kevin when he talked about "being pushed". Being pushed is described by Kevin as an unpleasant experience that yields unexpected benefits. The treatment groups the youths attend or have attended are comprised of a number of adolescent sexual offenders and one or more psychologists. Part of the group treatment included the group members challenging each other to tell the truth about offences and also about their own victimization if applicable. Kevin told me this about being pushed:

Support to me is just, I don't know people listening to what you have to say and if they don't believe you... I mean a lot of times in group you'll say something and they won't believe you and they'll say 'we don't believe that, tell us what really happened'. And I like that they push you and that's really good because it makes you talk more and you can't lie your way through it very well...There's times when I think they are

pushing it too far but to a certain extent if they are pushing you and making you talk about things it's very supportive actually...It's rough but in the end it works out.

The experience of being pushed that was most memorable for Kevin was when the group was trying to get him to talk about his own victimization.

On one hand I was getting support which was good but on the other hand I'd go there and be all stressed out. I wouldn't sleep Monday night and I'd go to group Tuesday and then they'd say 'o.k. well what are you doing about your victimization?' And it's like 'right now I'm not doing a damn thing. I'm trying to settle it in my own mind'. And then they'd spend the whole group on trying to get me to talk about it and I'd get angry and start yelling at them and it would be a full blown argument for about an hour. Most of the time we wasted about an hour on it and nothing came out of it because I thought they were ganging up on me and trying to beat me up over it and I just wanted to forget it. I had dealt with it in my own mind or I was trying to, and I was trying to forget it. So when they were bringing it up every week...And now I'm glad they did because I just finished telling both of my parents and now I'm glad they helped me out because I wouldn't have been able to do it without someone guiding me along somewhere.

Mark and Kevin both described a "fine line" between pushing as supportive and pushing as a problem. Kevin talked about times that the group pushed him "over the limits" and wouldn't stop. He just wanted the group to "lay off for a while" so he could "recuperate". According to Kevin what appeared to be harassment from the group members often ended up to be supportive in some way. All of the participants found support in their peer treatments groups, however Mark and Kevin identified being pushed as problematic at times.

The theme *It all takes time* is an important aspect of

support. These youths described interactive, volatile, ever changing qualities in their experience of support. What is seen as "useless information" one day may be realized as supportive advice a few weeks later. Building relationships with people you live with is a process that involves a passing of time. Support does not just come to someone without effort and struggle. Kevin says it like this:

I mean there comes a time when you have to ask for it [support]. But at first you have to work it through your mind, you got to work it through your heart in order to know what you want. Once you know what you want you go to the other people and say this is what I want, this is what I feel I need and they give you their honest opinion.

In summary, the experience of support in the lives of these four adolescent sexual offenders can be described by the four interrelated themes. These themes are very much interconnected and are woven to form the fabric these youths describe as their experience of support. The themes are: Living a Lie, Is There Someone There, I Take Care of Myself and It all Takes Time.

Conclusion

In presenting the experience of support four themes emerged that were discussed separately. These divisions are artificial ones in that these themes are intimately connected and rely on one another to produce the whole picture. The concept of support is huge, ever changing, and involves a non-linear process. After each interview I asked for summary statements of what support meant to each youth.

To follow are just a few:

Just having people around to talk to and to understand what you're going through. I mean they don't have to understand the whole thing because no one is going to be able to. No one is going to be able to understand everything that I feel and why I feel it, I don't even understand it sometimes. But it's nice to have someone there that you can go and talk to, call on the telephone and say let's go for coffee or what ever and then just sit ad talk for an hour, two hours. Get a whole bunch of things off your chest and them just listen and try to understand to the best of their ability (Kevin).

Good feelings given by everybody else. Given to me (Cory).

Someone to help you through hard times or to deal with hard times. Someone that I can talk to like my dad, or my cousin, like that they'll spend time with me too. Like they understand how I feel, they want to believe me that what I am saying is true and not bull. Well they want to do things with me like I don't know like I said with my dad go to the golf course or that. They don't try and make plans to do something else, like they don't try and cover up like the real thing like they do want to talk to you...They want to understand me and everything (Taylor).

Maybe just someone who understands me. Ya, someone who understands me and doesn't judge me or nothing (Mark).

The Experience of Being a Research Participant

In phenomenological research there is a recognition of the change that the research process imposes on both researcher and participant. The next two sections in this chapter are devoted to the experiences of both the participants and the researcher. The question "what was the experience of being a research participant like for you" was asked of Kevin, Taylor and Mark. This discussion took place

during the informal group session held after the interviews were completed. Each youth responded in his own way to the question. Kevin found the experience an "interesting one" saying "I never thought I'd do something like this". Kevin had explained in the first conversation we had that he would never have considered being a research participant before he started treatment.

That's probably another thing that's really changed. Two years ago I wouldn't be here right now. You would have called me up on the telephone and said can you come down here. I would have said 'kiss my ass, get the fuck out of here'. That's what I would have said, those exact words and now it's like I mean I had a little bit of worries about it but I'm here because it's one of those things I think needs to be talked about. I think my opinions have to be voiced.

He said he "liked" being a research participant because:

It gave me a chance to talk about what I'd done and the treatment process without counsellors and everyone around, which is a relief to me. So I think it's been good to be able to hear my own words and my own story without someone telling me 'no that's not right' or 'we don't believe you'...Someone listening but not judging.

Mark said he felt somewhat different than Kevin in that he'd been "talking and explaining for years". Mark said this about his participant experience:

I guess in a sense I was helping you that's why I said I was interested because you know I'm kind of into that stuff. You want to get information and I'm here. I like to give what I got. I'm a very well experienced person...If you're looking to do counselling you might use some of my stuff. You might use a story to tell that person something I might have said. So that's always a benefit for someone down the road.

Mark's main reason for participating in the research was the

hope of helping someone else while Taylor felt just talking about support as a research participant was helpful to him.

What support means to me is someone listening to me while I'm talking and explaining. I feel that you had a role in support too, because like you're doing this research and like you were listening to me and you wanted to know what it meant to us.

Kevin said he also could relate to Taylor's feeling supported during our conversations. Mark on the other hand said "I don't know, I don't think anything had changed for me. Support is the same and I find it where I can, and it's pretty basic".

One comment made by Kevin reminded me that support is ever changing within the lives of these young people. Kevin also expressed pleasure in the process of inventory taking that went on for him during our conversations.

This is a turning point in my life. I liked to talk about the support that I was feeling at those times. I mean they've changed, but at that time it was nice to say 'well ya this is what support is to me and this is who it is that is helping me out'. At those times those people were really important to me. So that was really good. I don't get a chance to say that a lot. I don't get a chance to measure out who is important to me and what they're doing for me.

Being a research participant was described by these youths as supportive, providing the youth with someone who listened without judging, allowing the youth to provide information that might help others down the road, and giving the youth a chance to take inventory on the supports in his life. On several occasions during the conversational data collection period the youths would express excitement about

and satisfaction with being a research participant. Their comments, for the most part, fit into the themes noted above. As much as being a participant affected the youths, I was also affected as a researcher. The next section describes the experience of being a researcher.

The Experience of Being a Researcher

The researcher becomes another subject in the research process and another dimension is added to the data. This dimension in the researching process is always present but is rarely made explicit or exposed in traditional research as another layer for investigation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 53).

The experience of being a researcher has been at times tedious, joyous, stressful, exhilarating and humbling. My initial image of a researcher as a person totally removed from the subjects, asking questions and getting answers was changed forever. I was about to learn that researchers are co-participants in a process that creates knowledge. I was not fully prepared for the emotions I experienced in doing the research. Research is often presented as a linear process that has an obvious beginning and end. I discovered that this was not to be the case for me.

The first issue I had to address was a choice about the language I would choose to use in talking and writing about my research. After becoming interested in phenomenology I noted the words used to describe different aspects of the research process. I started to use participant instead of subject, and conversation instead of interview, just to

mention a few. With a change in language also came a change in belief about what I was doing while researching. I started to focus on process instead of end results and I treated the participants as "experts" in their own experiences of support. I recognized that we were jointly creating knowledge and I was able to focus on my initial interest which was ensuring the voices of these youths would be heard. I enjoyed the conversations I had with the four youths; I talked with them and listened to them. I saw myself as only one piece of the final puzzle that would be my thesis. I came to realize that both researcher and participant are changed by the research process. As Kirby and McKenna state "The researcher and the research process will be changed at the other end, neither will be the same, Because it is a lived process both are emergent throughout it" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 73).

Another area I struggled with was the literature review, expected in all research projects. At the proposal stage I was resistant to completing a full literature review on support, the phenomenon I was researching. I wrote in my journal at that time:

I want to understand the experience of support in a new rather than already established way. I'm afraid if I begin with a list of already identified categories and theories from the literature it will get in the way of what emerges from the data...This is not a study of the literature but of the youths' experiences as adolescent sexual offenders.

After some thought and contemplation on the necessity for

reviewing the literature before doing the data collection I decided to look at a few of the articles in the area of support. This allowed me to discover how support was conceptualized within the literature while minimally exposing me to theories and research related to it.

I discovered the importance of finding literature that was applicable to my research findings when it came to the discussion part of my thesis. I began to understand how some literature from the initial review could be pulled through to the discussion part of my thesis.

Part of the learning regarding the literature review came from talking with experienced researchers. It became clear, through conversations with other researchers, that as a researcher I was "creating knowledge as part of a mosaic" (L. Shields, personal communication, April 7, 1994). If I was contributing to the literature that was already in the field I needed to be aware of what was already out there. I then integrated this literature into my findings. After a review of the literature I could see where my findings "fit" and where they did not.

The experience of phenomenological data collection in the form of in depth conversations became another area of learning. Kirby and McKenna (1989) state that "good interviewing is a skill" (p. 72). I learned that the skill of phenomenological interviewing was different than what I had practised in my social work career. I thought that

after ten years of daily, therapeutic interviewing that I could quickly adapt to any interviewing style. However, phenomenological interviewing was a challenge as it is less controlled by the interviewer and focuses on the participants' experience as opposed to their feelings or problems. An experienced phenomenological interviewer gave me feedback after each of three interviews with one participant. As time went on I learned to be less focused in my inquiry and to employ an expansive mode to get at the youths' experiences. At first I would often go back to the concrete aspects of the youths' experiences and pose irrelevant questions about age and location. I learned to focus on the youths' experience and use more silence and minimal encouragers to promote more in depth discussion. I was reminded of the importance of using the youths' language, instead of my own professional jargon. Slowing down the pace of the interview allowed the youths time to recall and explore the experiences they were describing to me. I learned to hold back interpretations and not to rush to conclusions. After the second set of conversations I wrote this in my journal: "I'm getting better at phenomenological data collection. I'm learning to ask clearer questions, keep my mouth shut, and think carefully between interviews".

The most significant effect that phenomenological data collection has had in my life is that I have incorporated

many of the skills I learned into my everyday work interviewing. I realized that while there is a certain expectation in interviews conducted for the purpose of creating a pre-sentence report for court, there is also more room for the increased use of the expansive mode, and of silence. I also have worked at using plain language and less jargon in my reports. My belief in the knowledge and expertise of those with whom I work about their own problems and solutions has been validated and confirmed. I continue to listen carefully to what they see as solutions in their situations.

As part of the rigor of this study I invited an independent reader to look at my transcripts, meaning units and themes. I wanted to know if my data analysis path could be followed and if my findings fit with what this person knew about adolescent sexual offenders. The reader who agreed to participate in this process was an adolescent sexual offender therapist and youth worker, with ten years of experience in this field. We spent several hours discussing data analysis and themes that I saw as emerging from the data. The reader was able to follow my data analysis path and understand the decisions I made regarding the analysis.

I learned from my reader that as a treatment person he would focus on the pieces of the transcripts that pointed to minimization and rationalization on the part of the youths.

It is believed among adolescent sexual offender treatment professionals that minimization and rationalization are two characteristics that are often evident in this population. It was not surprising that he keenly recognized these parts of the conversational data. Secondly, he often referred to the youths' victim mentality. He pointed out where the youths had used their past physical and/or sexual abuse as the reasons for their offending. Exploration of the victim mentality is important in the treatment process. The area we concentrated on most was the parts of the transcripts where the youths talked about the support they experienced while being pushed to talk and being confronted within their treatment groups. It was only within these mandatory treatment groups for the most part that these youths talked about themselves as sexual offenders. The discussion around mandatory treatment helped me with the theme: *Living A Lie* and the Discussion chapter.

The treatment perspective of the reader and my research orientation led to our highlighting both similar and different aspects of each transcript. As Kirby and McKenna (1989) say "throughout the research enterprise, who you are as a person, including the particular experience you have, affects what you can know" (p. 52).

In conclusion, I am continuing to learn as a researcher even as I write these words. I once imagined that doing research had a start and a finish. I have learned that this

is unrealistic and even undesirable.

Every part of the research process teaches us a bit more about ourselves and the world. It isn't a matter of getting to the end at all costs. Rather the way you get there, the process itself, is part of the research. Although a project may end, research never does (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 73).

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of support in the lives of adolescent sex offenders. A phenomenological research methodology was used to discover the essence of their support experience while at the same time providing the opportunity for the voice of these youths to be heard. Conversations of these youths' lived experience became the data from which four themes emerged: Living a Lie, Is There Someone There?, I Take Care of Myself and It All Takes Time.

The final stage of this study involves turning back to the literature to "reveal the limits and possibilities of one's own interpretive achievements" (van Manen, 1990. p. 76). Hycner (1985) describes the process of checking the study findings against the current literature: "to what degree do the findings fit in or not fit in with the tradition of literature in the area" (p. 298). This section utilizes current research from several fields of study to reflect upon the four themes. I will also discuss: limitations of the study, implications for research, and implications for practice.

The Themes: Turning Back to the Literature

In this section I will compare the themes from this study describing support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders with the literature and research in the fields of

social support, adolescent sexual offenders and children and youth in care of the child welfare system.

Living a Lie.

The theme *living a lie* is about the complicated coexistence of keeping the secret of being a sex offender and being silenced by society. The youths attempted to keep their sex offending self a secret from others in their lives and in society in general while at the same time society's rejection of sex offenders kept them silenced. The fear of rejection or physical harm by their friends and/or family keeps these youths from taking the risk of telling others about their sexual offending. The youths recognized that risking telling someone is possible only after a trusting relationship is built. Support from friends and others who did not know about the sex offending became limited in scope because friends were unaware of their situation.

Ways in which the youths in this study were living a lie were reinforced by the literature on denial and minimization of adolescent sexual offenders. For example the motivations for lying (fear of physical harm and rejection) reported by these participants were similar to the reasons given for denial and minimization in the literature. The reasons for lying and societal reaction to sex offenders was covered within this literature. Differences between the literature and the findings of this study are identified where appropriate.

The activities of denial and minimization are seen as significant characteristics of sexual offenders that impede therapy in many ways (Barbee, 1989). According to Barbee, a sex offender evokes intense critical reactions from the police, judicial system, child protection agencies and workers, and from their own friends and families. In custody these offenders are on the lowest level of the offender hierarchy. Denial and minimization become a "natural human response to intense criticism" (p. 30). The offender's natural defensive reaction is designed to protect against criticism including self criticism.

Barbee (1989) describes the forms that denial and minimization take. Denial may be expressed in one of three ways. An offender may deny that he had any interaction with the victim that could be seen as sexual offending. Second, the offender may argue that the interaction he had with the victim was not sexual in any way. Or third, the offender might argue that the interaction was sexual but not an offence (she didn't resist).

Minimization is described by Barbee (1989) as occurring in two forms. The youth admits he sexually offended but projects blame onto external events (factors external to him caused the event), or blames his offending on internal attributes (irresponsible internal attributes).

The youths in this study do not deny having committed sexual offences. Under certain safe conditions, they are

prepared to be "honest" and "tell the whole picture". These youths had been involved in sex offender treatment for some time when they became involved in my research. Also it should be noted here that I knew from the onset that they had been convicted of sexual offences so they did not need to deny that to me. They had been pushed to disclose the complete incidents of their offending behavior. Youths who are in complete denial of their sexual offending are often not accepted into group treatment. The difference between the four youths and those described in the literature is the use of denial. For the youths in this study, denial was not an all or nothing behavior. Much of the literature focuses on breaking through the initial denial of having committed a sexual offence. The youths in this study are not in self denial about having committed a sexual offence, however they work hard at keeping this behavior a secret from people who do not know. For the most part these people are their friends and peers at school or in their living situation. They have disclosed their sexual offences to their parents and to others in the treatment group. Outside of that group however, very few people know. This compartmentalized life is not recognized in the literature.

Participants in my study found living a double life very stressful; therefore this is an important aspect about which to conduct further research. The stressfulness of living a lie may be related to recidivism rates given that

most often these youth offend when under stress or when angry. Therefore, further research that explores way in which these youth can find opportunities to integrate their personal and public selves, thus achieving a calmer existence, may affect rates of relapse. This would be an important piece of research in the treatment field.

The literature regarding denial in adolescent sexual offenders addresses the reasons these youths lie about their offending. These reasons for telling lies most often included their fear of rejection and/or physical harm. This was consistent with the youths in this study.

French (1988) did research within a clinical setting regarding distortions and lies as defense processes in 42 adolescent child molesters. He defined distortions as "the process of unconsciously deceiving oneself" (p. 29). Lying was defined as a conscious process with the deliberate intention to deceive another person. According to French lying serves to protect the ego from a stimulus that is perceived as being threatening or intolerable. French addresses the public perception of sexual offenders and emphasizes that sex abuse in our society is seen to be one of the most despicable, perverse behaviors in which one could engage. He says there is a tremendous motivation for the youth to conceal their behaviors as he fears ridicule and ostracism. The youths in my study identified two reasons for keeping the secret of being a sexual offender, both

which fit with French's protective reasons. The youths described being physically afraid of others who might find out they were sex offenders. They also feared being rejected or harassed by others who knew of their offending.

Becker (1989) talked about the fact that there are no models for the admission of committing a sexual offence. She questioned "where in their environment do they have people admitting or confessing to sex offences" (p. 37)? This is part of the silencing of sexual offenders. It is acceptable to talk in public about being a recovering alcoholic or drug abuser, but no where is it acceptable to talk about being a recovering sexual offender.

One of my research findings that was not congruent with French's (1988) research was that these youths did not attempt to distort the reality of their offences to themselves. This is evidenced by their reports of feeling uncomfortable and stressed at leading a double life. This aspect was not necessarily a focus of my findings however is an important one to be noted.

French believed that these youths protected their "fragile self image" by distorting their reality of their offending behavior. The youths in my research were consciously aware of their offending behavior but worked at letting as few people know as possible. These sex offending youths according to French often have low self esteem, poor peer relations, are from an emotionally troubled family, are

socially and emotionally withdrawn, have little or no support system and are emotionally immature. Given this profile, French believes that the offender tried to escape the reality of being a sex offender by distorting and lying. However, for youths in my study they were not avoiding acknowledging the reality of their offences to themselves. Instead they were working at keeping their sex offending behavior a secret except in very safe situations. They were not confused about the reality of their offending. Unlike French's conclusion that it is possible after rehearsing an altered story enough times that the youth may become to believe it, the youths in my study were not confused about their reality of their offending. As mentioned above, these youths were in a process of constantly monitoring their disclosures which implies that they do not discount their own reality.

Stevenson, Castello and Sefarbi (1990) refer to "suppression" when they discuss treatment of denial in adolescent sexual offenders. Suppression suggests that the offence is quite present in the mind of the denying sexual offender. Stevenson et al. recognize that denial serves to protect the individual from possible physical harm at the hands of the victim's family or someone else.

The youth in this study did indeed fear harm if someone found out about their offending. However the fear was that their friends or peers at school would "turn" on them and

physically harm them, not fear of the victim's family. This is where the issue of trust was introduced. The youths in this research believed trusting relationships were very important, however most of them could not identify one friend they trusted enough to tell about their offending. Parents and therapists knew because of victim disclosures and court proceedings. It was unlikely that these youths would tell anyone else. In a study done by Ryan, Davis, Miyoshi, Lane and Wilson (1987) of information collected by the Uniform Data Collection System, 559 adolescent sex offenders took part. Of these youths 61% felt that there was no one they could trust completely. My study findings are congruent with this study as the youths' in my research felt that there was no one in their lives they could trust completely.

Raychaba (1992), himself a former child in care of the child welfare system, conducted extensive research with youth regarding youth policy. His findings indicate this about the importance of trust:

Sharing a sense of trust is one of the basics in an important relationship. It involves taking the risk opening up to others and it requires both parties to be trustworthy, so that trusting can be a mutual experience (p. 6).

He connects the sense of trust a youth has to the importance of consistent and continuous relationships over the years. It was clear from my research that the youth in my study did not experience consistent and continuous relationships over

the years. Two youths came from homes where one parent was lost through separation or divorce, and one youth had been in foster homes from an early age. This is consistent with the information presented by Ryan and Lane (1991) in their research with adolescent sexual offenders. They state that lack of trust is an early developmental deficit which starts in infancy. While these youths may hope for someone who is trustworthy it is not their expectation or experience. The youths in my study wished for trustworthy others in their lives. However they felt they had an extremely difficult time developing trusting relationships given their backgrounds. Ironically by withholding information about their sexual offending they did not provide others with opportunities to demonstrate their trustworthiness.

According to Bengis (1986) relationship bonds between primary caregivers and youthful offenders are of great importance when placing and treating adolescent sexual offenders. It is the consistency of caregivers and therapists which helps the youths to reestablish trust in adults and others. The four youths in my research recognized the importance of building and maintaining trusting relationships, however they had much difficulty doing that. The pain, fear and energy this process took was evident in the stories of the youths whom I interviewed.

For the four youths in this study living a lie had become their existence. They were ever-vigilant, ensuring

their secret never slipped out. At the same time they felt silenced by the societal reaction to sex offenders. On one hand keeping the secret of being a sex offender was their way of exerting control over their situation. Yet ironically it ultimately contributed to their overall sense of powerlessness. They wished they could tell others without being rejected completely. Research regarding the experience of living a lie is not available in the field but should be. The aspects of living a double life need to be explored further to find out how living a lie affects these youthful sex offenders' support systems. The literature and research to date has focused on what the youth lies about and how to change that. There seems to be a belief that once the denial is broken that these youths are then treatable. This may be true, however the youths in my study referred to the continued feelings of unfairness and discomfort in living a lie which leads me to the conclusion that more needs to be understood about the experience. While their keeping a secret does seem to be a "protective" mechanism (French, 1988; Stevenson et al., 1990), it also seems to be a realistic defense given society's abhorrence of sex offenders.

The first step in addressing the juvenile sexual offender is recognizing that the problem exists and that the youngster himself is struggling with this problem in silence because it would appear it is too uncomfortable for others to listen to and to respond to (Groth & Loreda, 1981, p. 38).

Therapists need to recognize that living a lie is a coping

mechanism that provides the youthful offender some predictability and control in his life. Disclosing ones offending behavior opens these youth up to other people's unpredictable responses. It might be detrimental to these youths to encourage them to stop living a lie before we've addressed the larger problem of society's abhorrence of the sex offender. Addressing this stigmatization of sexual offenders would require a commitment to change attitudes towards them. These changes might be achieved by consciousness raising techniques, educational strategies, and through desensitization by connecting offenders with community volunteers who could provide an individual level of acceptance (mentoring, buddy system).

Is There Someone There?

This theme is about the availability and accessibility of supportive people in the youths' lives. Being able to access someone depends on the proximity of supportive others to the youths. The best situation was to live with someone who was supportive. However just knowing there is someone there to call if the youth needs to talk, get help, advice, or just go for coffee was important too. Sources of support change frequently for these youths. Each youth identified the importance of having at least one parent who had been there for them during their court process and sentencing. Multiple placements in foster care or within the Young Offender system left these youths with the difficulty of

establishing and re-establishing relationships.

The youths in this study identified personal qualities that were important characteristics of a supportive person. These qualities included caring, understanding, a good listener, nonjudgemental and unconditionally accepting.

The components of this theme are well represented in the social support literature, the literature regarding children in care and the adolescent sexual offender literature. The importance of proximity to supportive others is validated by research done by Raychaba (1993). He studied family violence and abuse from the lived, consumer perspective of Canadian children and youth in care of the child welfare system. Raychaba conducted in depth interviews with 24 young people who had experienced being in care. Included in his findings were the identification of the importance of placement and relationship stability. Raychaba pointed to a study done in Saskatchewan by Ens and Usher (1987) which noted that of 101 case files reviewed of children in care, over 40% had experienced five or more placements within the child welfare system. With regard to caseworker consistency, 68% of these children had experienced more than one worker in two years. According to Raychaba, this placement and worker transiency had a negative impact on the youths' ability to form "attachment relationships" (stable, trusting, and long-term).

The four youths in this study had experienced several

placements since being involved in the Young Offender system. Mark had lived in several foster homes previous to his entry into the Young Offender system. These youths identified the importance of being able to establish relationships that facilitated support. They were thankful for at least having had one parent there for them during the court and sentencing process. For Taylor and Kevin that parent had continued involvement. Procidano and Heller (1983) in studying perceived social support from friends and family identified that a lack of family based social support was related to reported psychopathology. Furthermore, family social support due to its longer duration was a more stable source of support for the youth in their study. Adolescent sexual offender researchers and practitioners also recognize the importance of family support within the young person's life; especially in treatment (Gil, 1987; Knopp, 1982; Mathews & Stermac, 1989, National Adolescent Perpetrator Network, 1993; Ryan & Lane, 1991).

The personal qualities of supportive people as identified by the youths in this study are consistent with what is found in the social support, and youth in care literature. Gottlieb (Gottlieb & Todd, 1979) conducted research with sole support mothers to determine categories of informal helping behaviors of people in these women's lives. Gottlieb discovered four classes of helping behaviors, that contained 26 categories. All five of the

personal qualities that the youths in this research described as important can also be found in the five categories as defined by Gottlieb.

The personal qualities are also part of the findings in Raychaba's (1993) research with children and youth in care.

Raychaba states:

Both the youth interviewees responses and the available literature point out that young people feel comfortable sharing, talking about, and dealing with past abusive experiences only when they felt loved, cared for and accepted and when they possess a sense of belonging and trust in one or a group of significant individuals, whether peers or adults...Successful relationships provide children and young people in care with the precedents and the incentive to risk further relationships in the future (p. 67).

The youth interviewees in Raychaba's research noted attributes which promoted supportive, durable relationships. These attributes included honesty, trust, commitment, accessibility, flexibility, reciprocity/mutuality and a communicated sense of the youth as cared for, loved and unique. These attributes are comparable to the personal qualities as described by the youths in this research with four adolescent sex offenders.

The youths in this study are no different than any other young person when it comes to recognizing what makes a supportive relationship. The theme *is there someone there?* also points to the faceless nature of support. Supportive people in these youths' lives came and went frequently. These changes left these young people longing for someone

with similar qualities to come into their life. It was not their experience to have people in their lives at all times that possessed these qualities. Often the people they talked about possessing these personal qualities had been part of their lives for only brief periods. While research and literature regarding youth in care, social support and adolescent sexual offenders supports the components of this theme, it does not address this "faceless" nature of support these youths have experienced. These young people's lives had included supportive people at one time or another, some of whom were part of their lives for very brief periods of time. It is important for workers in the field to acknowledge the value of this support - transitory as it may be - and to facilitate its occurrence whenever possible in recognition that these brief encounters may have considerable influence on the youths' lives. One example would be the long lasting effect that the minister appearing in court had on one youth in this study.

Involvement with supportive people helped the youth to be able to identify important personal characteristics of these people. However, this did not provide them with access to those people at all times. Recognizing that transitory relationships do not provide consistent support for these youth, policy makers need to examine the continuum of care available to these young people. Goals must be established that ensure continuity in care givers and

workers as a fundamental part of sex offender policy.

I Take Care of Myself.

This theme is comprised of two components; independence and sense of self. Independence was described by these youths as a protective stance they took to make sense of their early separation from family that took place due to institutionalization. Through foster home and custody placements they were forced to rely on themselves as they often had no one else but themselves to rely on. This forced independence was directly connected to their sense of self. These youths often described how they would bolster their self concept through positive self talk. Their self image was a combination of how they viewed themselves and how others viewed them. A positive self concept was a critical component of support. It helped the youths to know what they needed from others and buffered them from the negative public image sexual offenders have.

The literature regarding children in care corroborates the experience of the four youths in this study regarding forced independence. Raychaba (1988) in his research with youth leaving the care of the child welfare system in Canada found that problems faced by youth at termination of care were: loneliness, isolation, a lack of support, feelings of rejection and abandonment, as well as general socio-economic hardship and continuing emotional/psychological difficulties. The four youths in my study talked about

being their own support. They often had no one to rely on but themselves. These youths in this study had left home earlier than most young people do. Raychaba points to research that indicates the majority of 18 year olds still live at home. As Raychaba's research confirms, youths leaving home early had unstable and inconsistent networks of support and often felt that they had been left to fend for themselves.

It is indeed sad that for many of these youth, independence all too often becomes synonymous with isolation and loneliness...people with whom the young person may have developed a relationship of rapport are very often simply no longer around to provide support and simply 'be there' (p. 63).

Researchers in the field of adolescent sexual offenders identify low self esteem as one of the most pervasive issues for this population (French, 1989; Gill, 1987; Ryan & Lane, 1991; Scavo & Buchanan, 1990). For the youths in this study their self identity was comprised of their image of themselves and society's image of them. They described a constant struggle to bolster their self image and to view themselves in a positive light despite the negative message society sent to them about being a sex offender.

French (1989) conducted research with 42 adolescent child molesters in an outpatient setting. He noted that "being considered a child molester is an extremely negative identity, both to acquire from others or to be self-imposed" (p. 30). French states that the youthful child molester avoids acknowledging the reality of his offence because to

do so would be to accept the negative self identity society encourages. The youths in my study did not in fact deny the reality of their offending to themselves, however their sense of self had been influenced by society's negative image of them. They were able for the most part to separate themselves from the negative behavior of sexual offending. This separation was the strategy they used to ensure a positive frame of reference of themselves. Without this positive outlook on themselves, as Kevin noted, there was no way in which to realize what he needed for support from others. It is important to remember that the youths in this study had attended or were attending adolescent sexual offender treatment, thus had been exposed to self esteem-building. Self-esteem building is most often a component of adolescent sexual offender treatment (NAPN, 1993; Ryan & Lane, 1991).

Maintaining a positive self concept is constant work according to the youths in this study. Their positive self concept buffered them from the negative image society has of sexual offenders. However, this negative societal image continually threatened to influence their self concept. The forced independence these youths experienced often left them with no one to rely on but themselves. They became their own source of support.

Not covered in the social support and adolescent sex offender literature is the idea of self support as

identified by the youths in this study as a critical component of feeling supported. Researchers in the field of support explore the social aspect of support. What is not considered is how one can be their own support doing many of the functions that others often do for us. The youths in this study describe a process whereby they bolster their self concept through positive, encouraging thoughts that in most people's experience would be provided by others. If positive self encouragement has been a useful tool for the youths in this study then as practitioners we ought to encourage the use of positive self talk by youths in treatment. Teaching them how to develop and use positive self affirmation could be achieved through peer teaching. Longer term youths within the treatment group could describe and explain how they use positive self encouragement to bolster their sense of self and feelings of support. The youths in this study have provided insight into one aspect of "self support" (positive self encouragement), however further research should be done to discover other aspects of this concept. What other ways do youth provide support for themselves and how can this be used to enhance the support they receive from others?

It All Takes Time.

This theme is about the process aspect of looking for, receiving and utilizing support. The components of this theme were getting ready to receive support, working for

support, using support, the realization of support, and the harshness of support. Within this theme the component of "getting ready to receive support" was explained by Kevin as a number of stages he passed through in order to ready himself to accept support. Mark on the other hand described his preparation as relationship building. "Working for support" according to Mark, Kevin and Taylor takes time, effort and is emotionally difficult. "Using the support" describes how one actually puts to use the support they receive. "Realizing support" is a process that happens after the youth has actually received the support. Kevin identified times when he did not realize support until well after an interaction had happened. The final component "the harshness of support" is characterized by 'being pushed' within the peer treatment group. Each youth within the group is pushed to disclose abuses he has perpetrated and abuse he may have experienced. This was described as an uncomfortable process that had unexpected benefits.

The literature in the field of social support, for the most part, does not address the process aspect of support, nor how much work must be done to be ready and able to accept support. Few studies examine how a person accesses, receives and utilizes support. These four youths described a dynamic process that ended in the utilization of the support. They talked about the preconditions of trusting relationships and knowing what one needs and wants regarding

support. Kevin identified having a realization that an interaction was supportive well after the interchange had occurred. This "ah ha" experience is described in the literature on confrontation with adolescent sexual offenders (Ryan & Lane, 1991). The "being pushed" component of the support process is also validated in the confrontation literature. Pushing youths to disclose abuse they have perpetrated and abuse they may have been exposed to is a commonly used strategy in sex offender treatment.

The paradox within this theme *it all takes time* is the positive experience of being pushed and confronted in group juxtaposed with the desire expressed by the youths in this study for unconditional acceptance within supportive relationships as discussed in the theme *is there someone there*. This paradox is identified and discussed by Ryan and Lane (1991) in the literature on confrontation within peer treatment groups. They note that unconditional acceptance while it is a basic element of supportive treatment, can conflict with the need to challenge and confront the denial, minimization and distortions of the offender. They go on to say that what can be conveyed in the relationship is unconditional acceptance and understanding of the offender as a worthy person, who is able to make changes and achieve control of his life.

Ryan and Lane (1991) explain that the goal of confrontation is to provide feedback to help the youth

become aware of the nature of his thoughts and behaviors. A genuine 'ah ha' experience illuminates the client's understanding of a concept and helps him to own the thought or behavior in question (Ryan & Lane, 1991). They suggest the confrontation process should be a calm and rational process with an identified goal.

Gottlieb and Todd (1979) noted, as have I, that the process aspect of social support has been overlooked in the literature and research in this area. Todd conducted research on social support with eight first year college youths in a group discussion format. His findings indicated that individuals differ in their needs and preference for the kind of social support network, and that those needs and preferences change over time. Participants in Todd's study varied in their orientation to support, with some seeking it even when the network did not provide it and others being hesitant to accept support even when offered it. Todd indicates that the critical and neglected dimension of social support is "the active way in which people often engage their social worlds" (p. 211). Todd's research identified the missing aspect of the interactive process of support. The youths in my study have identified and described the interactive processes regarding support. If the youths in this study were able to describe the process they went through to accept and use support that would indicate that this could be explored with other sex

offenders. This exploration could lead to teaching skills needed in order to seek and utilize support in their lives. Awareness of the process they undertake to accept and use support through discussion with other offenders within the group is a starting point for this skill development. Learning the skills necessary to utilize support could become a component of treatment.

Encouraging the sharing of personal experiences within a group format is a commonly used technique in treatment today. However, often communication with each other outside of the group is discouraged given the concern that these youthful sex offenders may get together and offend. Given the findings related to the theme *living a lie* it may be necessary to revisit the policy that discourages contact between group therapy members outside of the group format. The youths in this research described the value of their group work. A self help or mentoring type of component to treatment could enhance the learning process that is facilitated within the group among members. Within each therapy group there are youths at different stages of treatment. Encouraging the "recovering" youths to buddy up with a new member is a method used in programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous. This buddy system would give the youths a peer with similar life experience to turn to for support when they feel they can not tell their friends about their offending. Using the

insights of experienced youths in treatment, ensuring time is made to allow these insights to be shared and then facilitating a mentoring system would add to already successful treatment strategies.

In summary, the components of this theme *it all takes time* are identifiable within and supported by the literature. My study uncovered some of the complexities of the process of support but further detailed investigation is warranted. What is missing is research and theory on the process aspect of support. We really know very little about how support operates. This study is a small beginning in understanding how the process aspect of support worked for the adolescent sexual offenders in this study.

Limitations of the Study

This study is bound by the time and space in which it took place. Four participants' experiences were explored to gain a greater understanding of support in their lives as adolescent sexual offenders. The study was conducted in Saskatchewan in 1993-1994. These findings are not generalizable to all adolescent sexual offenders as they reflect the experiences of these four youths.

Sandelowski (1986) notes that qualitative researchers agree "that the general can be found in the particular" (p. 31). In this way comparing this studies' findings to the research already in the field ensures that these findings fit into contexts outside of the study situation. Also,

participants in this study have verified the themes (which represent the findings of this research) as representative of their experiences of support. While these results only apply to the four youths in this study they also "illuminate to some significant degree the 'worlds' of the participants" (Hycner, 1985, p. 295) and that in itself is important.

The findings of this study are completely dependent on the choice of participants. All four youth were caucasian, born in Canada, male, and had been exposed to sex offender treatment. Had they been from another country, female, youths of color, or never exposed to treatment their experience of support would probably have been different.

The selection of participants was not done to saturation in this study. In selecting participants in qualitative research often one attempts to interview different participants until redundancies in data start to occur. This process assures that as much different information about the phenomenon is explored as is possible. A limitation of this study is that I did not sample to redundancy. I did however interview three youths three times each and saturation was evident within individual youths' interviews. As a whole, the sampling did not attain redundancy.

A further limitation of this study is that one of the four youths was interviewed only once, as he left the province before further data could be collected. This youth

did not attend the informal, debriefing session; thus he could not verify the findings. The interview data from the conversation with this fourth youth was congruent with the themes and data however as presented it lacked depth.

The process of learning more about support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders gives us a greater understanding of the human experience in general.

"Therefore, even with a limited number of participants, though the results in a strict sense may not be generalizable, they can be phenomenologically informative about human being in general" (Hycner, 1985, p. 295). This research contributes to a greater understanding of the experience of adolescent sexual offenders as it applies to the phenomenon of support.

Implications For Research

Literature in the field of adolescent sexual offenders has grown increasingly over the past ten years. Few studies have been published that lead to an in depth understanding of the experiences of these youthful offenders. The phenomenon of support was explored in this research project. Social support literature and research were reviewed, and in keeping with the adolescent sexual offender research few in depth studies were found that explored the experiences of support in people's lives. Specific areas for further research have been noted within the themes discussed in this chapter. To follow is an expanded version of these and

other ideas for further research.

Within the theme *living a lie* it became evident that literature on denial and minimization dealt with these issues in an either/or kind of way. Either an adolescent sex offender denied and minimized his offending behavior or he disclosed the full story. However, the findings of this study indicate that for these four participants it was considered necessary to lie to some people while at the same time they talked about their offending behavior in treatment and with others who already knew about it (parents, caregivers). A more in depth understanding with respect to the experience of living a lie would be useful.

The theme *is there someone there* was about the availability and accessibility of supportive others in the adolescent sex offender's life. The youths in this study at times experienced a faceless type of support within their lives. Supportive people in these youths lives changed frequently; however these young men were still able to identify important personal qualities of supportive people. It would be helpful to learn more about the experience of the changeable nature of support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders, and how to develop consistent support systems.

The theme *I take care of myself* was about independence and sense of self. The youths described the experience of self support where they provided their own support when left

to their own devices. More research needs to be done to discover the ways in which youth manage to create self support, and the benefits of doing so.

The final theme *it all takes time* described the process of looking for, receiving and utilizing support. The youths in this study have identified and described interactive processes involved in support. It is often assumed that youth have the skills and ability necessary to access and utilize support, however this may not always be the case. Further research could be done to understand the ways in which we can help youth to develop the skills needed to access and utilize support.

Research methodologies used in the fields of adolescent sexual offenders and social support tended to be quantitative. These studies have provided us with a wealth of information. Adolescent sexual offender research has produced information on demographics, treatment modalities and causation. Similarly in the social support literature research has revealed useful information on types of social support networks, the density of these networks, their effects on health and psychological wellness. It has also revealed the effects of social support on different populations of people (ages, stages of development, gender, etc.). Further research is needed in the form of studies designed to provide an in depth understanding of the experience of support. For adolescent sexual offenders

research should include the voices of the youths. For too long the adolescent sexual offender has been viewed as an unreliable source of information given the reputed denial and minimization of his offending behavior.

Perhaps the primary obstacle to gathering accurate data with regard to the adolescent sexual offender is his proclivity to lie. As noted in a recent paper the need to manipulate and lie pervades the offender's every social interaction. This type of client will typically deny and minimize his history of violence, project blame onto others, and will resent questions which suggest he is anything but a model citizen. (Margolin, 1984, p. 66)

I suggest that it is not the youth's "proclivity to lie" that is the problem regarding research with adolescent sexual offenders. The problem may well be found within the way research is conducted on adolescent sexual offenders instead of with them. These young people have trouble trusting others, so why should they answer questions of researchers whom they do not know? One of the ways to include the voice of adolescent sexual offenders is to engage them in a partnership that explores their experiences and produces knowledge. Prolonged contact, in a non-threatening atmosphere, with the same researcher in this case has added to an in depth understanding of the phenomenon of support in the lives of four adolescent sexual offenders. The use of qualitative methodologies could add a richer understanding of the experience of being an adolescent sexual offender and at the same time, the youths could benefit from participating in the study in ways

similar to the ways in which they benefitted by participating in this study. The youths' experiences of being a research participant were similar to the benefits often derived from a therapeutic intervention. For example two youths in this research noted that they felt supported by the conversational interview process. They felt they were being listened to in an unconditional manner and felt free to express their opinions without being rejected. This process helped one participant to take stock of his social support network and appreciate what was important to him. Their perspective adds another important dimension to the research already in the field.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this research project have implications for practice within the field of adolescent sexual offenders. First, it is important for practitioners who work with adolescent sex offenders to expand their perception of these youths. This expanded view of these youthful offenders could take us away from the traditional view of these youths as "liars and deniers". As is identified in the theme *Living a Lie*, adolescent sex offenders survive by living their life in a compartmentalized state where they keep their sex offending behavior a secret from friends and peers. Front line workers must acknowledge these youths are much more than just liars who use every opportunity to deny and minimize

and that the need to lead a double life is very stressful. This stress needs to be acknowledged and dealt with. As practitioners and therapists we must not neglect the aspects of these youths that are honest and positive. They wish to contribute in a meaningful way as useful members of society. One of the ways they could do this is by being consulted as consumers of a service. They have opinions, based on their experience as to what they see as useful and supportive. For example, the youths in this study recognized the harshness of "being pushed" in treatment but also the usefulness of this process. This would indicate that they are not trying to find the "easy way out" but are in fact interested in understanding what works for them. These youths have the ability to give useful feedback to those involved in their treatment and planning. This has implications for policy development because these youths' expertise can be utilized in a backward mapping approach to developing policies.

According to Elmore (1983) the backward mapping approach to policy challenges the traditional "top down" ways of doing policy work. Backward mapping begins "with a statement of the specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for policy" (p. 21). Having established a target at the lowest level of the system, the process backs up through the hierarchal structure to determine what changes can be made

at each level. These changes along with the resources needed to make these changes at each level determine how to put the desired policy changes into effect. In this study the target at the lowest level of the structure are the adolescent sexual offenders and my study has revealed that they consider themselves to have useful information to offer. Therefore policy makers in the young offender field should consider drawing upon the youths' expertise in putting into place a backward mapping approach to policy development.

The idea that offenders are an important source of information regarding assessment strategies has been the guiding philosophy behind these interviewing techniques, which are very different from more traditional mental health approaches to the treatment of this population (Ross & Loss, 1991, p. 200).

This study highlights for human service professionals the residual role they play in the overall social support environment experienced by youths. The participants identified groups of people who had been supportive to them over the years. First they talked of family, then of alternate care givers and lastly human service workers such as therapists and probation officers. For example the role of the youth worker in many jurisdictions is not constructed to include time for supportive interaction with youths and is based on monitoring the youths' activities to lessen the chance of re-offence. As mentioned earlier, if practice were reshaped based on some of the findings of this study

then the role of the practitioner could be enhanced.

Social support networks are an essential part of the fabric of social work services, and have a distinctive contribution to make. It is becoming increasingly evident that such networks should not be regarded as anything less than fully engaged in meeting those needs which until now have been regarded as the prerogative and responsibility of the statutory services and the professional worker (Olsen, 1983, p. XVII).

The study also revealed that as practitioners in the field we need to realize that we hold positions of power and influence in the world of the adolescent sexual offender.

As youth workers, child care workers and mental health professionals we need to ensure that enough attention is given to the social side of these youths' lives. We have to consider the "web of interpersonal relationships that tie the individual together with others and in so doing provide a reliable system of helping" (Garbarino, 1983, p. 19). Focusing on both personal and social resources gives helping professionals a wider arena in which to influence change. Assessing what these youths have to call upon in their social environment will help us understand how these youths will cope upon return to their community. "To achieve the greatest possible level of mastery in our communities we must attend to, facilitate, enhance, and collaborate with social support networks based on naturally occurring or possible interpersonal relationships" (Garbarino, 1983, p. 21).

We can not assume that these young sex offenders have

actively supportive networks of people around them at all times. As these four youths have pointed out they are aware of personal qualities in others that are necessary for them to feel supported by those people, however these people are not always available to them. Often supportive others move in and out of the youths' lives against the youths' wishes. Integration of these youths into stable social support networks may be a challenging and difficult component of treatment for adolescent sexual offenders; however this study shows that some youth would benefit from consistent sources of support. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that treatment programs ought to include skill development on how to build and maintain support networks.

Changing the public's view of sex offenders will not be an easy task. However, these young people have been and will continue to live as part of our community. Societal protection is an important component within the Criminal Justice System however this protectionist stance has only increased the secrecy of offenders which may well perpetuate their offending behavior. Until we can accept these youthful offenders, the silencing that society forces on these youths is not getting us any closer to dealing with this problem. The silencing affects the offender at an individual level while also affecting society on a community level. These youths are our neighbors, brothers, baby sitters and community members. Community denial around the

prevalence of adolescent sexual offending and the needs of these youths will not help to reduce victim numbers.

The youths in this study want people to know that for the most part they are the same as other young people in that they want to be liked, accepted, cared about, and supported. They are not asking people to excuse their behavior, merely to recognize that they are more than just their label - sex offenders.

These youths are connected to their environment and long to stop living a lie in order to survive in society and be accepted. The youths who participated in this study described two ways of living in the world, one which included their sexual offending self and one which did not. In recognizing that these youth work at separation of their sexually offending self with their "other" self, it becomes clear that a more integrated and holistic approach to these young people may be necessary. In order to help young sex offenders live safely in their communities we must shift our focus at times away from interpersonal helping to helping that addresses the dynamics of the youths' environment (relationships, institutions, policies, media). To help in enhancing the environment in which these youths live, we must understand that world from the perspective of the youths. Recognizing the strengths these youths possess in combination with the resources available in their environment, we ought to be able to create places in the

world where adolescent sexual offenders can be themselves without the lies and the secrets.

As practitioners we can try to facilitate the development of suitable places where youths can be themselves and work on their issues. More effort needs to be spent on the social environment of the adolescent sexual offenders to ensure there is a place for these youths once they are back in their community. As mentioned earlier, strategies to enhance the social environment of the youths could include consciousness raising, educational sessions, development of peer support/buddy networks, and connections to non-offenders in the community.

A good deal of what ails the human services at present will be greatly improved by an infusion of ordinary lay people - friends, neighbors, kinfolk and volunteers - doing what they do best; providing support, criticism, encouragement, and hope to people in distress...Partnership is not only a desirable but a necessary condition for effective, efficient, and truly humane services. (Whittaker, 1983, p. 43)

The findings of this study indicate that ordinary informal helpers are already an important part of these youths' lives. As the environment of the adolescent sexual offender is part of the problem it must also be part of the solution. We must start to understand the world of the adolescent sexual offender and recognize potential sources of social support while at the same time listen to the voices of these youths when they tell us how we can assist them in their recovery.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience of support in the lives of adolescent sexual offenders. From the youths' experiences of support emerged four interconnected themes. These themes included *living a lie* which described two ways in which these youths live in the world; one that includes their sexually offending self and one that does not. The experience of support also included *is there someone there* which described accessibility and availability of supportive people in the young persons' lives. *It all takes time* explored the process aspect of support. Finally, the participants identified *I take care of myself* which described an intertwining of independence and sense of self. The youths' experiences of support provide a deeper understanding of the nature of support in their lives.

The importance of the phenomenon of support is best described in the voices of the participants.

I don't know support's a major thing for me if I don't have it then I fall apart, but the little stuff that I do have I try to make bigger. (Mark)

Just having people around to talk to and to understand what you're going through. I mean they don't have to understand the whole thing because no one is going to be able to. No one is going to be able to understand everything that I feel and why I feel it, I don't even understand it sometimes. (Kevin)

If I need to talk to someone about something then they'll sit down - I think if people understand it like when I am trying to explain it then they understand me. (Taylor)

Support is: Good feelings given by everybody else to me. (Cory)

This study suggests the nature of the support necessary for these adolescent sexual offenders. In eliciting the expertise of the youths, a greater understanding of the phenomenon of support in their lives was gained. This study illuminates the importance of meaningful connections with others for adolescent sexual offenders. It also provides an expanded perspective of youthful sex offenders by exploring the liar and denier image these youths have typically been given. Such an expanded perspective is necessary in order to understand the importance of including the voices of youth in research and treatment.

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Appendix A

Definitions

To provide internal consistency this study has relied on the definitions put forth by leading researchers in the field of adolescent sexual offenders. They are as follows:

Adolescent, the National Adolescent Perpetrator Network (1993) stated that an adolescent is between the age of puberty and majority.

Sexual abuse is seen as "engaging in sexual behaviors which constitute an offence; sexually violating or exploiting; sexual behaviour without consent" (NAPN, 1993, p. 11).

Juvenile sexual offender is defined as a youth from puberty to the legal age of majority, who commits any sexual act with a person of any age, against the victim's will, without consent, or in an aggressive, exploitative or threatening manner (Ryan, 1986, p. 125).

Adolescent offender is defined as anyone convicted, pursuant to the Young Offenders Act in Canada. In the Young Offenders Act (Rodrigues, 1991) a young person means:

a person who is or, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, appears to be twelve years of age or more, but under eighteen years of age and, where the context requires, includes any person who is charged under this Act with having committed an offence while he was a young person or is found guilty of an offence under this Act (Rodrigues, p. 616).

Aftercare is defined by the NAPN (1988) as the period of supervision and treatment of the adolescent sexual

offender after his release from closed custody or inpatient care. "This phase includes ongoing support, relationships, and monitoring provided by individuals aware of the juvenile's risk factors, patterns and intervention strategies" (NAPN, 1993, p. 13). This period of aftercare is seen to provide a transitional time where the therapeutic message provided in treatment is transferred to daily life in the community. (Greer, 1987).

Follow-up is defined as the ongoing contact and support services offered once the offender has successfully completed a recommended course of treatment (NAPN, 1993).

Custodial/Residential treatment refers to a place where the youth is confined during his time of treatment. The confinement may be in a secure correctional setting or in an open custody environment where the youth is a resident and only allowed into the community under supervision (Bengis, 1986).

Outpatient treatment refers to a program where the youth receives treatment, for his sexual offending behavior, in an outpatient group or day program. The treatment is provided while the youth is living in the community with his family or other care giver (Bengis, 1986).

Continuum of services and care as discussed by Bengis (1987) refers to the range of treatment settings providing different levels of intervention. This continuum is needed to provide a service delivery that is responsive to and

recognizes each individual's needs within the system. It is important that this continuum provide support and recognition for the client's change and progress as he moves through the system. A continuum of care and services allows for the use of the least restrictive measures for each youth. An ideal continuum of care would provide a planned aftercare/follow-up component. According to Greer (1987) the maintenance of client accountability and supervision during aftercare is the final phase of the continuum.

Appendix B

YOUTH'S INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
IN RESEARCH

You are being invited to participate in a research study of which the purpose is to gain an understanding of how youth who have been convicted of a sexual offence experience support in their lives. I am a student at the University of Victoria, School of Social Work. This research has been approved as my masters thesis.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked a set of interview questions about your experience of support. For example you may be asked to describe what support means to you, who provides you with support, and if that support has changed since you have been convicted of a sexual offence. At any time you may refuse to answer any of the questions. There will be three interviews over a three month period, and they will be tape recorded to ensure all information is fully and accurately captured. There will be an optional informal group debriefing at the end of all three interviews, where you can ask questions and give feedback about your experience of being a research participant. I will also share with you the initial findings of my research.

Information obtained in connection with the interviews will remain confidential. The tapes will be coded with a number immediately following the interview. A transcriber will be reviewing the tapes. He will be screened for confidentiality. All tapes will be erased after the information is transcribed. Fictional names will be attached to each transcript for the report writing.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty and your standing in treatment or with the justice system will not be affected in any way. Additionally, if the need arises counselling referrals to your psychologist will be available to you.

If you have any questions about the research, or your rights as a participant at any time, please call Susan Burke at 752-4910. My address is Box 302, Melfort, Saskatchewan, S0E 1A0.

Your signature below indicated that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have had time to ask questions about it, consult with your parents and therapists if you wish, and that you willingly agree to participate. You may withdraw your consent at any time and

discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You will receive a copy of this form.

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the "Information Sheet".

Name _____ Witness _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUTH AND PARENTS
ABOUT PROPOSED RESEARCH ON SUPPORT IN THE LIVES
OF YOUTH CONVICTED OF SEXUAL OFFENCES

The goals of my research are:

- 1) To discover how youth who has been convicted of a sexual offence experience and understand support in their lives.
- 2) To ensure that youth in the study have the opportunity to have their voice heard and their comments recorded.
- 3) To provide information about what support the youth believe is needed for them after they complete their outpatient treatment program and who should provide that support.
- 4) To heighten awareness of issues affecting and concerning youth who have been convicted of sexually offending.

The purpose of my research is to learn and understand more about the experiences of youth who have been convicted of sexual offences. I am interested in finding out what "support" means to the youth, and where they find it in their life. I am concerned about the lack of voice youth have been given in research. I will be asking youth to share with me the experiences they feel comfortable in sharing. This research will be used to complete my University requirements, by becoming the basis for my masters thesis.

I subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, physical comfort and safety of research participants.

Possible participants for the research have been identified through the adolescent sex offender treatment program at XXXXXXXX, in XXXXXXXX.

Participating in the research process may provide the youth with a powerful and positive experience. The results of the study will contribute to knowledge about what the experiences of the youth have been, and what they perceive to be necessary in their lives to support them in not re-offending.

Three individual interviews will be held over a three month period, in a location agreed upon by all parties. The input of the youth will not be criticized or challenged. In the

individual interviews, each youth will be interviewed by myself and the interview will be taped. The interviews will center on the topic of support and will be more like a discussion than a question/answer type interview. I will be asking the youth to share their experiences and thoughts with me to help me understand where, how and when they experience support in their lives. The tape recording is done to ensure all information is accurate and complete. The interviews will be done in a place agreed upon by myself and the youth. The most convenient place to do the interview may be at XXXXXXXXX, in XXXXXXXXX.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. The youth may refuse to take part in any of the discussions, and may withdraw at any time. Youth's involvement in this research and all the information they provide will be confidential, and any identifying features will be deleted from their response. The youth's access to services or involvement in groups/activities in their clinical program is in no way contingent on their involvement in this project.

All tapes will be destroyed after the research project is completed. A master list of names will be seen only by myself and locked away to ensure confidentiality, and will be destroyed upon completion of my thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research or you or your son's participation, please feel free to contact Susan Burke, Box 302, Melfort, Saskatchewan, telephone number: 752-4910.

Appendix D

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR THOSE WITH YOUTH
INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear Parent:

I am inviting your son to participate in research being done by myself as part of my Masters degree in Social Work at the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

The purpose of my research is to find out what the experience is of youth who have been convicted of a sexual offence and have completed outpatient treatment. I am interested in what role support plays in their lives. I hope to discover what support means to them, including where and how they find it.

Each youth will participate in individual interviews with that focus on the experiences of support in their lives. The interviews will last approximately one hour each. There will be three interviews over three months. The individual interviews will be held in a place agreed upon by all parties, taking into consideration transportation issues. There will be an optional informal group debriefing at the end of all the interviews, where the youth can ask questions and give feedback about their experience of being a research participant. I will also bring the initial findings of my research for the youth to review, at this time.

Your son may withdraw from the research at any time. No participants names will be used. All information will be kept confidential and anonymous; any personally identifying features will be deleted from the responses.

Your son's participation, or his decision not to participate in this research will not affect his involvement in treatment programs, or with the justice system. My hope is that as a result of this research there will be a greater understanding about what support youths need in their lives to keep them from re-offending. My belief is that youth themselves must be listened to more often, in society at large and in specific programs in which they are involved.

Sincerely,

My son, _____, has permission to participate in the research being conducted by Susan Burke. I understand that he can withdraw from the research at any time, and that all information will be kept confidential.

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the, "Information Sheet", and that I have had the opportunity to ask for any further information and clarification I may require.

Parent's Signature

Date

Appendix E

Interview Guide

I. What is your experience of support?

Many people talk about support. To start with I would like to talk to you about your definition of support or what that word means to you. I am hoping we can come up with a definition of support that you and I will use in our discussions that is one that has meaning for you. There are no right or wrong answers because what you have experienced in your life is what I am interested in, not what a text book or an adult has said about support.

- A. What is it like for you when you are really supported in your life?
- B. What does it feel like when you are feeling supported?
- C. Tell me about a time when you were with a person or group of people and something they did made a difference to you in one way or another.

II. What or who in your life provides you with support?

- A. Do you receive support in other ways?
- B. What is it about that person that is really supportive to you?
- C. How do they express or show their support?

III. When do you feel unsupported?

- A. Have you felt a lack of support at different times? If yes, describe it?
- B. How could these experiences have been different?
- C. What would you have liked to happen?

IV. How is your experience of support the same or different than what you were told to expect in treatment?

V. In your own words what does support mean to you?

- A. If you had to tell me what support means to you in just a few words what would they be?

VITA

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Given Names: SUSAN JOAN

Place of Birth: Tisdale, Sask.

Date of Birth: April 4, 1959

Educational Institutions Attended:

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Title of Thesis: Is There Someone There?: Support in the Lives of Adolescent Sexual Offenders

Author



SUSAN JOAN BURKE

Aug 26, 1994