

The quality of service of the family violence, child protection and sexual offences unit of the South African police service, post-2010

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Literature indicates that police organisations in poor and middle-income countries are providing specialised policing services relating to crimes against children mainly as a centralised service, while those in wealthier countries provide decentralised services. Having reviewed the literature, an attempt is made to determine how external service delivery provided by the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit can be improved. This unit's quality of external service delivery after re-introduction of the unit to a centralised capacity in 2010 is examined exploring the current state of affairs. In order to draw a comparison of the quality of services provided by this unit after re-introduction, research was undertaken among a West Rand Unit Commander of the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit, non-governmental organisations and senior public prosecutors directly involved in dealing with family violence, child protection and sexual offences in the West Rand policing area. Data for the study was gathered through a literature review and semi-structured interviews. The research findings indicate that the provision of centralised policing services relating to family violence, child protection and sexual offences is more advantageous for effective service delivery in the South African context as opposed to a decentralised structure.

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is a prevalent and life-threatening social problem facing South African society. In 1986 the South African Police (SAP) established a Child Protection Unit (CPU) within the SAP to prevent and combat crimes against children. In the ensuing years it became apparent that the service provided by the CPU needed to be extended to include the increasing number of adult victims of family violence and sexual offences. This led to the establishment of the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit (FCS) within the South African Police Service (SAPS) in March 1996. The establishment of the FCS was approved by the Provincial Commissioner, Gauteng, on 18 March 1995 and the first Child Protection Unit in the SAPS to be transformed into a Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit was the Braamfontein (Johannesburg) branch, on 18 March 1996. The first FCS units established functioned as centralised units (FCS branches at SAPS area level, each with its own branch commander) with four levels of command: National, provincial, area and local level.

Members transferred to the FCS needed to have already completed the basic police training at one of the SAPS colleges, and have already gained some experience in general policing. Crimes policed by members of the FCS are:

- **Family violence** (intra-familial, victims of 18 years and older), such as, assault with the intention to do grievous bodily harm and attempted murder;

- **Child protection** (victims under the age of 18 years), such as, rape, incest, indecent assault, attempted murder, kidnapping, abduction, crimes with regard to the sexual exploitation of children, and child pornography;
- **Sexual offences** (victims of 18 years of age and older), such as, rape, incest and indecent assault (*Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit (FCS) 2012*).

In 2006 the national management of the SAPS embarked on a process to empower police stations with the necessary capacity and authority to render an effective service to communities. Part of this process was to move members from specialised units at area level, of which the FCS was one, to police stations. The main aim of this process was ultimately to have skilled FCS investigators available at all police stations on a 24-hour basis. The rationale for the restructuring was, according to the SAPS, based on a perceived lack of accountability, low conviction rates, distorted communication and a host of other factors leading to ineffective service delivery by the FCS unit. The restructuring of the FCS unit during 2006 had been a contentious topic of debate among the South African non-governmental sphere, prosecutors who deal with FCS-related matters and also among members of the SAPS. The process caused widespread concern among internal and external stakeholders. These concerns were confirmed and evaluated during research conducted between August 2007 and December 2008 (Van Graan

2008). The primary research findings indicated that service delivery of the FCS unit had been negatively affected by the restructuring process. As a result, the rationale for the FCS restructuring was possibly based on incorrect perceptions, rendering the process unnecessary. Had the restructuring not taken place service delivery may not have been adversely affected the way it was. In 2009 the Minister of Police announced that the re-establishment of the FCS units was under consideration.

In recent years, as the issue of child abuse increasingly became a topic of national concern, South Africa passed a series of laws, such as the Domestic Violence Act, 1998 Act No. 116 of 1998 (South Africa 1998); the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 Act No. 32 of 2007 (South Africa 2007); the Films and Publications Act, 1996 Act No. 65 of 1996 (South Africa 1996); the Child Justice Act, 2008 Act No. 75 of 2008 (South Africa 2008) and the Children's Act, 2005 Act No. 38 of 2005 (South Africa 2005a). This legal framework was designed to regulate the care and protection of children. As a result, certain legal obligations are imposed on members of the SAPS to ensure the protection and care of children. In order to fulfil these obligations the National Commissioner of the SAPS issued an instruction to provide clear direction to members on how to provide and ensure the necessary assistance to and protection of children. In terms of this instruction members of the SAPS are required to take action, without delay, where the interests of a child demand this.

Various SAPS policy directives furthermore prioritise service delivery to child abuse victims such as the SAPS Strategic Plan 2010 to 2014 (South Africa 2010c:12 & 15). This plan sets out to improve the capacity and professionalism of detectives through continued skills development as an operational strategic priority, as well as to allocate sufficient resources to these units. The SAPS Strategic Plan for 2005 to 2010 (South Africa 2005b:31) was intended to combat crimes against children, focusing on child abuse as a key strategic priority. The Annual Performance Plan 2011/2012 (South Africa 2011:32 & 41) of the SAPS furthermore aims to foster skills and development of detectives through training courses focusing on how to deal effectively with violence against children and to render effective support to child victims. This annual performance plan also aims to detect 66-70% of crimes against children and to achieve a 3% increase in court-ready dockets.

However, the legal framework and policy guidelines alone did not efficiently deal with these crimes, as legislation only addresses aspects of the problem such as arrest requirements. It was clear that a system to address the physical safety and well-being of child victims was needed. It became evident that a more holistic approach to combat child abuse was needed based on increasing dissatisfaction of the community with the fight against child abuse. Some statistics, furthermore, confirmed the need for such an approach. The Annual Report 2009/2010 (South Africa 2009:100) of the SAPS indicates that during the 2009/10 financial year, 48 721 cases were received by the FCS unit for investigation (2 089 enquiries and 46 632 dockets), which led to only 27 492 arrests. A total of 41 858 cases (400 enquiries and 41 458 dockets) were on hand as of 31 March 2010 (28801 are court cases). Official statistics on crimes against children (under 18 years), ranging from murder, attempted murder, common assault, assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm (GBH) and sexual offences, as given in the Annual Report 2010/2011 (South Africa, 2010a: 91) of the SAPS disturbingly reflects that 42% of all reported sexual offences cases, 7.20% of all reported common assault cases, 5.54% of all reported assault GBH cases, 5.07% and 5.68% of reported attempted murder and murder cases, respectively, were committed against children. The re-introduction of the FCS unit in 2010 to a centralised capacity was therefore met with optimism among FCS members, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other government departments.

The SAPS Provincial Management in Gauteng developed an FCS Strategy 2011-2015 (South Africa 2010b) which reflects the strategic goals and priorities that the province will attempt to achieve over the five-year period from 2010 to 2015. The re-introduction of the FCS unit has been implemented as one of the strategies to improve services to victims of child abuse. These units were established and aligned with the cluster policing model. In June 2010 Gauteng re-established (re-introduced) 22 FCS cluster units within the SAPS to a centralised capacity in order to align itself with this decision by the minister. Each of these cluster units has five to eight serving police stations under its control headed by unit commanders. Service delivery of these units is coordinated by a provincial coordinator, and furthermore managed by four detective zone commanders. Each of these commanders is responsible for five to six cluster

police stations. This re-introduction was followed by the other provinces. The FCS was thus once again structured on four levels of command: National, provincial, cluster and unit level. According to the Annual Report 2010/2011 (South Africa 2010a: 93) of the SAPS a total of 1 864 police officials and 218 support staff were placed at these units. The majority of these members have previous FCS investigative experience and training. An additional 250 FCS members attended the FCS Detective Learning Programme during the 2010/2011 financial year. FCS members also attend training programmes such as the Sexual Offences Investigation Course, First Responder to Sexual Offences Course, Integrated Sexual Offences Course (multi-disciplinary), in-service training and FCS-related workshops.

The FCS in Gauteng also aims to increase the number of investigating officers to all FCS units in the province through the recruitment of sufficient numbers of detectives to prioritise the investigation of child abuse. The increase in physical resources, such as sexual assault evidence collection kits (crime kits), has also been prioritised to improve services rendered to child abuse victims. As illustration of the FCS's commitment to improve service delivery, skills of FCS investigators will be increased by eliminating training backlogs and retraining existing FCS investigators. New training courses have been developed with the focus on sexual offences, for example, human trafficking and child pornography courses, related legislation, for example, the Child Justice Act, the clarifying of roles and responsibilities of first responders at police stations, and the implementation of standard operating procedures for reporting FCS-related crimes. These newly developed training courses aim to optimise investigation.

The FCS acknowledges victim empowerment as a strategy of social crime prevention interventions aimed at vulnerable groups such as children. The victim empowerment programme will be implemented at all FCS units and victim empowerment centres are established at every police station. These initiatives contribute to a victim-centred approach within the communities the FCS serves to prevent and reduce secondary victimisation.

In order to improve FCS service delivery to child abuse victims the FCS has also adopted an integrated approach. The establishment of partnerships and interaction between the FCS, the community, victims of violence, NGOs and other government departments are also receiving priority

attention as a newly adopted strategy to combat child abuse. The establishment of the Provincial Child Justice Forum, which includes the Departments of Justice and Constitutional Development, Health, Community Safety, Social Development, and Education, NGOs, and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), is evidence of a multi-disciplinary approach to sustainable partnership policing of the fight against child abuse.

The establishment of one-stop centres throughout the country, such as the Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs), is particularly welcomed to improve service delivery to child abuse victims. These one-stop facilities have been introduced at public hospitals in communities where rape incidents are particularly high, and they play a vital part in South Africa's anti-rape strategy, aiming to reduce secondary trauma for victims, improve conviction rates and reduce the cycle time for finalising cases. These centres are managed by an inter-departmental team including the Departments of: Justice, Health, Education, Treasury, Correctional Services, Safety and Security, Local Government, Home Affairs, and Social Development, as well as civil society organisations. These centres are also linked to sexual offences courts that are staffed by prosecutors, social workers, investigating officers, magistrates, health professionals, NGOs and police in close proximity to the centres.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

For the purposes of this article the following concepts are defined:

Internal service delivery

Internal service delivery refers to the joint venture, collaboration, relations and operational arrangements among the various FCS units (Van Graan 2008:206). These units individually deliver services to victims of abuse in different police clusters, such as, Krugersdorp, Johannesburg Central and Hillbrow. The Krugersdorp FCS cluster provides services to victims of abuse to serving police stations at Krugersdorp, Hekpoort, Kagiso, Magaliesburg, Randfontein, Muldersdrift and Tarlton.

External service delivery

External service delivery refers to the partnerships, interaction and working agreements between the FCS, NGOs, such as, The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children and other government departments, for example NPA rendering services to the client system (child abuse victims) serviced by the FCS (Van Graan 2008:206).

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The prevention of crimes against children are categorised by the SAPS as crimes that receive priority attention. However, “South Africa still has high levels of violence against its women and children, despite a world-renowned Constitution and a legislative overhaul that protects women’s and children’s rights” (*Women and Children in South Africa* 2011).

The research on which this article is based attempts to gain insight into the quality of services currently provided by the FCS to abused children after the re-introduction of the unit to a centralised command structure in 2010. The purpose of the research was to determine the experiences of stakeholders of FCS service delivery in the form of a centralised structure as opposed to the former decentralised structure, and by establishing this, to identify any shortcomings in FCS services provided to external stakeholders post-2010. This knowledge could be utilised to identify new developments in South Africa regarding policing in the fight against child abuse and to make recommendations for further advancement. This article is based on the experiences of an FCS unit commander as well as NGOs and senior public prosecutors working closely with the FCS.

Police organisations globally are searching for innovative ideas on how to deal with crimes against children. The question could thus arise as to whether the policing of these crimes in South Africa should be approached utilising a centralised or decentralised command structure in order to improve service delivery to child abuse victims. Research conducted by Frank and Waterhouse (2009:28) indicates an advantage in utilising a decentralised specialised policing structure in wealthier countries for policing crimes against children, in terms of efficient service delivery, as opposed to utilising a centralised structure. As a result, the need was identified to further explore the quality of services provided by the FCS unit to establish whether the use of a centralised system in South Africa would produce improved results in terms of service delivery. Conclusions are drawn from the findings, and recommendations are made for improved service delivery.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection commenced with a review of national and international literature on the policing of child abuse, followed by semi-structured interviews. These interviews were

conducted during March/April 2011. A purposive sample was drawn for the interview phase. The sample consisted of a chief executive officer (CEO), a Head of Department: Clinical Services and a Head of Department: Crises Line from one prominent NGO, as well as a therapeutic manager from another prominent NGO. These NGOs render counselling services to child victims of violence and abuse. Three senior public prosecutors handling FCS cases in the West Rand policing area also formed part of the sample. These participants were directly involved in dealing with FCS-related crimes in the West Rand policing area and were chosen on account of their participation in the original study. The target population and sample consisted of two NGOs, The Teddy Bear Clinic and Childline, and three senior public prosecutors in the jurisdiction of Krugersdorp, Roodepoort and Randfontein. In order to obtain the views of the SAPS a semi-structured interview was conducted during March 2012 with an FCS unit commander in Gauteng who formed part of the target population and sample. Data was collected until it had reached saturation point.

A non-experimental research design was used in this study followed by a qualitative approach. The researcher used the application of Guba and Tesch’s techniques as explained by Tesch (1990:142-145) to qualitatively analyse the collected data. This technique classifies the data according to categories, themes and codes. The researcher identified three themes that emerged from the analysed data. These themes were firstly the quality of FCS service delivery, secondly the expertise and specialised skills of FCS detectives and lastly external communication and consultation. The research design and methodology applied in this study aimed to make the study replicable and therefore reliable. The qualitative methods and sampling procedure support validity within the specific population. The supporting literature, the information obtained through semi-structured interviews and the pilot testing of the interview schedule assisted in ensuring relevancy and clarity.

SPECIALISED POLICING SERVICES: A SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

A comprehensive review of international trends of specialised services with regard to policing services relating to crimes against women and children was conducted by Frank, Waterhouse, Griggs and Rontsch (2009). This review

indicated significant institutional differences between countries in their approach to policing these crimes.

Poor and middle-income countries with specialised policing services included India, Malaysia, Nepal, Liberia, Mozambique, Mauritius, Namibia, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In all these countries, services for FCS-related crimes are located at district level (Kandaswamy & Deepa 2004). One of the reasons given for why poor and middle-income countries deliver services at district level is that they have fewer resources than wealthier countries and fewer professionals available at local level to manage services. Under these conditions, it makes more sense to offer good services at district level rather than offer many poorly run services at station level. South Africa does not fit the described pattern of district-level delivery, even though in terms of many other factors the country fits the general profile of the middle-income countries like Argentina, Chile, Malaysia or Mauritius (Frank *et al.* 2009:23).

In nine out of ten of the poor and middle-income countries reviewed there was an integrated national plan for combating the crimes concerned (often relating to both prevention and responsive services) with significant national oversight and management. India, which like the United States or Canada, has large autonomous states that each organises its own services, was the exception (Frank *et al.* 2009:23). This was shown to result in inconsistent and less effective service delivery, as there was no national-level group to monitor and evaluate (Ruiz 2006). National oversight accounted for successes both in poor countries like Nepal, and in middle-income countries like Chile and Malaysia (Frank *et al.* 2009:23). In Chile, there was something exceptional: a ministry at national level devoted not just to these investigations (monitoring and directing the detective work on women and children's issues), but with a mission to eradicate serious crime problems. Considerable evidence emerged to indicate that in poor and middle-income countries, a national department for issues such as those relating to women and children offered many advantages in terms of improved service delivery over decentralised service delivery (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:29).

Interestingly, women police stations are increasing rapidly around the world in poor and middle-income countries (Nepal, India, Philippines, Pakistan, Peru, Colombia, Nicaragua, Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, Liberia and elsewhere),

but no example of this was found in the richer countries (Frank *et al.* 2009:24). These stations are staffed with women only and can be within regular stations, for example Brazil, but are sometimes entirely different facilities for the particular purpose of handling specific cases more sensitively, for example Tamil Nadu. If these stations are different facilities, it dramatically increases resources since entire stations are then devoted to responding to the problem. Women police stations are effective for two main reasons. Firstly, most women beaten or abused by men or who have had their children hurt by these men are reluctant to report to male officers who are not always sympathetic in male-dominated stations. Secondly, women seem to make better and more sensitive investigators of crimes against women and children (Frank *et al.* 2009:24). The empirical evidence below supports these statements.

Reporting levels doubled in Brazil and India when women police stations were established (Downie 2005). In India, women increasingly started to report crimes from earlier years when they were too intimidated to report to male officers. Women police detectives took such a strong interest in these cases that the investigation of such crimes increased dramatically (Jones 2008). A number of governments, perceiving the success of these detective services, invested in specialised units to the extent that these units flourished around the world (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:29).

Police in both Chile and Argentina are mandated to respond to calls within minutes of a report of child abuse or domestic violence. Argentina is experimenting with mobile domestic violence units with two police members ready to respond at any time in order to arrest the perpetrator, along with a psychologist and a social worker to support the victim. The team is expected to arrive within 20 minutes of the call for assistance (Eduardo 2007). There are good grounds for a speedy approach. One reason for low reporting rates for domestic violence and child abuse is that a great deal of time may pass between an incident and the victim being able to report it, during which the perpetrator pleads for forgiveness or threatens the victim (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:30).

Tamil Nadu has mobile units for a different reason, one that might also apply to South Africa, namely to reach rural areas with professional teams. A police official, an advocate, a doctor, a social worker and a revenue

department official work together to identify and resolve problems on the spot (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:30).

There was evidence that both poor and middle-income countries (Malaysia, Mauritius, Argentina and Chile) showed similar trends regarding the creation of interdisciplinary teams that include detectives, psychologists, doctors, prosecutors, NGOs and other health practitioners, and integrated, monitored and evaluated national plans that concentrate the resources of various departments on the problem (Frank *et al.* 2009: 25).

According to Frank and Waterhouse (2009:30) it seems, however, that the provision of police services to victims is not an adequate strategy for reducing crime levels. In no example was there clear evidence that these units prevent crimes against women and children. Even the best combination of services in Chile – accessible courts, researchers, national campaigns, trained judiciary, shelters, bringing offenders to book and reintegrating victims of violence into their families – did not impact significantly on crime rates. However, there was significant evidence of success with regard to increased reporting levels, crime-solving rates and victim satisfaction. Nevertheless, conviction rates in all ten countries reviewed were relatively low, for example India (Ruiz 2006).

Some of the countries reviewed set high standards in relation to the qualifications of the personnel working in the system. While Malaysia is very similar to South Africa in economic terms, the 110 women police investigators assigned to Malaysia's sexual abuse and child investigations division are required to have tertiary degrees in a relevant subject prior to police training. It seems that training should not be considered a once-off event but should take place on an ongoing basis to cover various aspects of investigations, the law and appropriate treatment of victims. In richer countries, this is achieved with specialised units that do nothing else but provide ongoing training in accordance with evaluation results that determine exactly what these training needs are. This seems like good practice, but among the ten countries was found to occur only in Chile (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:30).

Many of the specialised units reviewed had their own budgets and resources. India (Poornachandra 2006:114), Brazil (Downie 2005) and Argentina (Jubb & Izumino 2002) have special women's police stations with their

own budgets, teams of lawyers, psychologists and social workers to address these issues. Similarly, Chile has a national department with entire institutes directed at the joint provision of psychological, legal, social and police services to women and child victims (*Chile: Violence against children by family members and protection available from the state* 2007). The notable exception to this trend was Namibia, where the women and child units struggle to obtain resources that are needed to sustain routine daily activities (Weidlich 2007).

Having reviewed international trends on how services are provided to child abuse victims in poor and middle-income countries, the latest developments in FCS service delivery to child abuse victims in South Africa were studied. These are found to be increasingly in line with international standards, such as the broad spectrum of training provision to FCS detectives and the integrated multidisciplinary approach to service delivery in the fight against child abuse. In certain instances service delivery to child victims exceeds these standards, such as the SAPS Tracking Teams tasked to, among other things, track wanted criminals for crimes committed against children and the intensifying efforts of the SAPS to fight these crimes in rural areas by increasing resources, especially in Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape and Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal. The reporting rates of crimes against children in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 showed an increase of 16.02% whilst the reporting rate in 2010/2011 showed a decrease of 10.90%. During these periods no significant impact was noted on crime rates as evident for the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 periods' reporting conviction rates of 20.48% and 21.41%, respectively (South Africa 2009). However, the FCS Strategy 2011/2015 indicates the conviction rate (41.22%) of crimes against children increased during 2010/2011. Cases that went to court (45.25%) during this period also showed an increase (South Africa 2010b).

No specialisation within the police

Five nations without specialised policing services were reviewed. These were Japan, Peru, Angola, Botswana and Turkey. The most important finding in these countries was that the lack of specialisation had to do with socio-cultural factors rather than with a policy choice driven by objective studies or even economic considerations. These factors exist across the economic spectrum as they occur in rich (Japan), middle-income (Botswana, Turkey) and poor countries

(Peru, Liberia) alike (Frank & Waterhouse 2009:30).

Violence against women and children is at such high levels in these countries that it can spiral so far out of control if not managed by an integrated response that includes police and it can affect a great deal of the population, for example Afghanistan (Nijhowne & Oates 2008). According to Frank and Waterhouse (2009:31), the enormity of the problem also leads to the conclusion that specially trained police units or even female police units would initially be more effective than trying to reform an entire police force deeply affected by a culture of patriarchy, for instance Angola's police force that is made up of male ex-combatants.

Specialised services in wealthier countries

The services in rich countries under review were so decentralised that much could be written just about specialised police services to victims of sexual offences and domestic violence in thousands of cities and towns. To condense this vast literature, only very general trends were examined by Frank *et al.* (2009:32) in five countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, involving 20 towns, cities and provinces. A few significant trends in the wealthier countries included:

- Services decentralised to municipal or state level but with central offices that monitor and evaluate programmes, establish strategy and offer training (*Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland Thematic Inspection: Domestic Abuse* 2008).
- Interdepartmental strategies offer a huge range of services and referrals according to joint protocols (*Violence Against Women and Children Strategy Group* 2007).
- Professionals with tertiary qualifications provide high levels of specialised services including risk assessment (Frank *et al.* 2009: 35; *New York Police Department, Special Victims Liaison Unit* 2011).
- Constant training is prescribed by monitoring and evaluation units (Frank *et al.* 2009:38).
- Rapid response teams offer mobile, holistic and integrated family services (*Calgary Sexual Assault Response Team (CSART)*, 2008).
- Help desks, support services and emergency numbers are advertised (Kandaswamy & Deepa 2004).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Quality of FCS service delivery: centralised vs. decentralised

One of the participants in the research for this article, a therapeutic manager representing an NGO, reported that the quality of service provided by the FCS prior to the restructuring in 2006 was characterised by exceptional services and valuable support to NGOs, and FCS members received outstanding training. After the decentralisation of the FCS, a significant gap emerged in the service delivery of the unit causing increased challenges for NGOs since support to victims was extremely limited.

After the reintroduction of the FCS to a centralised structure in 2010, the quality of services delivered by this unit showed signs of improvement. This participant regarded the restructuring of the FCS to a centralised structure as favourable since NGOs can lean on this unit for support.

Participants from another NGO experienced similar trends in the provision of services by the FCS. Participants noted that prior to decentralising this unit, they had experienced quality FCS services characterised by sympathy towards victims and constant collaboration between the FCS and NGOs. However, after the decentralisation of this unit in 2006, the participants experienced disruption of services mainly provided by ordinary police officials. These services were experienced by the participants as substandard due to insensitivity by members of the unit towards victims, uncertainty about police jurisdictions and a lack of training.

It became evident from discussions with senior public prosecutors that these participants had diverse experiences regarding the quality of FCS investigations prior to, during and after the FCS restructuring. One participant described the quality of FCS investigations prior to decentralisation in 2006 as good; however, this participant was of the opinion that after decentralisation, there was a clear deterioration in the quality of investigations by the FCS. The participant experienced an improved standard of investigations after the reintroduction of the FCS to a centralised structure in 2010. The high quality investigations are characterised by the following:

- Members are more committed to oppose bail applications of perpetrators;
- Enhanced cooperation with the (NPA);

- Efficiently trained members, especially in terms of certain offences such as child pornography;
- High skills level of fairly new members; and
- Timely completion of investigations.

Similarly, another senior public prosecutor experienced a decline in the standard of investigations after the decentralisation of the FCS in 2006. In contrast with the previous participant, though, this latter participant experienced a decline in the standard of FCS services after the reintroduction of the unit to a centralised structure in 2010. The substandard services are reflected in poor quality case dockets and are characterised by the following:

- A lack of experienced FCS members since the majority of these members are juniors;
- Several experienced members are no longer serving at the FCS;
- A lack of sensitivity and focus as well as a lack of attention to precision and swiftness in support of victims; and
- A need for guidance from officers.

In agreement with the two senior public prosecutors, another prosecutor acknowledged a decline in the experience levels of FCS members after the decentralisation in 2006. This participant was of the opinion that the more experienced members are overloaded with investigations, resulting in investigations being adversely affected. However, the collaboration of FCS members, brought about by the reintroduction of the FCS, could lead to a marginal improvement in service delivery given that the more experienced members provide guidance to inexperienced members. Nevertheless, this latter participant was of the opinion that the most significant factor of perpetrators found guilty depends solely on the quality of an individual investigating officer since the investigation process is individually bound to the investigator as opposed to the unit as a whole.

From discussions with an FCS unit commander it was revealed that service delivery to victims of abuse was adversely affected by the restructuring initiative in 2006. However, this participant noticed recent signs of improvement in service delivery (after reintroduction) because newly appointed members first had to be trained. This participant, however, experienced a huge shortage of SAPS forensic social workers, resulting in substandard service delivery to victims of abuse. The participant, furthermore, indicated an increase in reporting rates and convictions, but

the shortage of investigation officers is concerning.

Expertise and specialised skills of FCS members

One participant from an NGO felt that after the reintroduction of the FCS, members of this unit do not have evenly balanced levels of expertise and specialised skills; therefore, additional and ongoing training is required. The therapeutic manager representing another NGO anticipated that the reintroduction of this unit would have a positive impact on FCS members' expertise and specialised skills since members of this unit are open-minded and receptive to negotiation with NGOs.

Senior public prosecutors had diverse experiences of the re-introduction impacting on the expertise and specialised skills of FCS members. On the one hand, one participant noticed that the reintroduction motivated members to enhance their skills and expertise through sharing information and investigation methods among investigators and supporting one another. The FCS unit commander acknowledged that experienced investigation officers left this unit after the restructuring process and this resulted in skills and expertise being lost. It followed that newly appointed members first had to be trained to acquire some skills.

External communication and consultation

During interviews with NGOs, one participant confirmed that the SAPS engaged with these NGOs, through a series of meetings and workshops to communicate the reintroduction of the FCS. The SAPS also engaged in consultation processes with the NGOs facilitating joint cooperation. Although the communication and consultation processes only occurred after the reintroduction of the FCS, they were welcomed and experienced positively by the NGOs.

On the other hand, it emerged prominently from interviews with senior public prosecutors that the reintroduction of the FCS was not officially communicated to the NPA. The only communication all these participants received about the re-introduction was via the grapevine from investigating officers of the FCS. The FCS unit commander emphasised that the reintroduction was communicated to all role players shortly after the unit was re-introduced by means of a launch event. This event gave rise to the Provincial Child Justice Forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made, based on the results of this research:

The necessity for sufficient and skilled FCS investigators cannot be overemphasised. It is therefore recommended that the recruitment, training and development of these members receive ongoing attention. The recruitment of FCS members should be a priority to alleviate the shortage of investigation officers and should include psychometric testing of candidates to ensure that these members are capable of investigating sensitive cases. It is further recommended that skilled and experienced members that left the FCS after the restructuring in 2006 be reincorporated in these units to strengthen their capacity for service delivery. All FCS members should receive a scarce skills allowance as recognition for their specialised skills and expertise.

SAPS forensic social workers play a crucial role in the assessment and counseling of child abuse victims. It is thus suggested that SAPS forensic social workers urgently be recruited and placed at FCS units in order to improve the services to victims of abuse.

The multi-disciplinary approach adopted by the FCS is encouraging. However, similar to the international countries reviewed, South Africa also places more emphasis on reactive service delivery to child abuse victims and not to the

prevention of crimes committed against children. It is recommended that this forum address social issues concerned with child abuse and implement innovative ways in the quest to prevent these crimes.

It is furthermore recommended that further research be conducted on the provision of FCS service delivery in order to facilitate new developments for further advancement.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this article was to investigate and provide insight into the experiences of external stakeholders regarding the quality of FCS service after reintroduction of this unit to a centralised capacity. Having reviewed the international trends relating to how specialised policing services with regard to crimes against children are provided, an attempt was made to determine how service delivery could be improved to child abuse victims in the South African context. How should the FCS be structured to effectively police crimes against children? The research findings indicate that the provision of these services as a centralised structure is more advantageous for policing crimes against children in South Africa. This research has established that the cluster model, adopted by the FCS after reintroducing the unit in 2010, has been advantageous for effective service delivery to victims of abuse.

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