Thesis: Lochlainn Mahon,
(Student number:1243081).

Social Science Research
Project April 2010.

Supervisor: Dr. Niall Hanlon.

Research Project Coordinator: Dr. James Brunton.

Title: The Impact of working with child abuse on the Social Support Worker.
## Contents Table:

Abstract ........................................................................................................ 3

Acknowledgements .................................................................................. 4

1.0 Introduction ....................................................................................... 5

1.1 General Introduction ........................................................................ 5

1.2 Literature Review .............................................................................. 6

2.0 Methodology ...................................................................................... 16

2.1 The Participants ................................................................................ 16

2.2 Apparatus .......................................................................................... 17

2.3 Analytic Framework .......................................................................... 17

2.4 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) .................................. 18

2.5 Procedure .......................................................................................... 18

2.6 Limitations ......................................................................................... 19

2.7 Ethical Considerations ........................................................................ 20

3.0 Analysing Results .............................................................................. 21

3.1 Experiences of the support worker ................................................... 22

3.1.1 Education ....................................................................................... 22

3.1.2 Coping ............................................................................................ 24

3.2 The Journey ........................................................................................ 26

3.2.1 Choosing this path ......................................................................... 26

3.2.2 Emotions ........................................................................................ 26

3.2.3 Self Struggle ................................................................................... 28
Abstract:

Context: The roles of social support workers increasingly play huge relevance in Irish society. The researcher examined the lives of support workers that were directly involved in working with cases of child abuse. The aim of this research project is to gain an insight into the actual lives of these individuals, to see from their perspective how they value their work and how it has perhaps changed them as a person.

Method: A qualitative method using an IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) design was implemented to analyse the personal, lived experiences of the workers. The data was collected from five individuals consisting of both genders from mixed age groups, all working in different fields of social support that deal with child abuse cases. They worked in different geographical locations.

Results: There was a clear link between the results that emerged from the qualitative research and the literature. There were additional interesting discoveries, such as the reality that being committed to this area has inflicted on the personal lives of those working in this area. This was made possible through the personalised function of the interviews and the evaluation through IPA.

Conclusion: After conducting such a specific research topic, it was beneficial to provide interaction with these participants. The general feedback from the participants to the researcher was that they hadn’t considered so many of the areas discussed. The participants began to realise that in fact they had been deeply affected and changed by their experiences. The research gives the support worker a voice and an opportunity to articulate their experiences.
Acknowledgements:

This formation of this research project was backed up with undoubted support from various people throughout the production of it. I would like to highlight my gratitude to Dr. Niall Hanlon, my assigned research supervisor along with my project coordinator, Dr. James Brunton.

I would like to thank the individuals who participated in this research, by taking the time and opening up themselves to the interviews which I carried out with them. This would not have been possible without them.

Last but not least I would like to thank my family and the Social Science class of 2010 at DBS for being an outstanding support by keeping me engaged and sane throughout the processes of constructing this research project and throughout the entire course throughout the past three years.
Introduction:

This research proposal endeavours to explore, the affects that working with child abuse victims has on social support workers. The role of social support networks is vital for members of our society. It can be seen as the back-bone for assisting and contributing to the contentment for those working in this demanding area.

In this paper the researcher will undertake a literature review of child abuse and the roles of social support systems. The literature will provide a background that will enhance our understanding of the complexities involved for social support workers engaged with victims/survivors of child abuse.

This research project will also include a qualitative analysis using IPA. This will involve exploring five main themes, each with appropriate sub themes that are integral to the lives of support workers themselves. This hopefully will add to any gap in the literature and provide a further insight into the individual experience of those in this field.
Literature Review:

The background behind support for child abuse victims:

The issue of child abuse has been dramatically exposed to public eyes in recent times. The measures taken to control and potentially limit it have progressed accordingly. On both a national and regional level, there has been a significant increase in the number of child abuse and neglect referrals to the health boards overall. In recent times, the number of child abuse notifications rose nationally. They increased from 434 in 1983 to 6,415 in 1995 (Buckley. 1993. P.23). The dilemma of child sexual abuse sought reports rise from 37 in 1983 to 2,441 in 1995 (Buckley. 1993. P.23). The abandonment of a child, child neglect and child cruelty showed a recording of 195 crime offenses in 2004, which increased to 523 cases in 2009 (CSO.ie. 2010). This portrays the necessity to improve services for victims of child abuse, and also the educational status of those assisting and counselling those affected directly and indirectly by child abuse.

Social support systems:

Social support refers to the various types of support, such as assistance, that people receive from others. Social support can be considered a responsive act of assistance that takes place between human beings (Tracy & Whittaker, 1994). It can be generally classified into two, or often three major categories. They can be classified as emotional, instrumental and additionally as informational support. (Seeman, 2008). Emotional support refers to the measures that people implement to make us as individuals, feel appreciated and cared for. Support can bolster our awareness of self-worth such as communicating a particular issue or
problem, a provision of encouragement, generating positive feedback and so forth. Such support frequently takes the form of non-tangible types of assistance. In contrast, instrumental support refers to the assorted types of tangible aid that others may provide (e.g., helping out with childcare/housekeeping chores, provision of transportation or financial assistance). Informational support represents a third type of social support (one that is often included within the category of instrumental) and refers to the assistance which others may suggest, through the provision of information (Seeman, 2008).

Social support can ameliorate the damaging effects of stressors on mental and physical health attributes (Ren, Skinner, Lee, & Kazis, 1999). A lack of social support is a risk factor for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for persons who have faced traumatic events, (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000) such as child abuse. Victims of sexual assault more often disclose to friends or relatives rather than to police, and may feel preferably understood by these relationship bonds from these socially intimate persons (Dunn et al., 1999).

In the past there was an evident conflict in the development of integration within support networks. Buckley (1993) saw how there was a lack of any arrangements of communication between support networks such social workers and the Gardai. There was shown to be no designated gardai representatives to investigate and tackle the cases of child abuse. Along with this record keeping was at a poor standard and differing shift patterns caused delays in contact (Buckley. 1993. P.22).

Buckley (1993) noticed throughout the research that there was a diverse underlying effect of formalities. The reluctance for co-operation between the Gardai and social workers “emanated from the stereotypical outlooks each agency has of the other; the social workers perceived the Gardai as incompetent and that they were ‘insensitive’, ‘poorly educated’, and having ‘chips on their shoulders’ (Buckley. 1993. P.22). While the Gardai, on the other hand,
saw the social workers as ‘useless’, ‘do-gooders’, ‘anti-police’, and ‘over the top about confidentiality’ (Buckley, 1993). Support workers need to be secure in them. To be secure adults they need to be confident and socially competent. As well as this they need to be capable of acknowledging their own distress and by doing so seek support themselves (Howe, D. 1995. P.126-127).

**An understanding of Abuse:**

“Thou shall not be aware, societies betrayal of the child.”

Alice Miller, 1981.

An understanding of abuse is vital to provide the relevant knowledge on this complex issue. This is necessary for the support worker to be competent in their field of assisting and counselling survivors of child abuse.

There are categories outlined to indicate the form of abuse that has been inflicted on the individual and with this support workers can assess the situation. It is crucial the knowledge of the variations of abuse is studied by support workers as it provides the ability to assess the situation. They grasp the concept that sticks and stones may break your bones and names will hurt you (Stolinsky. 2002. P.6) and are moulded to obtain a sensitive, considerate approach towards each victim. The categories of abuse as stated by Stolinsky (2002) are emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

A simple context of child abuse is the exploitation of or assault on a child, if not both. It can consist of verbal, emotional, physical or sexual. These different forms can overlap (Stolinsky,2002,P.5). Abuse due to violence of any sort directed at children, typically inflicts negative aspects on development and psychosocial functioning (Karson, 2001). Sexual abuse
has shown to be the form of abuse that most victims, as well as most perpetrators, try to remain secret, which support workers have concluded creates an even greater negative effect on the situation (Stolinsky, 2002, P.7).

**How support workers adapt to their role:**

Being involved in the field of social support brings responsibility to be personally reflexive. The individual working with a victim/survivor needs to engage with their clients; while at the same time have the capacity to direct their energies away from their field of work. They need to be clear about their own perspective so they don’t inadvertently impose their own opinions onto their clients (Bass, E., Davis, L. 2002). As the support network is assisting a victim who suffered a form of child abuse, they are forced to face the preconceptions regarding abuse and the factors that coincide it, such as their personal philosophy, their religious beliefs, their attitudes towards good and evil, their own experience of sexual confusion and pain, their feelings towards men and women, about sexuality whether it be heterosexuality or homosexuality, their views on breaking taboos, their ideas to speak out or be made visible (Bass, E., Davis, L. 2002) all have to be put aside in order to produce the most effective results.

Within the field of counselling, higher levels of cognitive complexity have been linked to more flexibility in counselling methods, more empathetic communication, (Benack, 1988, cited in Journal of Counselling & Development, 2010), less prejudice, more multicultural appropriateness, more sophisticated descriptions of clients, more confidence, less anxiety, a greater tolerance for ambiguity, (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999, cited in Journal of Counseling & Development, 2010), and more focus on the counselling process with less self-focus. (Birk & Mahalik, 1996, cited in Journal of Counselling & Development, 2010).
A social support network must be able to believe the unbelievable. Working with survivors of child abuse, they come across the most disturbing, twisted things human beings do to each other. Adults have sadistically tortured children through some form of abuse and this is the reality that the support network has to come to terms with as a possibility in their assistance (Bass, E., Davis, L. 2002).

**How social support helps the victim/survivor:**

It is often difficult to initially communicate with the victim/survivor as they are extremely sensitive when it comes to trusting. Measures have been linked to assisting the victim to make them more feasible when it comes to being open to discuss their experiences through communication. Support networks can adapt methods such as creativity exercises to enhance their conformity with assistance (Bass, E., Davis, L. 2002). This may be simple exercises such as drawing, writing, sculpting or allowing the victim position their bodies in a certain manner such as movement or even to adjust the environment by facing back to back with the client to allow them open up at a stage where they felt less intimidated, not directly facing another individual. This would potentially create a safe place where they could off-load their feelings and become, over time, comfortable in sharing their experience by combining talking with seeing and been seen (Bass, E., Davis, L. 2002).

Struggling whether or not to forgive the offender is a common strategy that social support workers face throughout their practice of counselling and assisting survivors of child abuse. Some survivors of abuse believe that forgiveness is pre-required for true recovery (Draucker & Martsolf 2006). Others believe that the individual must forgive the offender of abuse because of their religious or social beliefs (Draucker & Martsolf 2006). It is an important factor for support workers, particularly counsellors, to help them determine what forgiveness means to them. There are two outlines of forgiveness that the support worker can
work primarily from, to provide a more helpful approach in connecting to the victim. Justified abuse forgiveness and compassionate abuse forgiveness (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006) can suggest the route in which to perform such assistance toward the victim.

The outline of the Child Care Act 1991, reinforces the aspiration towards working with families in their own homes and involving parents in the construction of child care plans (Buckley, Skehill, O’Sullivan, 1997). This allows assistance by support networks to access the needs of children and help deal with the issue of child abuse situations, which can be processed in the highest regard to their welfare, as well as assisting the families that may struggle to provide sufficient care to prevent children from potential abuse and assist those to attend to abused victims.

The importance of having a support network readily available to a victim is emphasized through the lack of support they may experience personally. An individual can feel isolated and with the assistance and counselling processes they may wish to be reintegrated into the family of origin where once they felt abandoned by. Counselling maybe particularly helpful in assisting survivors, to maintain realistic expectations regarding their families responses, while focusing on what survivors can control when re-entering the family or re-establishing a relationship with the entire family or a family member (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006).

**Attachment:**

Attachment theories provide a resource for an understanding of attachment, experienced by the victim and their support system. It was believed that an individual who suffered emotional adversity obtained through childhood later suffers from a range of behavioural, emotional and mental health problems that were connected to their lived experiences (Bowlby cited in Howe et al, 1999. P.12). Attachment primarily was seen to be the
relationship between the mother and her child. Having this bond provided a secure base for the child, which constructed a location of safety, comfort and warmth which assisted their needs (Howe, D. 1995. P. 53). Behaviours of attachment are set off not by internal physiological needs but by external threats and dangers (Howe, D. 1995. P.53).

A disorganised attachment pattern can occur with an individual who has suffered abuse. They may not have a lack of support in their home life, as their own parents themselves may have unresolved issues, for example themselves suffering from traumatic experiences including childhood abuse or when they are the responsible individuals for maltreating (Howe et al, 1999. P124).

**Supervision:**

*Supervision in the helping professions has been regarded as a “supervisory jungle”* (Rich, 1993, cited in Tsui, M. 2005).

The role of supervision is outlined to provide the functions of job improvement where the support workers capabilities are enhanced through a good work environment, professional knowledge, practice skills and emotional support (Tsui, M. 2005. P.12). Supervision enables the support worker to deliver extended effective care by being able to gain a second opinion, raise concerns about their individual intervention, peruse professional development, gain feedback, deal with their own feelings and improve the workers own self-management. The supervisor is also responsible for communicating policy (Pettes, D, E. 1967). This will provide maximum benefits for the clients and minimize inappropriate responses from the support worker (Tsui, M. 2005).
In order for the supervisor to assist the support worker perform to the best of their ability, they must know the worker’s work. (Pettes, D, E. 1967). This is implemented through previous experience, through case readings and through regular supervisory sessions. It also outlines a responsibility for evaluating, which creates unity between the supervisor and the supervisee to work out new objectives, discovering the support workers interests and abilities, as well as investigating areas where improvement may be necessary (Pettes, D, E. 1967).

Having personal support supervision is an emotional requirement of support work. The support worker is treated as a companion where there is a primary, informal and personal relationship between them and their supervisor. The goal of supportive supervision is ensure social support workers feel confident, morale and are satisfied with their job as well as being a crucial determinant of quality provision of service. (Tsui, M. 2005).

**The outcomes of Social Support interaction for the victim/survivor:**

There are many advantages in participating in assistance and counselling processes for the victim of child abuse. Parrott (2000) suggests that social support is crucial for victims of sexual abuse. Social support mainly sets a goal of manipulating the victims’ emotional misfortune into a recovery situation, where they turn away from the role of a victim. This is done through the communication methods of assisting the adaption of the victim into taking over control of their own feelings, thoughts and actions (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006). By acquiring this assistance, a person can better cope with the transition from being a victim to becoming a survivor. This formality can help them to tackle with their feelings of loss and anxiety that is associated with this change (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006).

The process of assistance from support groups may encourage the recovery process. The victim may realize their strengths and weaknesses and with this, integrate the abuse
experience into their overall identities. The guidance that the victim receives, could provide them with coping mechanisms, and with this are able to adopt a form of contentment and may no longer need to define themselves by their childhood abuse. (Sgroi, 1989, cited in Draucker & Martsolf, 2006).

It is a significant loss for the survivor when their support network becomes less necessary, as the assistance has become a centre point in their recovery. It is also a transition consistent with relinquishing the survivor's individual identity (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006). Support networks may provide an extended invitation to the survivor to remain in some form of contact, however not a reliance form, as the survivor can often gain from sharing ongoing life changes with the support network (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006).

**What has changed in recent times:**

Sociologist Emile Durkheim put a significant emphasis on the importance of education. He believed that it played an essential role in socialization, bringing together a multitude of detached individuals and that it was necessary for teaching the required skills needed to perform specific roles in specialised occupations (Giddens, A. 2009, P.834). The construction of policy and development of laws have generated the awareness and have the intention to minimize the likelihood of child abuse within society. Change has occurred and society has segregated support networks to cater for this demanding service, for assistance and counselling. Support workers for example, therapists, by law, must gain specific training around the issue of child abuse. They must understand what the area means primarily, along with the formalities that follow it. Without this they cannot obtain their professional licenses (Stolinsky, 2002, P.5).
Michel Foucault noticed how the emergence of institutions has played an increasing role in controlling and supervising the society (Giddens, A. 2009. P96), which has raised concerns and has been the predator of abuse, as was unfolded in Irish society last year. The Media has highlighted this issue from a once withheld, unjustified issue to an evident publicized factor in society. This was the case with the Ryan report into clerical abuse of children within institutions in Ireland within recent decades. This case was heavily followed by mass media bodies such as the Irish Independent and the Irish Times newspapers in 2009.

The provision of services such as child-line (ISPCC- the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) have seen an increase of 25%. Last year, a record 815,708 children contacted service provider, Childline. Out of the calls received 11 per cent arose in relation to abuse and welfare that the children experienced neglect from. Although they were able to answer over 500,000 of those calls they still lacked to ability to answer the number of calls received (ISPCC.ie). Their policy of “one child unanswered is too many” shows the vital importance this single service portrays (ISPCC.ie). This has shown that the necessity to secure a stronger importance in child welfare through the provision of assistance and counselling opportunities, should be implemented further and to be made publicly more aware of.
2.0 Method outline:

2.1 Participants:

The participants for this qualitative research project consisted of various representatives of the social support network. The study focused on the experiences of five individuals who directly and indirectly work with survivors of child abuse. They consisted of:

- An independent counsellor and psychotherapist, Marie*
- A family therapist, Jeremy*
- A counsellor from a support organization, Alex*
- A child protection social worker, Deirdre*
- A representative of the ISPCC (Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children), Kelly.*

The information received from them was carried out, in person, through interviews in a personal environment. To gain access to these individuals, contact was made to these persons whom the researcher had an informal relationship with. They were primarily assured of the confidentiality and the extent that the material would be implemented upon. As these were educated, established practitioners in the area of social support, consent to conform to this study due to age, didn’t hinder the research methods as all participants were consenting adults over the age of eighteen.

* For the purpose of confidentiality the participants were given pseudonyms.
2.2 **Apparatus:**

The materials used throughout this research analysis consisted of a Dictaphone, which was utilized to record the interviews that were carried out. A notepad and pen were also kept at the researcher’s proximity to note extra occurrences of the interviews that would benefit the IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) analysis section of the results. An important source for analyzing qualitative research which was used by the researcher was Nvivo which is a computing system that was availed to analyze the interviews. It allowed the researcher analyze the data by spreading the received data into themes and therefore making it feasible to effectively discover the results as accurately as possible.

2.3 **Analytic Framework:**

For this study the researcher decided that the topic best suited feedback through qualitative methods and were carried out through one on one interviews, as opposed to other methods such as quantitative analysis. The researcher opted to consider focus groups as a research method as it produced data through natural interactions between members of the group (Wilkinson, 2003). Interviews were most appropriate for this type of research as they are structured interactions which are socially acquired between a researcher and a participant (Charmaz, 2000). For this study the objective was to conduct a semi-structured personalized interview which provided the researcher with the response of experiences, thoughts and expressions which facilitated the methodology of this study. Conducting this type of interview allowed the researcher to direct the conversation to discover aspects that the participant may not disclose in social gathering of individuals, that a focus group may have interfered with their honest experiences.
2.4 **Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA):**

Throughout the analysis of the interviews, the system of IPA was used. The ideology of this approach suited the researcher as it portrayed the individuals own voice. Phenomenology is concerned with the actual lived experiences of individuals and it explores the meaning of these experiences (Burns and Grove, 2001; Streubert and Carpenter 1999). Smith (2003) suggested that interpretation of interaction with a text can gain an insight into the participants world which can be “dependent on and complicated by the researchers own conceptions.” The aim to enter the participants’ life world.

2.5 **Procedure:**

The purpose of this research project was to gain a further insight into the lives of social support workers who participate in a valuable aspect in aiding particular needs of society. The researcher wanted to understand additionally to what the literature has provided and this was implemented by first hand research. After the researcher studied the literature, it was then attainable to construct research questions to best fulfil the desired knowledge.

The researcher was fortunate to obtain the primary resources of interviewees through an informal relationship with the participants. This meant there was no need to send a consent form to the participants of the interviews. There was a consent form given to each participant for legalities which they signed and the researcher co-signed.

The participants were assured of the upmost confidentiality prior to the commencement of the interviews and were noted that it would be recorded. This was expressed through verbal
communication and consent forms. The interviews were undertaken by the researcher whom outlined total flexibility to the interview participants as to where they would arrange to carry out these interviews. The researcher chose to interview both genders so that a universal approach could be achieved. The researcher was invited by each participant to travel to each of the participants’ residence to carry out the interviews, where the semi-structured interviews were undertaken in a quiet, informal and comfortable environment in their residence. The interviews were recorded and ranged from 31 minutes to 45.5 minutes. During each interview the researcher interpreted the participants’ thoughts on the outlook of themselves; this was done by taking down notes of significant, outstanding feedback provided. During this process the researcher was able to distinguish emergent themes. A closer analysis of the transcripts provided the researcher with a list of super ordinate themes which contributed to assessing the main themes.

When all the interviews were completed, the researcher then started analyzing the received data by transcribing the five interviews which were carried out. When they were transcribed, the use of computing software system NVivo for qualitative research methods, was implemented. NVivo was operated to manage the data by storing the received knowledge gained from the interviews and to analyze interpretations from them. Coding was constructed through this computing system to identity specific themes and sub themes of the interviews to provide the key aspects of value to the research (Bazeley, P., Richards, L. 2000. P.23).

2.6 Limitations:

The researcher found few limitations throughout the research of this project. The participants for these qualitative based interviews were readily available to the researcher through
fortunate connections. The only consideration of limitations that stood out to the researcher, was the probability of the results being slightly tangible, where there may have been more interviews conducted. This was due to time management and a restricted word count. Another aspect was the availability of literature. Most of the literature provided a background to the roles of social support which was of assistance to understand the background of what is expected of social support workers and the investigation into the issue of abuse. However it was minimal when it came down to researching the impacts of their work on them personally. In stating this, the researcher was content with the results retrieved.

2.7 Ethical Considerations:

Throughout this research project there were ethical considerations which had to be implemented while conducting the direct research in the form of interviews. The entire formation and interview process was an important factor of this study and therefore throughout the research the cognitive approach considered was thinking and judging what the ethical obligations are, which is vital (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, cited in Patton, M. P. 2002. P. 411). By conducting an ideographic study, it can be said that one should adopt what Stake (1994) observed, which was that “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world and their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict.” The researcher had to incorporate a code of confidentiality which had to be strictly and sensitively prioritized throughout the construction of approaching the interviewees. Obtaining relevant information with appropriate use of language and moral justification was another area that had to be constructed in an ethical perspective, in respect to the consented participants.
**3.0 Analysing Results:**

This research was carried out through conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis. The goal of this research was to reveal a universal understanding of the lives social support workers live. This was to be demonstrated in respect to the two diverging aspects of their lives—professional and personal. An outlook can vary from person to person. The analysing of the research should provide the researcher with the discovery of feedback which will be parallel to the current literature or perhaps an additional source that could be included in future titles for this area.

There were five significant themes throughout this research and they are described in detail throughout the breakdown of the research which follows. The interview were carried out at a personal level and therefore shadows the themes support workers connect to as a result of being involved in this position of support. The target was to articulate what was similar in the experiences of the respondents regarding each theme outlined.

The main themes that arose from the analysing of the transcripts were the following:

- **Experiences of the support worker**
- **The Journey**
- **Ideals of social support workers**
- **Support for the supporter**
- **Successful social support.**
3.1 **Experiences of the support worker.**

3.1.1 Education support workers receive:

During this initial stage of the interview, it was evident that education is a necessity to be an effective social support worker. The support workers expressed how they felt they could not deliver an adequate service without the appropriate understanding of the work and issues they were involved in. Kelly expressed this by stating:

*Extensive training is the largest factor in this work.* - Kelly

Alex reinforces this view by stating how he feels he needs to understand before he can be of adequate assistance:

*I think having the appropriate knowledge in this field is the first factor I consider when tackling a case of abuse.* - Alex

Extensive educational measures were necessary for practical experience to be fully beneficial. The support workers found that by being educated first they were able to gain more from their hands on experiences.

*I found that my training for the organization I work for made me conscious to apply the important company procedures, when I was getting my practical experience. I had*
learned the right etiquette and I was able to apply it to my experience which made it a lot more fruitful. - Alex

Marie gives an example of the training she was involved in to obtain a position as a social support worker that she regards as being the centre point in dealing with her clients:

Research and long extensive examinations and two counselling sessions which lasted an hour and a half, present, with the clients permission, a supervisor, had to be passed, along with yearly interviews, was initially what I had to achieve successfully.
- Marie.

It was clear how the importance of education is essential as it equips you to be constantly aware of how simple actions can have a significant role:

I certainly have learned in training that there are things we never ever do with clients present such as crossing our legs, fold our arms, we really try to keep away from any body language that may put a barrier between me and the client. - Marie.

From the research it is clear that it is not a simple process becoming a social support worker, and the individuals who have done so are confident in their decision:
One has to have the strong interest and coincide that with the appropriate education which is what I did as I wanted to be a support to society, that was my goal and I’ve achieved that. - Kelly

The extraordinary can spring out of any situation and Jemmy had a realisation, one that affected his life so dramatically through his social behaviours and his understanding of life, as a result of his work:

I have learnt more about spirituality and the spirit of people from survivors of abuse, then I did through religious domains, and I had a religious background. My work has shown me there are no simple answers. I’d be anti-doctrine, I’m intolerant around certainty - Jeremy.

3.1.2 Coping:

Supervision is seen to be important for social support workers as it provides a coping mechanism so they can relieve themselves from the pressures that their role may burden upon with:

They’re very clear with us that if we did need an extra supervision session we could have it. - Marie
Coping with difficult situations becomes easier for the worker when they gain more experience. They become familiarized with the issues that situate around the abuse and can personally tackle them when faced:

_In some ways the longer you’re doing it you probably have a better way of dealing with it. I would know even for myself just to go for a walk, to go down to the river for a while, em, you know, and take my hat off, take my carers hat off, and just relax doing something else._ -Marie

The concept of experience was a reoccurring factor that these support workers strongly state to be necessary for coping with this job, such as the difficulties involved in working with victims of child abuse. All the participants expressed the huge relevance it had. Alex and Jeremy pointed out the following:

_Inexperience is inappropriate for this field; it’s too sensitive for the inexperienced._ - Alex

_If I hadn’t the experience I have, I’d say I am a disaster._ - Jeremy

To be able to cope Jeremy pointed out how he has to build up stamina to take head on what he’s about to discover and not let it uphold his ability to assist the child abuse client:

_I think the most important thing is that I stay not afraid of being... of being affected by what people tell me_ - Jeremy.
3.2 The Journey:

3.2.1 Choosing this path:

The social support workers were influenced by a variety of things that influence their decision to choose this as a career. Marie’s personal experience of therapy initiated her decision, as she realised how effective it can be.

*I got very interested in this area when I was in therapy myself. Years ago I probably spent overall maybe three, four, five years in therapy and I was really impressed with how it helped me, how it helped me to reflect and make changes in my life.* - Marie

Alex’s confidence in his decision comes with the new situations he constantly finds himself in. It was his ambition to serve others unconditionally:

*I find that every day brings with it new experiences and this is one of the main reasons, even though it’s a challenging job, why I like it so much.* - Alex

3.2.2 Emotions.

The participants described how their emotional stand in their practice is at a controlled level. They recall the initial experiences of emotional despair from this work which they have learned to manage effectively in current times. Marie conveys her lived experience of tackling the emotional repercussions of her work:
It’s still shocking to hear of the abuse and we do need support, thought it’s not like when you first start working with it, when you bring it home with you, when you can’t sleep, nightmares, anger, frustration, all those things but I wouldn’t have that very often at all now because my psyche is more able to take it now without being devastated. - Marie

With experience comes a greater facility to cope and this assists in the support workers emotional competency. Initially the work carried great emotional unrest and over time the participants were able to control this mix of emotions. Marie states how she is aware of her emotional change:

*It would be lovely to say perhaps that as psychotherapists move into years of working with abuse cases that they still feel shocked and the same as the early days of their practice, but I think if people are honest, that’s not true.* - Marie

The secondary notion of emotions can be the starting point to greater problems. Jeremy is critical in his idea to perform to the best of his ability that he has to realise that there’s only so much he can do for a victim/survivor:

*The more I think I have to get it right, like God, the more personal anxieties come into my life.* - Jeremy
3.2.3 Self struggle.

Self struggle is integral to this work. The idea of self struggle is a complex one and humans all experience some form of it. Jeremy was reminiscing about a case he was involved in and he expressed a time of self struggle where he directly saw neglect occurring by the unwillingness of the child’s family to support him and the lack of resources available to him by other support areas, which out casted him:

To see this child being abandoned and neglected by his family and resulting in him having to live 14 miles away from his home in a B&B where they said ah you might get dinner there too, really frustrated me, I had to withhold my personal feelings for this kid as I may have gotten myself in too deep. - Jeremy.

A common trait of every individual is the fact that we are all, in some way or form, prejudice. Being included in situations of child abuse where the support worker has to assist within their own jurisdictions, provides the struggle to having no choice but to switch off from their personal ideas or misconceptions:

If I think I’m not prejudiced I’m foolish because I am prejudiced, I’m always prejudiced, my job is to see where I am prejudiced and to do something about it. - Jeremy
The role of a support worker goes beyond a clock in, clock off profession; it took lengthy periods of time, of self reflection, integration of experience to accumulate this level of competency. Deirdre elaborated how she had to experience a personal war of her own:

I found that it was difficult to control my behaviour patterns. I wouldn’t be a moody person, it’s not in my nature but I used to have outbursts towards my family in the early days. I was at the stage of trying to learn to cut-off from my actual clients and although they were aware that, that specific day may have been difficult for me, I still felt anger toward the perpetrators of these really great people and initially I lashed out inappropriately at my family trying to register what had happened, which I found hard. - Deirdre

3.3 Ideals of social support workers:

3.3.1 Capability

The participants highlighted throughout the course of the interviews, how the support worker had to have the capabilities to successfully facilitate in the area of support. They all stated in some regard, the requirement of not only education and training but the equal necessity of being able to implement their knowledge with their fearlessness.
I think you’d want to feel confident that you’re able to do the job, that you’re the person for it, that you can listen and have empathy rather than sympathy. - Marie.

I do believe that social support is vital for the needs of society, but the right people need to be doing the job. - Alex.

3.3.2 Approach

Jeremy felt a considerable aspect of his work was how he engaged with the clients. He felt that sincerity was foundational as a primary step in forming a bond with the client in feeling comfortable with him:

To me, the most important piece that we give to anybody is our humanity. I find that it’s not trying to change people it’s about being with people and that’s very significant with child abuse cases. - Jeremy

This was backed up by the approach Deirdre gave where she considered her own morale had to be alienated in her work. She led to believe that becoming neutral made her work easier, more accessible:

Being needed in such terrible circumstances such as this, makes me, well forces me to leave my own opinions in my mind. I can form relationships better by being so open and it has helped me in my social life too. - Deirdre.
The researcher was discussing with Jeremy the applications he’s adapted into his own life and his interaction with others that are linked back to his work:

_"I think I wouldn’t necessarily take things at face value, would I be suspicious, I’d think around the corner a bit more." - Jeremy._

Alex pointed out how he felt there were a number of characteristics that has influenced his personae. He gained various characteristics that he didn’t realise he had as a result of being in this field:

_"Communication is everything. The language you use is everything. In my professional life I am extremely vigilant of my communication strategies and have noticed they have also rubbed off in my social life in the away I approach conversations." - Alex_

### 3.4 Support for the supporter:

#### 3.4.1 Family:

Support is a huge aspect of this profession; it provides the extra care that support workers need to survive in this arena of mixed feelings. It was evident that family was their secondary source to effective support.
Marie states how she can’t put her emphasis on getting her needs of support through her family:

>You can’t rely on your family for support because you need to learn to leave these issues at work and not bring them home, for your sake and my families. -Marie

There are cases where informal support from the support workers family can be a significant assistance to their own contentment. Deirdre briefly explained how when she feels low about the day she feels more optimistic when see interacts with family members:

>I maybe phone my sisters in England and have a good long chat, that refreshes me and makes me more self believing... that there’s more to life outside the depressing circumstances I’m faced with day to day. -Deirdre

Jeremy reveals that although it can be a tough job, the personal gain, the joy he gets from being able to do it has rubbed off on his daughter and has made her consider this path to take:

>It’s quite astonishing really; my daughter wants to go into social support, social work specifically. She didn’t always; it was when she was able to be aware of how careful I was with her, that I always have my carer’s hat on. That appealed to her and it can be a rewarding experience and it never gets boring. -Jeremy.
The family unit has always been a complex one in which they all differ according to their ideas on life. Alex finds his role has challenged characteristics of his pre-support world. He feels his changes have devalued by the closest people to him:

My mother is one that I reckon is disappointed in me as I have lost my religious appetite. I think perhaps working with people who have been victims to such cruelty has made me question my faith and it has left me at a place of utter confusion. - Alex.

3.4.2 Peers:

An underlying theme arose from the main theme of support; this was the accountability that support workers often relate easier to their various forms of peers. Kelly discussed how she feels closer to her work peers as they both are at the same level and was able to rely on each other at a more personal level:

I formed a great bond and built relationships with the people I work with as you may see them once a week or everyday and they become a support, someone you can talk with. - Kelly

Alex explained how he felt more equipped by the formal and informal relationships he had and how they help him with his own quests professionally and personally:

I’d say I gain a lot from being around my colleagues, well my friends and family too. I like to observe my surroundings and through my occupation I sort of rely on that as I can never be too sure of myself, my training has helped me though. - Alex
3.4.3 Supervision-

The idea and compulsion that the support workers should receive support within the institution, for their own needs, was a regular focus of the participants. Throughout the interviews each interviewee referred back to the importance supervision had in the personal career as a support worker and in their private lives so they can with hold any additional strains in their life.

*I feel that it would be unethical, wrong, to work with clients and not have supervision*-

*Marie*

*Yeah it is extremely vital as you need to have someone that if you do have a problem that you’re not on your own or feel isolated.* - *Kelly*

*There is no question that this is necessary. Our supervisors join us in our journey personally and professionally.* - *Jeremy*

Marie explained how the vulnerability of a support worker to feel trapped in a personally draining situation can have damaging after effects on the worker and therefore from her experience of supervision she is able to be the support worker she aimed to be. However this can only be fully achieved through constant supervision monitoring. Jeremy backs up her stand on the utter importance of it to help avoid damaging impacts that may affect them in this work:
Supervision is vital. For every eight hours I do, approximately, there is one hour supervision. This is ethically a must for social support workers. I wouldn’t feel I could deliver effectively if I hadn’t got it. – Marie

There is no question that this is necessary. Our supervisors join us in our journey personally and professionally”. - Jeremy.

It can still be hard to face the realities of child abuse, even for those experienced support workers, as Marie points out:

   *It still is shocking to hear of the abuse and we do need support.* - Marie

The idea of supervision is heavily associated with well being in this profession. There have been incidents where providers of support have lacked in their area of seeking support and it showed, Jeremy recalls:

   There’s so many people my age and I’m in my mid-fifties, who are burnt out because they have not minded themselves and it is so easy if you don’t mind yourself, if you don’t look after yourself and don’t look after the workers I think em, you run out of steam, you run dry...I wouldn’t risk it. - Jeremy.
3.5 Successful social support:

3.5.1 Job Satisfaction:

One of the purposes of this research project was to investigate the personal perspective about why these diligent individuals got involved and their personal thoughts after being included in this profession after a period of time:

Although I am not supernatural and can’t get rid of someone’s pain, I have seen positive results where individuals have been able to recover and get on with their lives in a positive manner, this makes me assured that this work is worth doing. - Alex.

Having commenced the road to social support provision, it has brought with it the advantage of applying further self awareness. Deirdre shone a light on her own personal characteristics and feels herself improvement has been assisted by her position:

The fact that social support can play such a large part in someone’s life, has been a keen interest of mine, seeing cases resulting in the person being able to cope and find contentment, reassures me that to be patient and non-judgemental pays off. It was challenging to do but it pays off and I’m better able to apply myself in this service by altering my personal traits. - Deirdre
Obtaining the role of a support worker has provided additional self building to the participants. Kelly, for one, would believe it has helped her grow in all areas of her life, that although it is a job, it is more than that to her:

*Having the opportunity and being capable to contribute to this profession, to me, is one the greatest gains I’ve received. It has matured me.* - Kelly.

Being involved in this certain profession can impose self awareness of value life has to the individuals that provide this service. It was evident throughout the feedback from the participants that they got back more a status as Alex conveys:

*I think it has made me more appreciative to know how fortunate I really am. Working with such a sensitive issue and seeing how much it has affected the victims of it, shows me I’ve so much to be thankful for and the support I get makes me overcome any obstacle and enlightens my ability to help others and that’s all that matters to me.* - Alex.

### 3.5.2 Resources:

The participants all expressed a concern regarding the lack availability of resources necessary to implement a better service. The lack of resources impacts on the social support worker and can exacerbate the situation for them:

*You say my job is to work with this child, and the resources aren’t there really there to support him.* - Jeremy
The limitations of the resources around us are very powerful. Having the facilities makes my role and the role of support more accessible. - Jeremy

The support workers do acknowledge the relevance of sufficient resources necessary to provide a more prestige service to their clients, however the reality is they are lacked and it was evident that it was effecting their ability to support effectively. It was one of the main factors that hindered support succession:

I think the environment is an important aspect of assisting a service user. I know in my space where I discuss these issues is limited. The walls are thin and I often have to tell the client to speak lower which isn’t very professional and the seating accommodations are inadequate, they are not comfortable. - Marie.
4.0 Discussion:

The affects that working with child abuse victims has on social support workers was the aim of this study. The researcher wanted to get an insight into the background surrounding the areas of child abuse and social support in order for the research analysis to be foundational and coinciding with the two aspects that were brought together for this study. The researcher found that interpreting the analysis portrayed an individualistic outlook of a support worker. It allowed them to have their say on the personal characteristics of working in this particular area of support. The themes emerged directly from the personal experiences of the support workers; coincidently they emerged alongside the research literature and questions. This suggested to the researcher that both of these aspects of the study were very much in alignment with personal experience. The participants were intrigued by the format of the interviews. They all commented on the aspects of the interview that they never had considered themselves, which shed a light on the reality that they were in fact manipulated by their work to a certain extent. A perspective that researcher, previous to the research, was that a theme or a regular occurrence of social workers being overly protective towards their families, as the abuse they regularly listen to might instigate this. A progression that would almost be taken as a form of a disorder. This didn’t arise much to the researcher’s astonishment. Various other factors clearly over ruled.
**Experience of social support workers:**

Throughout the research project, the researcher was constantly being told about the support workers experience within their role and behind the scenes when they were themselves, an individual of society. The sub themes of education, struggles and coping came into the main theme of experience and each participant related their experiences primarily in these areas.

It has been outlined through legislation that support workers must successfully gain specific training in child abuse. They must have an understanding of what the area consists of and the current formalities that follow it. A support worker can’t gain a position without this if they decide to work in this area, unless they have acquired these procedures (Stolinsky, 2002). This was backed up in the interviews where the importance of knowledge and training was a key aspect of their experience to gain a position working with abused victims.

From the researcher’s analysis, it shone experience. Jeremy was the most qualified and the longest in the field of social support for child abuse victims/survivors. It showed through the quality of his interview, which had the capability of going well beyond the advised maximum forty-five minutes which it began to do. With his ideas and varied accountabilities of events through involvement, the researcher was able to interpret significantly the way his role affected and affected his life as a whole. He is able to base his energy positively towards society and is seen to be an inspiration by his peers, family and community.

Buckley (1993) portrayed how there was a conflict between social support networks within the society. The research showed the participants universal thought that support networks can often be at opposing sides. For example through one of the interviews, it was stated how the individual can sometimes get frustrated with social workers. Although they are aware the
resources in that department are low, however this particular participant expressed frustration with his experience of alliance with this one particular network.

The Journey:

This theme was particularly interesting as three of the participants regarded their support provision, as being a journey. They explained how they felt drawn to the route of care provision and that they wanted to give back to society, that they felt caring was in their nature. They idealized it as carrying new experiences, a range of challenges and outcomes. What the researcher gained from this theme was the idea of humanity. Many of the participants described their role as a path that wasn’t straight; there were no ways to foresee what was going to happen next. Being a support worker this not only related to their work but their personal lives. The notion of the inevitable was a superordinate theme that came out of the research. The research builds support workers up to be able to withstand any situation, which they regularly achieve beyond expectations.

Often it occurs that the client has attachment issues after they encounter their abuse which can often be a challenge for the support workers (Howe et al, 1999). They can be drawn in to be emotionally attached to their client as the client can primarily become attached. Through workers training and supervision they learn to implement a supporter’s alliance but have to be careful the client doesn’t become reliant as it can cause future problems for both parties.

Being involved in this field inflicted a rollercoaster of personal reflection and personal change. The participants evaluated these processes and outlined that they faced emotional and self control challenges as a result of their work.
**Ideals of social support workers:**

The study provided the researcher with a firsthand understanding of how the workers classified the proper functions of provision necessary in being a successful support worker, one who is able to do their work and remain capable of shutting off when the work is completed. It was stated that the support workers are responsive acts of assistance between individuals (Tracy & Whittaker, 1994) and this was backed up through the participants’ accounts of their professional value required by society.

It was stated through the background research of the literature that support workers had to make it a priority to leave any personal opinions away from their role (Bass, E., & Davis, L. 2002). The research showed that this was a regular, collective strategy. It was the route to a successful starting point in the supporter-client relationship. It minimized if not eliminated the impacts of unrest.

Bass and Davis (2002) stated that the support worker must be able to withhold some of the most shocking situations they will ever come across or they won’t last personally or professionally. This was backed up by the participants’ reflection of past cases and they felt without the intense training and personal stamina, this area of support would be limited for those who could fully be able to engage themselves with the horrendous situations being poured out to them.
Support for the supporter:

Tsui (2005) pointed out how supervision was vital as it increased the supporters’ ability in their profession as well as maintaining personal health. It gave the supporter the opportunity to relieve themselves from troubles they may face professionally and personally. The research found that all participants regarded support, particularly the support from their supervisors and peers to play a significant role in their life privately and professionally as it provided the chance to off load what they are carrying and therefore were able to progress in their own lives without the added burden.

One of the participants recalls incidents where the support worker didn’t take the appropriate care of themselves and resulting in not only being stressed out but by making them physically ill. Ren et al (1999) stated how there could be damaging effects to support workers who neglected their obligation of support, specifically by their supervisor.

Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine (2000) pointed out how an individual needing but lacking support is a risk for the development of post traumatic stress disorder. These individuals who have been involved in traumatic events, such as support workers, are faced with difficult recalls of abuse. They can find themselves falling victim to other repercussions. This was noted when Jeremy explained how he came to witness the “burning out” of support workers who didn’t taken care of themselves and sought the personal support they should have. This he explained affected their personal lives as their family and friends became involved to assist them, the qualified social support representative.
Successful Social Support:

It seemed to be that the support workers were content in their roles when they were successfully able to adapt their knowledge and experience to generate a safe, appealing haven for those looking for assistance after being the victim of child abuse. It can be seen that the statistics of ISPCC call centre Childline is receiving more calls than ever, with around 11% being solely related to abuse that has been experienced or is ongoing (ISPCC.ie). This suggests that abuse is rampant in our society and that the roles of social support do help as they generate an increase in the willingness of victims to discuss their experiences and seek support.

The general idea in respect to the research carried out was that being involved in such a demanding and an emotionally draining area, brought further positive personal developments to the individuals. Their work was not just a mode they entered when they entered the workplace; they were able to adapt them into their own lives like patience and good communication skills.

Future Research:

A key finding from the research was the commonality of support workers children going on to work in the same field whether it be as a career or for a charity dealing with the issues in social support such as child abuse. The precise nature of this interaction could merit further research and could be a valuable attribute to the literature. Throughout the majority of studies it was specific support workers that were analysed, such as social workers, therefore the
distinction of support peers could be brought in together and investigated as a whole which
could be a resourceful study for diversity in the support working population.

Conclusion:

This research project has been not only a keen interest but an inspiration. The interpretation
of the personalised interviews has provided the researcher with a broad understanding of the
individuals behind an often undesirable, unrecognised and at times an un-praised, but vital
social provision. It was beneficial to include both genders as it provided the researcher with a
universal sample that eliminated the limitations that could have arised. The researcher felt
this topic was relevant in current times as the reliance for social support is further growing,
particularly with the exposure of institutional abuse, which is only going to add to this
already demanding sector. In reference to the aim of this study, the more obvious result is that
social support individuals are impacted by their work. For the majority it was mainly in the
start of their work with clients but they have all learned to control the struggles and
misconceptions that they may face.
Appendix 1:

Consent Form:

Dear participant,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in your decision to participate in this research study. For your assurance, all participants’ names and details obtained by the researcher will be handled with the upmost strict anonymity and confidentiality previous to the interviews and post interviews. For your piece of mind the researcher will replace all original names with pseudonyms.

If for any reason you wish to withdraw any information contributed to the research, at any time, please feel free to do so by contact the researcher at (...........).

I, the participant, consent for the details I shall provide through my interview with Lochlainn Mahon, to be used to assist his research project for his BA in Social Science.

YES ____             NO ____

Date: _____________________________

Signed: _____________________________

Researcher Signature: _____________________________
Appendix 2:

The Interview process:

Background to work:

Q1. Can you tell me briefly, what your area of practice involves and the reasons you chose to go into this field?

Q2. Do you feel you have adequate training to successfully assist and/or counsel those affected by child abuse?

Should more be set in place for future workers?

Is confidentiality a prime concern of yours?

Q3. Would you consider your work to successfully provide assistance to the client of abuse?

Coping mechanisms:

Q4. How do you cope with clients when you hear tales of horror and what methods do you use to retain body language expressions?
- Does one have to build up a defence mechanism to cut off any emotion inherited by the received experiences?

Q5. Would you experience forms of attachments from your clients and if so how do you control these situations?

Q6. Would you suffer from personal anxieties or struggle with your own personal feelings after working with a survivor of abuse?

Q7. Would you consider your own supervision support to be vital in your field?

Self Actualization:

Q8. Do you think your personality characteristics have altered since you’ve begun this work.

-for example as in do you now feel more bitterness, anger, trust issues as a result?

Q9. Would you think being involved in this field effects your own family and/or relationship life?
Q10. If you have a religious faith whatever it maybe, do you feel it challenges your personal faith?

- Would you question your beliefs and struggle with it as a result of the inhuman acts experienced by your clients whom you hear on a day to day basis?

Q11. Would you consider the outlines in social policy to be in accordance with the needs of prevention and care for those who have survived acts of child abuse?

Q12. When you’re discussing or involved with a victim of abuse, would you consider the construction of your own sociolinguistic trends are an important factor for portraying the upmost appropriate communication in assistance and counselling succession?

- How difficult do you find this process?

- Do you alter your linguistics from how your normally would use it?

Q13. How do you “cut off” from your work?

- Do you think it’s important to be able to talk to someone about your own experiences, after being the receiver of such experiences?
Q14. “Forgiveness is said to be an emotional rest for victims.” Would you think it makes assisting and counselling more feasible to suggest or that has already been adapted?

Would you consider yourself a strong believer of forgiveness?

Do you think this is an important personal trait you have so you can suggest it to your clients as a way of healing?

Further assistance for the assister:

Q15. Do you think you need more support personally from family or friends?

If so what do you feel would help your own personal mental health?

Is supervision provisions enough?

Q16. What do you think can be changed from prevention to the provision of support networks being made more accessible?

Does the state have a heavy influence on change or is it societies issue, would you consider?
Appendix 3:

Interview Transcription Key Chart:

I......... Interviewer

A......... Alex (One in four support member. Age group: Late twenties)

D .......... Deirdre (Support social worker. Age group: Late fifties)

J .......... Jeremy (A family therapist, project leader in prevention and a lecturer of counselling
in a top Irish University. Age group: Mid-fifties)

K .......... Kelly (ISPCC representative. Age group: early twenties)

M .......... Marie (A psychotherapist. Age group: Early sixties)

,   = A short pause, usually an indicator of thought

... = A long pause

= Interrupting speech

**Words in bold** = Strongly emphasised speech.
Appendix 4:

An extract of the interviews that took place:

**Participant**: Alex (a counsellor from a charity based abuse crisis centre)

**Interview Length**: 33 minutes

**Location**: At the participants’ residence in Kildare.

An extract from Alex’s interview:

I: Can you tell me if you would consider the education and/or training you received to be beneficial and character building?

A: I found that my training for the organization I work with, has made me conscious to apply the important company procedures, when I was getting my practical experience. I had learned the right etiquette and I was able to apply it to my experience which made it a lot more fruitful.

I: OK Alex, can you explain to me the way in which you cope when working in this area. Do you adapt particular coping mechanisms to deal with the situations you are told and if so what do you do?
A: Yes I think that I learn to cope as time goes by and I get used to hearing such tragic experiences of child abuse. I do often feel a little down when I leave my workplace and am back in my own environment but I try not to be obvious about it as it wouldn’t be right for my family to see me upset as it would only worry them as it is an everyday occurrence. I try not to dwell on what I’ve been told and if something is bothering me I bring it up with my supervisor or close friends....... 

Participant: Deirdre (a child protection social worker)

Interview Length: 32 minutes.

Location: At the participants residence in Kildare.

An extract of Deirdre’s interview:

I: Are there particular ways you develop to stay sane in your work. Do you have to learn specific coping mechanisms?

D: Acquiring specific skills has helped me to cope. My overall desire to help and support victims of child abuse has in its self provided a coping mechanism. I mean this by... by, the way I knew what I was getting myself into. I did a lot of research and training in this area and through this I gained the skills I needed to be able to withstand what I would hear.

I: How do you cope with this gruelling field? Do you ever nearly lost it as it got too difficult to bear?
D: Ye I can cope fine now, it does take time and to be patient to know it gets easier. In my early days I found that it was difficult to control my behaviour patterns. I wouldn’t be a moody person, it’s not in my nature but I used to have outbursts towards my family in the early days. I was at the stage of trying to learn to cut-off from my actual clients and although they were aware that, that specific day may have been difficult for me, I still felt anger toward the perpetrators of these really great people and initially I lashed out inappropriately at my family trying to register what had happened, which I found hard.

I: Do you think your own personal work is a succession, like would you be happy with your attitude towards this work and have you felt it as changed you as a person?

D: Being needed in such terrible circumstances such as this, makes me, well forces me, to leave my own opinions in my mind... I can form relationships better by eh, being so open and it has helped me in my social life too..............

**Participant:** Jeremy (J), a family therapist, project leader in prevention and a lecturer of counselling in a top Irish University.

**Interview Length:** 45 1/2 minutes.

**Location:** At the participants residence in Kildare.

An extract of Jeremy’s interview:
I: Good evening Jeremy, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting me and allowing me to conduct this interview with you. Just that you know for your own awareness, all that will be discussed now will be kept with the upmost confidentiality. Any time you want to withdraw any information you have given to me today, you can contact me at any stage and I will withdraw any information you wish.

J: Thank you.

L: Ok, so basically this interview is regarding your work as a social support worker and I want to maybe, really, find out your experiences in working particularly with clients that have been affected by child abuse, whatever abuse it may be. So first of all I would like to get an understanding into the back-round of your work, so can you briefly tell me what your area of practice is and perhaps the reasons you chose to enter this particular aspect of this field?

J: Em, there is probably a number of levels I can pitch it, em... Firstly let me go to my work in the inner city where I work in a project, eh a project that is really focused on working with children and families and young people, who are effect by drug issues. So that means that very often the children or focus of the children is the parents are using drugs therefore there is so much, there is often neglect, there’s often, well I hate to say abuse but it’s usually emotional abuse in that children are neglected seriously and often at different times we obviously come across sexual abuse and physical abuse. Eh, so that’s my main work and I manage a project where we work in that context.

I: Ok, so maybe why did you decide to go into this particular area if you have been educated in the broad term of this field and go down the route you have done, like is it a personal feeling you’ve maybe had towards this area or -
J: Yeah, There is also the other side of it, I do some lecturing, I do some work also in private practice as a psychotherapist and family therapist and em, even a little bit of teaching. I think the reason I’m in it, if the truth were known, it’s probably something to do with me eh fulfilling something in myself, now that’s a really, delicate thing to say. Is there something in me that wants to be eh minding people or supporting people, eh maybe trying to mind myself I don’t know. Some of the psychoanalytic people would say the only reason your doing this kind of work is to mind yourself because there is a part of you that is not adequately minded. I really like to think in those terms. I rarely like to be so narrow with that mindset em, but I, I like the honesty of that because there is obviously a buzz that one gets from eh you know, supporting people and touching into lives. We’d be very foolish to think that em, it’s all totally altruistic, I do think there’s something we get back eh by giving. There are times in the inner city one might ask why am I doing it, the bottom line is you end up doing it because it’s a job but strange enough the thing I keep saying to the people I work with is, there’s so people my age and I’m in my mid-fifties, who are burnt out because they have not minded themselves and it is so easy if you don’t mind yourself, if you don’t look after yourself and don’t look after the workers I think em, you run out of steam, you run dry.

I: Ok, perfect. Do you feel you have had adequate training to successfully assist or counsel your clients?

J: I suppose I do, Loc, em, and that sounds like a cheeky thing to say. It’s a strange thing I think the thing that trained me most was I had the opportunity of working in, during the masters program in family therapy in the Mater, it was a UCD program, and I was teaching, not so much teaching,

I was working with a group but it gave me confidence to kinda realize at the end of the day the most important, the most important piece that we give to anybody is our humanity, and
you can have training to beat the bands. As it turns out I have a fair bit of training, you know
I’ve done a masters in America and trained in Dublin in different, all kinds of courses, but at
the end of the day the more experience and life experience practically perhaps has thought
me, especially the people I work with and my clients the service users is that what people
need is humanity, they need relationship, they need connection, so I would have the cheek to
say I’ve enough training but thats with an understanding that my training continues, that I
continue to be open to learn new things and above all I continue never to feel like I have it
sorted. If I feel I have it sorted I’m gone, In fact there is a lovely expression they use in
family therapy of not understanding too quickly, of taking a not knowing position and that
means an awful lot to me because it actually says if I know it I feel I’m trained up to it then
I’m gone, so in a sense very often when I don’t know that’s when i am most effective.

I: Yeah... Would you consider confidentiality a prime factor of your work and what does it
mean to you?

J: Yeeeah, I would...

I: What measures do you maybe take to adapt this factor?

J: Yeah people need to know that they are secure; people need to know it’s safe. If they don’t
know that they have no hope, in terms of developing a relationship. Working in the context
where there’s often neglect and abuse we have to say very clearly to people we work with
that listen confidentiality is assured except in circumstances where people are at risk, and
certainly in town we are even more specific about what at risk means, and and eh I think in
any context so yeah confidentiality is vital but child protection, we can’t deny those pieces,
people need to be... protect themselves, be it their suicidal be it they’re going to be dangerous
to somebody else.
I: Perfect, would you consider your type of work to be a success for your clients or do you think they need more assistance or that they might not need as much aid that you may provide for them?

J: Well some parts of the work appear to be very successful, you know when you get people talking together eh it’s successful, but very often the work around the issue of abusing parents and the children it’s much bigger than just therapy. Like we might be therapists but we need to connect with issues sometimes around housing they have been thrown out by the Dublin city council because of anti-social behaviour so you’re trying to organize and be involved in housing issues, you could be involved in educational issues for the children, you could be involved in... obviously school issues, parenting issues, parents breaking down so there’s so many, such a complexity of issues. Is it successful. It’s successful if you develop relationships, we have on our mission statement our job, our mission is to develop relationships with people that can lead us into a prodigious of areas which is way bigger than us. I can just think of recently of a child that comes to the centre and the young child, he’s been coming since he’s been about nine with his mam and his dad who are separated but mam and dad are both drug users, minded by members of the family but even the members of the family, they would have their own personal issues and the child, his placement broke down and this child is in the centre, he’s fourteen years of age, he ends up being, well the social workers get involved because the auntie who is minding him said I can’t mind you anymore because she’s got other things going on in her life and the child ends up living out in Donabate, like twenty, fifteen miles away from his home totally inadequately placed and you say my job is to work with this child, and the resources aren’t there really there to support him, I yet I kind of say em, is my work successful. My work is a very very small piece of a huge big big pond and eh eh, the limitations of the resources around us is very powerful.
I: You were saying that you feel that the important issues for yourself is that you develop positive relationships. What do those relationships mean to you personally? Do you consider you have not been successful if you have not developed positive relationships or do you feel it’s all a growing development in your work. Do relationships effect a case whether it be negative or positive?

J: Yeah, yeah. I mean at the end of the day when you think of it, Loc... the first thing is will someone come back, you know it’s fairly basic. You develop a relationship, it has to be positive, in that you can’t put people down, people have to feel at least that it’s a constructive rather than a destructive experience, that it’s a positive experience... so the success is it’s not trying to change people it’s about being with people. The relationship is everything, it’s foundational. Without relationship you can go absolutely nowhere. There’s no shortcut to relationship, in fact very often I can think of somebody I am working with at the moment, an adult, and it’s very very difficult. This person is super traumatized by an experience in her life and if I hadn’t the experience I have, I’d say I am a disaster. Some part of me believes, she comes back she pays me and she keeps coming back and some part of me believes I’m just holding it and some part of me knows the secret is I’m not expecting too much too soon and that is what relationship is about. Relationship is not about, you see the doing in our society, our society is so much doing, get things done sort it out quick fix, relationship is very very slow building, sometimes, sometimes it happens fast but generally my starting point has to be to take it really slow, so that takes patience -

I: Would that be trust?

J: I think it’s about trust, yeah. It’s about believing, like who am I to know better then someone else about their lives. So people are kinda saying everybody else they go to tells them how to live their lives, if they think I’m going to tell them how to live their lives they’re
going to say you can F*** off I don’t want to hear from you, so they want, people want you to take your time, they want you to be with them and then they can say to themselves actually I want to change but if I start telling people to change, nobody wants me to tell to change, if I tell anybody to change they’ll tell me to buzz off I’m not interested. So if I learn to be with them and then slowly by being so much with them that they actually start saying you know there is some things I don’t like about what has happened. Oh yea what’s that, well I don’t like sometimes the way I hit my child. No you don’t no, It kind of upsets me, well what do you mean by that, rather than me saying yeah your right, your right that’s like that, and they say I don’t I don’t like that it kinda hurts me because I know I don’t mean it I feel like I’m not a good parent and they start owning that but that takes patience and that takes me not knowing too quickly, me not jumping in the deep end with answers. So what does it do to me, it means I’ve got to be very human... not to be snotty, not to be prejudice. one of the things I liked about the training in family therapy was, they talked about looking above all, at our prejudices around and they classes, such as gender, sexuality, culture and so on, but they are easy words to throw out but to really hold that down is to know where are my prejudices. So yeah the challenge is for me to look at it and if I think I’m not prejudice I’m foolish because I am prejudice, I’m always prejudice, my job is to be seeing where I am prejudice and to take that on, and be open but that takes humility and when you get a bigger job you might not want to be humble. So it’s a strange thing, the humility and the expertise are side by side.

I: Ok, yeah, interesting... Ok I just want to discuss your coping mechanisms as a social support provider. How would you cope with clients when you might hear horrific stories or situations that have gone on. Do you have a personal defense mechanism, do you have to refrain from saying things or retain your body language? What measures would you implement to cope with disturbing acts of abuse.
J: Yeah, I think the most important thing is that I stay not afraid of being... of being affected by what people tell me............................................................


Interview Length: 31 minutes.

Location: At the participants residence in Dublin.

An extract from Kelly’s interview:

I: So Kelly, can you tell me a bit about your work and why you chose to do it.

K: Well I was always interested in the area of support and thought about becoming a social worker and thought I would really benefit from the experience in Childline first.

I: Can you tell me a bit about your training that you’ve undertook and do you feel it’s adequate for the position you’re in?
K: Well I had extensive training which was the largest factor in this work. I’m assured that I can do my job appropriately as we have supervision and I can go to my supervisor at any stage if I received a difficult call.

I: Do you think your work is successful?

K: Yeah I do because our service is a listening service where victims of abuse have total confidentiality and are able to avail of a non judgemental service where the children can talk as much as they want or as little as they want to assist how they feel. It’s a service where it’s not voluntary and they come and use the service on their own terms... They can monitor the whole situation.

I: How do you cope with your clients who have suffered a form of child abuse?

K: Well in the agency i work for, before I started working there I had a lot of training. There’s also counselling available to us, there is a lot of people to talk to and you get monthly supervision if not more. You form a great bond and build relationships with the people you work with as you may see them once a week or everyday and they become a support, someone you can talk with.

I: Do you have attachment issues with your callers?

K: It can occur that a child wants to only talk to me so that maybe because I’ve been their hearer before. It can happen that kids want to talk to the opposite sex of who they were abused by and that can create regular informal relationships with a caller who I end up talking with on regular occasions and they feel comfortable talking to me. They can become attached to the service and often over reliant on it and that’s not what we want.
I: Do you ever suffer from stress, anxieties and so on as a result of your work?

K: Not really as I’m new to the service and I’m not that experienced, but I have heard of others in my agency who have been bothered or upset by calls they’ve received and they usually report to their supervisor or if the call is still in operation, they have called for assistance by being shadowed.

I: Do you think supervision support is vital in your work?

K: Yeah it is extremely vital as you need to have someone that if you do have a problem that your not on your own or feel isolated. It’s also important that you have the people you work with as they can be a more personal support and they can be the most important people to you to discuss this as you can maybe talk to them a lot easier then you can talk to a manager, as you feel they’re on the same level as you and the bonds you form with people are very important.

I: Discussing Self-Actualization of yourself in this field, do you think your personality characteristics have altered since you’ve begun this work?

K: You become aware of how to deal with it and to leave it there. I thought I’d be alot more effected but through support your able to make it a job that doesn’t hinder your own life too much. A change that I experienced was my ability to remain professional no matter what the situation was, so I developed that through this work....................

Participant: Marie (An independent counsellor and psychotherapist)

Interview Length: 33.5 minutes
**Location:** At the participants residence in Kildare.

An extract from Marie’s interview:

I: So Marie, how did you get into this work. Why did you yearn to do it?

M: I got very interested in this area when I was in therapy myself. Years ago I probably spent overall maybe three, four, five years in therapy and I was really impressed with how it helped me, how it helped me to reflect and make changes in my life.

I: What did you have to apply to gain this position?

M: Research and long extensive examinations and two counselling sessions which lasted an hour and a half, present, with the clients permission, a supervisor, had to be passed, along with yearly interviews, was initially what I had to achieve successfully.

I: What do you have to do to successfully be accepted by the service user?

M: I certainly have learned in training that there is things we never ever do with clients present such as crossing our legs, fold our arms, we really try to keep away from any body language that may put a barrier between me and the client. I had a client who came to me when she was sixteen, who had suffered abuse throughout her childhood, and I worked with her for four years and she has done so well, because she was so committed, we did great work together. we both benefited from the work we did together...

I: I’m going to move onto how you cope? How do you deal with this? Do you have coping mechanisms?
M: It’s still shocking to hear of the abuse and we do need support, thought it’s not like when you first start working with it, when you bring it home with you, when you can’t sleep, nightmares, anger, frustration, all those things but I wouldn’t have that very often at all now because my psyche is more able to take it now without being devastated. Supervision is vital. For every eight hours approximately, there is one hour supervision. This is ethically a must for social support workers. In some ways the longer you’re doing it, you probably have a better way of dealing with it. I would know even for myself just to go for a walk, to go down to the river for a while, em, you know, and take my hat off, take my carers hat off, and just relax doing something else.

I: Do you feel you have enough support? Do you think it’s necessary and if so from where?

M: They’re very clear with us that if we did need an extra supervision session we could have it. I feel that it would be unethical, wrong, to work with clients and not have supervision. You can’t rely on your family for support because you need to learn to leave these issues at work and not bring them home.

I: What’s a successful support worker in child abuse made up of.

M: I think you’d want to feel confident that your able to do the job, that your the person for it, that you can listen and have empathy rather then sympathy.

I: Would you ever have personal issues while dealing with these sensitive cases?

M: I sometimes feel like I’m taking a mothering role especially with younger clients who have lacked it. They learn to trust me. This is a slight aspect of where attachment may occur in my experience.............
Reference List:

Textbooks:


**Journals:**


**Websites References:**

www.cso.ie, 05/02/10, 15:23.


Seeman,T.www.maces.ucsf.edu/Research/Psychosocial/notebook/socsupp.html,25/02/10,15:15.

**Primary Sources:** The Interview participants.