

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF MONITORING THEIR ADOLESCENTS' COMPLIANCE WITH DIVERSION ORDERS

Zurina Abdulla, Veonna Goliath

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The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 makes provision for the diversion of child/adolescent offenders and expects parents to monitor their compliance with diversion orders. This paper examines how parents' experience fulfilling this role, especially against the backdrop of their reduced influence during the adolescent development phase, following a qualitative study undertaken with 12 parents of diverted adolescents in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole. The findings revealed the particular difficulties that parents experienced in monitoring compliance and highlight the specific parental support needs that can be met by social workers and other child justice officials.

[Veonna.Goliath@nmmu.ac.za](mailto:Veonna.Goliath@nmmu.ac.za)

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### INTRODUCTION

Adolescents who clash with the law have been found to be more likely to come from communities with a high incidence of crime and from urban areas characterised by poor socio-economic conditions, “*inadequate parenting, child maltreatment, family disruption, poor parental supervision and parent criminality*” (Arthur, 2007:8-9). As primary socialising agents, parents play a critical role in guiding and monitoring adolescents' adherence to socially acceptable norms. Parents' failure to fulfil this role may lead to adolescents becoming vulnerable to alternative influences which, in turn, could contribute to their involvement in anti-social behaviour. The issue of children in conflict with the law gained much attention in 2010, when South Africa reached an important milestone in terms of children's rights in the promulgation of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, following consultation, lobbying and advocacy spanning five years (Sloth-Nielsen & Gallinetti, 2011:63). The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 provides the legislative framework for dealing with three categories of children in conflict with the law, i.e. children aged 10 years and below, children aged between 10 and 14 years and children aged between 14 and 18 years at the time of the commission of the crime (South Africa, 2010). The latter category formed the subject of the present research and for the purposes of this paper will be referred to as adolescents.

Through its introduction of diversion, the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 makes provision for children to be held accountable, restore the damage caused by the crime, and address the offending behaviour through rehabilitative programmes (South Africa, 2010). Diversion, as defined in the Act, means diverting a child in conflict with the law away from formal criminal court processes (Sloth-Nielsen & Gallinetti, 2011:74). All children may be considered for diversion, provided that: they acknowledge responsibility; the crime is a schedule one or two offence; they have not been unduly influenced; there is a prima facie case against them; and, if available, the parent/guardian consents to the diversion. According to Section 57(1) and (2) of the Act, the supervision of the diversion order is the joint responsibility of the accredited diversion service provider, such as the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), the probation officer, and the child's parent or guardian. During 2010/11 over 16 000 diversion orders were issued in South Africa, and during the same period a monthly average of 45 adolescents aged 14 to 17 years were diverted at the Nerina One Stop Youth Justice Centre in Port Elizabeth to NICRO's diversion services (Muntingh & Ballard, 2012:5; NICRO website, 2013). Annually this translates into over 500 parents in Port Elizabeth becoming legally responsible for monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders. The concept of parental responsibility can be viewed in terms of Section 3(18) (2 a, b, c and d) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa, 2006) as meaning “the responsibility to care for the child, to maintain contact

with the child, to act as guardian of the child, and to contribute to the maintenance of the child". This parental responsibility is implied in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, but is further built on in terms of parents' responsibility to monitor their children's behaviour to prevent their involvement in crime.

The adolescent developmental stage is characterised by a decrease in adolescents' level of self-disclosure about their daily activities and challenging parental authority in an attempt to increase their level of autonomy (Keijsers & Laird, 2014). Adolescents who have been in conflict with the law often have a history of abusing illegal substances and spending many hours out of the home; they are generally easily influenced by their friends and tend to conceal information about their daily activities (Kerr, Stattin & Burk, 2010:41-42; Mankayi, 2007:69-70). Parents of diverted adolescents, as described in Section 41 of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, are required by the Act to increase their level of control and monitoring of their adolescents (South Africa, 2008). Research indicates that the parents of adolescents, and particularly the parents of diverted adolescents, find the monitoring of adolescents challenging, as these adolescents tend to limit self-disclosure about their daily activities in all social domains (Keijsers & Laird, 2014). Kerr *et al.* (2010:39-64) state that: "parental monitoring efforts did not predict changes in delinquency over time" as adolescents' involvement in delinquent activities resulted in their concealing information about their daily activities out of fear of punishment or parental disapproval. Delinquency refers to children under the age of 18 years perpetrating illegal acts or engaging in illegal behaviour (Siegel & Welsh, 2012:9). According to the NICRO website (2013), the types of offences committed by adolescents diverted to NICRO are primarily theft, attempted theft, shoplifting, assault and possession of narcotics (NICRO, 2013). One of the possible reasons why adolescents could commit these crimes is that parental monitoring is at a level that allows the adolescent the freedom required to perpetrate these offences. This implies that, although a decrease in parental monitoring is necessary for the development of autonomy during adolescence, the parents of diverted adolescents need to increase their level of monitoring to ensure the adolescents' compliance with diversion orders and to prevent future recidivism.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was framed in the Life Course Developmental Perspective (Bengston & Allen, 1993:469), which proposes that life-stage transitions occur sequentially throughout life with prescribed age-appropriate behaviours, roles, expectations and events during each life stage (Rodgers & Bard in Adams & Berzonsky, 2003:7-8). According to this perspective, the parent and the adolescent start preparing for the adolescent stage, with the parent expecting to decrease the level of monitoring, while the adolescent prepares to increase the level of autonomy (Nixon & Halpenny, 2010:16). The decrease in parental regulation or monitoring and the related opportunity for adolescents to make more choices within various domains can be explained through Turiel's (1983) social domain theory (cited by Smetana, 2013:1). This theory clarifies the domains in which parents monitor adolescents, particularly diverted adolescents' daily activities, and explains how monitoring activities within the different domains

affect parenting experiences during adolescence. This theory has been extensively cited by researchers in studies of parental monitoring of adolescents and its impact on the development of adolescent autonomy (Keijsers, Branje, Van der Valk & Meeus, 2010; Kerr *et al.*, 2010; Sorkhabi, 2010; Yau, Tasopoulos-Chan & Smetana, 2009). Parental monitoring of children's daily activities poses various challenges as they transition from infancy through childhood and into adolescence (Wray-Lake, Crouter & McHale, 2010:637). Stattin and Kerr (2000) study of parental monitoring established that parental knowledge of adolescents' daily activities was gained primarily as a result of adolescents' disclosure to parents rather than parental solicitation.

Parents of diverted adolescents, as described in Section 41 of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, are required by the Act to increase their level of control and monitoring of their adolescent children. In assigning parents legal responsibility for monitoring their adolescents' daily activities, the question arises: "Can parents be expected to monitor children in conflict with the law?" It is unclear what impact the prescripts of the Act have on parents having to monitor adolescents in conflict with the law, specifically diverted adolescents. An awareness of how parents' experience affect their monitoring responsibilities and what their support needs are could aid the provision of appropriate support services to equip parents or guardians to competently execute their responsibilities as set out in the Act.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore and describe parents' experiences of being informed of their adolescents' arrest;
- Explore and describe parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' daily activities to ensure compliance with diversion orders;
- Explore and describe what monitoring activities parents employ to ensure adolescents' compliance with diversion orders;
- Identify and describe parents' support needs in ensuring adolescents' compliance with diversion orders and fulfilling their parental role in terms of Section 24(5) of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 (South Africa, 2010).

## **RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research approach, rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, and an exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design were selected for this study. According to Creswell (2009:18), exploratory studies involve the exploration of a new interest, a fairly new or unstudied area or phenomenon to test the feasibility of a more in-depth research study or to define the methods for a more comprehensive study. This design was suitable as the study explored the contextual elements and experiences of parents' journeys through the child justice process, provided comprehensive descriptions of parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders and gave an indication of the support needs of these parents. The population from which the sample was selected included the parents of adolescents between 14 and 17 years, in

conflict with the law, who have been dealt with in terms of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 at a Youth Justice Centre in Port Elizabeth, between June 2011 and June 2012. The population size for the period was estimated at 500 parents or guardians who were assigned legal responsibility to monitor their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders (Muntingh & Ballard, 2012:5; NICRO website, 2013). Non-probability sampling was employed, given the limited pre-existing knowledge about the sample. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to stipulate predetermined inclusion criteria (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004:100; Denscombe, 2010a:25) to guide the selection of the research participants. The sampling criteria stipulated that participants had to be the parents or guardians of adolescents who (i) had appeared at the Youth Justice Centre in Port Elizabeth; (ii) had been diverted to NICRO for diversion services between June 2011 and June 2012; (iii) were English or Afrikaans speaking; and (iv) were willing as well as available to participate in the research study.

At least one parent or guardian per adolescent was included in the research study. The number of participants comprised 12 parents, including seven biological mothers, one biological father, two stepfathers and two grandmothers. The small sample size was informed by three factors:

- Firstly, in accordance with the description of data saturation as explained by Mason (2010:1), data were collected until recurring themes and responses emerged, and no new information surfaced;
- Secondly, the research study formed part of a Master's degree, which implies limitations in terms of time and resources in conducting the research; however, it laid the foundation for the subsequent doctoral study; and
- Three parents approached for inclusion in the study declined to participate for personal reasons.

Semi-structured interviews were employed using an interview guide with open-ended questions. This data-collection method was flexible and allowed participants to speak widely on the topic so as to reveal their personal experiences (Denscombe, 2010b:175). The selection of semi-structured interviews allowed for open-ended questions and encouraged participants to elaborate on key areas of interest. The following questions were posed to elicit participants' responses during the semi-structured interviews on their unique experiences and support needs:

- Share with me how you heard that your child had clashed with the law?
- From the moment you heard your child had clashed with the law, what did you understand about what was happening?
- Can you explain to me what happened after the police informed you of your child's arrest, and what did they explain to you about what will happen next?
- Share with me what you thought the court expected from you when they sent your child to the diversion programme?

- Tell me what it was like having to monitor/check that your child attended the diversion programme on a weekly basis and stayed out of trouble?
- Can you give me some examples of how you monitored your child's activities and what you did to check that he attended the diversion programmes?
- What made it difficult for you to monitor your child's compliance with the diversion order?
- How did you deal with those difficulties to ensure your child's compliance?
- What type of support or service could have assisted you in monitoring your child's compliance with the diversion order?

Written reflections on the research process and the researchers' responses to each phase of the process limited potential subjective researcher bias (Denscombe, 2003:175).

This study employed the method of qualitative data analysis, which prescribes a cyclical process of reviewing the data generated because "*communication is not linear and the interpretation of meaning should not be linear either*" (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:105). In line with interpretive analysis, the focus is holistic and contextual in nature (De Vaus, 2001:235; Porta & Keating, 2008:30). The researchers sought relationships in meaning between all categories and reviewed the data to interpret their meaning in the context of what is already known (Denscombe, 2003:280-281; Engel & Schutt, 2005:380; Henning *et al.*, 2004:104-109; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:8; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003:1-6).

Strategies used to assess and verify the findings in this research included researcher reflective journaling as well as peer reviews of the generated and analysed data, which were further supported by employing an independent coder (Guba & Lincoln, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:210).

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The ensuing section provides a discussion of each of the findings which are presented according to the themes that emerged from the analysis.

### **Theme 1: Parents' experiences of being informed of their adolescents' arrest**

Although the focus of the study was on diversion, the researcher set the scene for the data generation with the parents by posing warm-up questions and asked them to describe the first time they learnt about their adolescents' arrest. The majority of the parents experienced the arrest of their adolescent as unexpected. All the parents were informed of their adolescents' arrest by police officers as prescribed by the Child Justice Act. Only two parents made reference to a written notice or summons being handed to them or their adolescent; one parent recalled "*even when the police gave the letter, they couldn't even really give details; it just said you got to be there so and so.*" The rest of the parents reported that the police informed them verbally when they must attend court. Whilst the parents' accounts of events are acknowledged, it is possible that their emotional state at the time of the police's visit and the time lapse since the incident may

have diminished their recall of the detail regarding the written notice or summons. This concurs with the finding by Peterson-Badali and Broeking (2004, in Broeking & Peterson-Badali, 2010:42) that parents are often disengaged at the time of their adolescents' arrest.

The findings showed that the majority of the parents experienced emotions such as shock and anger when hearing about their adolescents' clash with the law. A parent reflected that: *"when I got the call, I didn't believe it at first, because I didn't expect it from him."* Even a parent who expected this from her son, since she knew he was using drugs, shared that she was angered by his arrest. This is consistent with Vrselja's (2010:145) description of the adolescence-limited delinquency theory that adolescent delinquency is usually preceded by behaviour problems, which may explain why one parent commented that she was not shocked but angered by her son's arrest, because of his prior drug use. Some parents also reported behavioural manifestations such as sleeplessness and feeling disoriented at hearing about their adolescent's arrest. One parent recalled: *"I stayed up the whole night. I did washing, cleaning that time of the morning, 2 o'clock; I could not even drive myself."* The discussion of the parents' initial experiences of their adolescents' arrest provides the context against which the remaining three themes which follow below were interpreted.

## **Theme 2: Parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' daily activities to ensure compliance with diversion orders**

The findings revealed that parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' daily activities in order to ensure compliance with diversion orders was influenced by the following factors, i.e. their understanding of what diversion is, their perception of their role in diversion, and lastly, their feelings about their role in diversion, each of which is discussed in turn.

### ***Sub-theme 2.1: Parents' understanding of diversion and their role in diversion***

The findings showed that those parents who misunderstood diversion as a non-custodial sentence with specific conditions experienced the monitoring of their child's daily activities as a huge responsibility, fearing that: *"if your child doesn't attend [the diversion programme], then he will be locked up"*. Most parents had some understanding of diversion. For instance, one parent explained that: *"instead of him going to jail and getting a criminal record, they do this Diversion Programme which is the life skills."* The latter quote reflects with the definition of diversion in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 (South Africa, 2010) as the *"channelling of children away from court-based processes to programmes and developmental measures"* (Sloth-Nielsen & Gallinetti, 2011:74). Another parent experienced the monitoring positively, considering her understanding that diversion would afford her daughter the opportunity to access the services of a helping professional, which she articulated as follows: *"I felt it was an opportunity for her, I mean opportunity in a way that I knew she was going through things. Like I told you, we were divorced; I never could get her to be counselled."*

As prescribed by the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, parents are assigned the responsibility to ensure that their adolescent complies with the diversion order and any

conditions stipulated in the order. This places an important onus on parents to monitor their adolescents' daily activities and in particular to ensure that their adolescents attend NICRO's diversion programme sessions, which requires parents to attend the first and last sessions of the programme. The findings revealed that all the parents took it as their responsibility to transport, or arrange transport for, their adolescent to attend the NICRO Programme. Parents also explained that they *"had to sit in on the first meeting and the last meeting and to consult with regard to progress and attitude."* One parent in particular experienced the monitoring as a liability, fearing that she would be held liable and issued with a fine if her adolescent failed to comply with the diversion order. She explained that: *"she (the child) must now attend the NICRO classes and if she offends and because now I signed now to become like a, how do you say now, I would be also liable"*. Another parent, who regarded the monitoring as a dual responsibility, stated that her only responsibility was to drop her adolescent at the NICRO Programme venue and that it was his (the adolescent's) responsibility to ensure that he complied with the diversion order, and not hers (the parent's).

The differing views of these two parents seemed to influence the level of direct monitoring methods that they employed to ensure their adolescents' compliance, as well as the level of stress experienced in ensuring such compliance. All the parents had an understanding that they had a role to fulfil in ensuring that their adolescents complied with the diversion orders. Most parents took it upon themselves to play an active role in either attending the NICRO Programme with their adolescents or arranging transport to the Programme. Similar findings were made by Broeking and Peterson-Badali (2010:47), who found that arrested and diverted adolescents expected their parents to provide emotional and practical support during the child justice proceedings. The researcher noted that most of the parents implicitly accepted that they needed to be there for their adolescents and support them throughout the diversion programme. However, the parents' role in monitoring adolescents' compliance with diversion orders and the consequences of failing to fulfil their role were not explicitly spelled out by child justice officials.

### ***Sub-theme 2.2: Parents' feelings about their role relating to diversion***

The research revealed that parents viewed it as their responsibility to ensure their adolescents' attendance of the diversion programme and for their adolescents not to reoffend. Most parents were of the view that they had to support their adolescents and felt that they were supportive by virtue of attending the NICRO sessions as well as transporting their adolescents to the programme, which served to ensure adolescents' compliance. A father reflected that: *"if he failed to meet those sessions, I think it would be information that goes to the court. What type of, first of all, parent-child relationship you dealing with, and then also the attitude of the candidate?"*

Not all the participating parents were aware of the legal consequences they faced should they not fulfil their role in monitoring their diverted adolescents. Only one parent stated that should their adolescent not comply with the diversion order, *"it will also be like an offence, [be]cause I'm supposed to make sure that she does appear and if she didn't, I mean for her classes, then I can be held in contempt of court as well"*. This parent



shared that she felt stressed about her child not complying with the diversion order and worried about the fact that she would be held liable or have to pay a fine. A further finding is that, although parents accepted their role in monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders, most of the parents felt burdened by the additional responsibility, which affected their daily work schedules. Some parents also revealed feeling resentful towards their spouse or partner for not sharing the responsibilities in monitoring the adolescent. Consistent with the findings by Ashbourne and Daly (2010:1428, 1430), parents are expected to reduce their level of monitoring during adolescence and they are expected to provide more practical support during adolescence, such as transport. In monitoring adolescents' compliance with their diversion orders, all parents in this study assumed responsibility for ensuring that their adolescents were transported to the NICRO programme sessions. All parents reported attending the first and last sessions with their adolescents; however, they expressed feelings of frustration at having to fit the additional responsibility into their daily activities. The need for counselling and parental support services is motivated by the negative feelings experienced by parents in assuming their responsibility in monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders.

### **Theme 3: Parents' methods of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders**

In exploring the parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders the researcher first asked parents to describe the monitoring methods they employed. The monitoring methods employed by parents included restricting their adolescents by limiting the time spent with their friends; expecting adolescents to inform them of their whereabouts; and soliciting information from adolescents about their activities.

Most parents indicated that they increased their level of monitoring after their adolescent had been diverted to the NICRO programme and set rules/boundaries to encourage the adolescents to account for their activities. A mother shared the following: "*We definitely clamped down on him, on how he spends his time with his friends*". In accordance with other studies (Allen, Porter, McFarland, Marsh & McElhaney, 2005:755; Buehler, 2006:122; Hargovan, 2013:29; Harrison, 2008:142; Pillay, 2008:iv), the negative influence of friends was revealed in the present study, as most of the adolescents had committed their crimes with a group of friends. This resulted in parents restricting their adolescents' contact with friends during their attendance of the Diversion Programme.

#### ***Sub-theme 3.1: Parents' direct monitoring methods***

Deeper exploration of the monitoring methods revealed that parents employed both direct and indirect methods to gain knowledge about their adolescents' daily activities. Some parents described employing direct methods, stating "*Want ek vra hom, met wie is hulle? Dan hoor ek.*" [*Because I ask him, with who are you? Then I listen.*] and "*Sometimes, he will tell us out of his own, most of the time if I asked him, he would just tell me 'oh, it was OK, mom.'*" Similar to the findings of Nixon and Halpenny (2010:3), direct methods involved the parents soliciting information directly from the adolescents

by asking questions, by phoning to check up on their whereabouts, communicating with the adolescents, transporting the adolescents to their activities, and through constant supervision. Indirect methods would be employed when adolescents limited their level of self-disclosure to restrict their parent's knowledge about their activities, as can be deduced from this parent's statement: "*Hulle is nie daai praat-kindere nie, daai kindere wat net sommer praat. Partymaal moet ek maar net sommer hier in die bloute gryp, vrae vra en dan sal die een nou antwoord. Die ander een praat total nie, hy laat die ander een praat.*" [They are not the type of children who just talk. Sometimes I must just probe in the dark, ask questions, and then the one will answer. The other one does not talk at all; he lets the other one talk.].

As postulated by the social domain theory (Sorkhabi, 2010:765), some participating parents reported that their adolescents would not disclose information about their activities despite parental solicitation. While parents reflected on their adolescents' secretiveness, it was observed that parents felt frustrated when adolescents were secretive about their activities, as the parents had to increase their efforts to gain information from other sources. Consistent with earlier research (Kerr *et al.*, 2010:39; Yau *et al.*, 2009:1492), this study established that parental knowledge of adolescents' activities depended more on adolescent self-disclosure than parental solicitation. The parents participating in this study reported that adolescents would at times share information about their activities out of their own volition; however, most reported that their adolescents would not share information voluntarily.

### ***Sub-theme 3.2: Parents' indirect monitoring methods***

Other studies have found that the use of indirect monitoring methods, which refers to parents soliciting information about their adolescents' activities from sources other than the adolescents, was employed by parents when they struggled to gather information directly from their adolescents (Bakken & Brown, 2010:383; Yau *et al.*, 2009:1493). Similar findings were made in this study, showing parents' use of indirect monitoring methods to gain knowledge about their adolescents' activities and to monitor their adolescents by gathering information about them from their siblings, friends or neighbours, and by listening in on the adolescents' conversations with their friends. A mother stated: "*I said to the maid, I instructed my maid and my mom that he must stay indoors and he must be home on time, although they said he can go to school.*" Similarly, the help of friends was enlisted in gathering information about the activities of adolescents, as can be seen from this statement made by a guardian: "*Meestal hulle vriende of van die gemeenskap, enige iemand wat hul sien dan sê hulle: 'nee die auntie het hulle gestuur, of daai auntie het hulle gestuur'.*" [Mostly their friends or from the community, anyone who sees them will say: 'no this aunty sent them, or that aunty sent them.']. Some parents reported that adolescents shared information about their activities after they had already engaged in the activities.

### ***Sub-theme 3.3: Parents' experiences of implementing the monitoring methods***

Once the parents described the monitoring methods they had employed with their adolescents, the researchers explored parents' experiences of implementing the

monitoring methods they had described. It was evident that the participating parents had not reflected on their experience and the impact of the role they assumed in monitoring their adolescents' compliance; however, upon reflection, they reported that they had to make adjustments to their work schedules, which was stressful at times, in order to fetch their adolescent from school and rush to the NICRO Programme venue. Two parents reflected that: "*it was hard, because I had to lie to my boss where I was*" and "*I remember some of that hour sitting in the car, waiting was a frustration*". Parents expressed that they struggled at times to cope with their role and responsibilities towards their diverted adolescents and that this affected their mood, their relationships and their interactions with others. The findings further revealed the intrapersonal coping strategies used by parents, which included internal dialogue, attitudes or thoughts, and interpersonal coping strategies, which refers to their relationships with others (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008:446). A few parents employed both interpersonal and intrapersonal strategies to cope with monitoring their adolescents, such as praying, accessing support from family and employing positive self-talk.

Consistent with previous research (Tolou-Shams, Hadley, Conrad & Brown, 2012:449-456; Yau *et al.*, 2009:1493), the parent-adolescent relationships in this study were affected by the adolescents' clash with the law, and most parents reported not being sure as to whether they could trust their adolescents, hence the imposition of restrictions on their adolescents' freedom. Parents reported that their relationships with their spouses or ex-spouses had been negatively affected by their adolescents' arrest and diversion. One mother revealed that: "*I would fight with my husband, I would not worry about the other two kids, and it wasn't nice at all. I stopped, I would say I stopped eating, but I would go through depression, where I would just want to be alone and I had no-one to speak to because I can't go and speak to my neighbours about things like this. My parents knew about it, but they don't live near to me*". This is consistent with the findings of studies on inter-parental conflict which demonstrated that parenting and differing parenting styles, in particular, could cause conflict between parents (Krisnakumar & Buehler, 2000:25-44; Schoppe-Sullivan, Schermerhorn & Cummings, 2007:118-1134). Differing levels of parental involvement have also been found to cause strain in parental relationships, as one parent reflected: "*My husband and I would argue furiously, and it would always be about him (the diverted adolescent)*". A statement made by a mother that: "*his father did not get involved in the programme at all, didn't do any of the fetching and carrying at all – he appeared at the court one hour and then left*" supported Ashbourne and Daly's (2010:1426) claim that mothers usually assume more monitoring responsibility in relation to the diverted adolescent. The parent left to fulfil the monitoring role also revealed a range of negative feelings, such as a sense of disgrace at having to sit in a group with other parents, feeling unable to cope with the situation, and feeling blamed by the other parent for their adolescent's transgression. These emotions can be seen as underlying factors in parents expressing a need for counselling and support groups as well as the need for family support.

#### **Theme 4: Support needs expressed by parents in terms of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders**

The participating parents divulged that they needed the support of their spouses as well as to share the responsibilities of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders. A mother reflected on what could have helped her: *"If I could have had the support from my ex-husband."* They also enlisted family members to support them through their adolescents' journey through the child justice system, as can be seen from a mother's reflection: *"Honestly, if my sister wasn't there with me, cause she is the only sister I have; we're very close, if she wasn't there, I wouldn't even be able to say my name to that magistrate"*.

The parents' need for family support, particularly support from their spouses, in coping with their parental role, has been emphasised by Mulford and Redding (2007:641). Family support has been found to buffer the effects of role overload on parents and practical support helps them to cope better with stressors related to parenting (De Garmo, Patras & Eap, 2008:44-45). Coupled with family support, the parents participating in this study also indicated the need for support from child justice officials, in terms of practical support regarding matters such as transport information and counselling. This is consistent with the findings of Broeking and Peterson-Badali (2010:42,50), who state that parents require information and support to navigate their way through the complexities of the child justice system in order to support their adolescents.

##### ***Sub-theme 4.1: Professional support needed by parents***

Parents expressed the need for information about the child justice process to be communicated to them in a sensitive manner and for transport to be made available for their adolescents to attend the NICRO Programme sessions. A parent suggested the provision of state-funded transport: *"Actually, if he had transport, ja, to and from the programme for those that's not so fortunate"*. Parents revealed the need for information and guidance from child justice officials and said that: *"No-one can help you, so even if you phone, there's no-one that can even tell you this is what you got to expect, everything was new."* Another parent stated: *"As parents, you worry and you've never been through this, and there's no-one to guide you"*. The findings further suggest that parents need to have access to counselling services for themselves at the Youth Justice Centre, from the point of their adolescents' arrest throughout their attendance of the NICRO Programme sessions. A parent noted: *"I feel that counselling is something that you would need, because you have family support and everything, but it's not everything that you can, if you, if you have to let out to an independent person what is your real feelings and how you know you feel difficult, because you never know if you're asking the family too much"*. The findings revealed that parents experienced the need to speak to a counsellor and other parents in a counselling and supportive setting to help them cope with their role of monitoring as well as supporting their adolescent (Miller & Sambell, 2002:32-44).

## **CONCLUSION**

Parents' experiences of monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders were explored in this study, which provided parents with the opportunity to verbalise their personal experiences. This research study revealed parents' perceptions of which methods they experienced as effective and ineffective in monitoring their adolescents' daily activities. While parents can reasonably be expected to monitor their diverted adolescents, the parents who participated in this study experienced emotional and financial strain as a result of the role assumed in relation to monitoring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders. The findings revealed the parents' support needs in ensuring their adolescents' compliance with diversion orders and gave direction to possible improvements in practice, supporting the recommendation for counselling and/or support services to be accessible to parents at the Youth Justice Centre where this study was localised.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the findings of the study, recommendations for social work practice and child justice officials are outlined below.

The child justice officials should approach parents with sensitivity and consideration of the trauma experienced by parents at their children's arrest and subsequent court appearance. Police officers should ensure that parents receive written information that is user friendly and explains directions to the Youth Justice Centre and the court process that follows the arrest. It is further recommended that parents have access to clear and comprehensible information that would clarify the child justice process and key concepts in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 (South Africa, 2010). In addition, the provision of social work counselling and support services is recommended to parents whose children appear at the Youth Justice Centre to help them cope with their adolescents' arrest and subsequent diversion. Transport should be provided for parents and adolescents to attend Diversion Programme sessions, with funding for the transport subsidised either by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development or the Department of Social Development and Special Programmes. Child justice officials should furthermore provide clear and accessible information on the availability and cost of transport for court appearances at the Youth Justice Centre. The NICRO Programmes should be presented in flexible time slots and at venues in safe environments to minimise safety risks for diverted adolescents and their parents. NICRO Programmes should include parents in more than one session and provide after-care services. Social workers should form partnerships with parents in monitoring the diverted adolescents' progress during and after completion of the Diversion Programme. The final practice recommendation is for child justice officials to be trained in engaging with parents in a supportive manner and providing information to parents using concepts that parents understand.

The following areas for future research have been identified as a result of the findings of the present study: the development of practice recommendations as well as an intervention programme to provide counselling, support, information and guidance to parents from the point of their children's arrest to the conclusion of the diversion

programme; studies focusing on the child justice stakeholders' experience of involving parents in the child justice process and their views on strengthening parents' ability to prevent their adolescents' recidivism; studies exploring adolescents' experiences of the application of the Child Justice Act; and lastly, studies exploring adolescents' experiences of parental monitoring during their attendance of the Diversion Programme.

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*Ms Zurina Abdullah, Area Manager of NICRO, Eastern Cape Province; Dr Veonna Goliath, Department of Social Development Professions, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.*