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I Am a Woman

I am a woman, and I'm beautiful
How can I not be beautiful?
I am made in the image of God

I may be thin or fat
I may be black or white
But whether I am short or tall, is the question

Look at me, I am perfect
My lips and nose are right where they are supposed to be
From the top of my head, to the bottom of my feet
I am beautiful

Gaze into my eyes and speak to my soul
See the love in my heart?
It's the same kind of love I am made of
You see, when God created me
He took his time,
Phela that's when art was invented

Take a tour around my 36, 34, 36 figure
I am a masterpiece, truly a work of art
I am fragile, yet fiercely strong
When you hit me and I cry
I'm not crying because of blood and bruises
Oh no! That's only temporary!
I'm crying because I feel so sad
Sad cos I don't understand how you can claim to love God
And fail to protect me

When I submit to you, It's not because I'm weak
But because I'm trying to make you stronger
So when you do something for me, don't keep reminding me of it
Because you know why I do those things?
Ha ha, I'm worth it!

Look at me, I am your mother
I endured childbirth just so you could live
I am your wife; I'm here to help you
I am your sister, I deeply care about you
And I am your daughter
I love you not because of anything
But in spite of everything

I am all these things and so much more
But above it all
I am a woman
So if you can't love me
As beautiful and perfect as I am
That's ok
I know somebody who does.

Written and read by Phumzile Phakathi
Women's Gala – San Lameer
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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is not only recognized as a pervasive and insidious social problem affecting all societies, but is being increasingly characterized as the most widespread form of human rights violation. South Africa is at this moment, experiencing violent crime at an unprecedented rate. Today, violence has become deeply entrenched in South African society. As such it is not surprising to witness the widespread abuse against women. The researcher begins by examining relevant literature in the area of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships.

This study makes use of a phenomenological method to explicate the meanings of 6 participants of the Aryan Benevolent Home, a safe house, who have experienced abuse in an intimate relationship. The central aim of the study was to investigate the experiences of abuse women by their intimate male partners. The research was approached from a feminist perspective, using a qualitative methodology. The participants were diverse in terms of age and background and drawn from women seeking help at the Aryan Benevolent Home.

Information was obtained by means of a semi-structured interview, which was tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to all participants before the study. The study concludes with the limitations and implications of the findings and recommendations are further discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1. Introduction

Sex discrimination, when combined with race, class and other forms of oppression constitutes a potentially deadly denial of women's right to life and liberty on a large scale through out the world (Tshesane, 2000). Gender-based violence is one of the most widespread human rights abuses and public health problems in the world today, affecting as many as 1 out of every 3 women (World Health Organization, 2004). It is also an extreme manifestation of gender inequity, targeting women and girls because of their subordinate social status in society. In most social spheres, men are awarded more power than women, thus benefiting by this position. The power men yield over women is in most men's interest, maintaining the status quo of gender inequality and patriarchal dominance (Sigler, 1989; Roopnarian, 1999; Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005).

One of the most pervasive forms of violence is that against women, specifically in the domestic environment. The Global Report on Women's Human Rights, states that domestic violence is a leading cause of female injury in almost every country in the world (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy and Lazano, 2002). Worldwide, millions of women are wounded, crippled, disfigured, traumatized and maimed by their intimate partners. At the most extreme they are murdered (United Nations Children Education Fund, 2000).

The profound impact of domestic violence and sexual abuse in South Africa cannot be underestimated. Violence impacts the victims, the witnesses and ultimately us all.

The results of being assaulted by an intimate partner include not only physical injury and emotional consequences (for example a loss of dignity and self worth), but also impact on other peoples' lives such as those of children caught up in the violent situation and witnessing the abuse (Mwamwenda cited in Liedeman, 2002). This has a negative impact on some children, because in most cases children, who witness violence become abusers in later stages of their life (Beyers, Leonard, Mays & Rosen, 2000 and Markowitz, 2001).

Despite a progressive Constitution and legislation in place that compares with the best in the world, the prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa is high and on the increase (Van der Hoven, 2001 and Deane, 2002). The preamble to the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 recognizes that domestic violence is a 'social evil and that there is a high incidence of domestic violence within the South African society' (Act 116 of 1998). A 1996 comparison of South African crime ratios with those in over a hundred other countries revealed South Africa to be the leader with regard to the incidence of murder, rape, robbery and violent theft (Deane, 2002). According to the most recently available South African Police Services statistics, 51 249 cases of domestic violence were reported nationally in 1999. In South Africa it is reported that 50% to 60% of marital relationships involve abuse (People Opposing Woman Abuse, 2001).

Mwamwenda cited in Liedeman (2002), found that 1 in 4 women are regularly assaulted by their husbands.

The Advice Desk for Abused Women, located in Durban, estimates that 1 in every 6 women is regularly assaulted by her partner, and that 1 in every 4 women is forced to flee because of life threatening situations in their homes (Padayachee & Singh, 1998).

It is estimated that domestic violence takes place in 1 out of every 3 South African households (Kruger, 2004), and every 6 days a woman is killed by her intimate partner (Vetten, 1996 and Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002).

In a study of 600 pregnant and non pregnant teenage girls in Cape Town, 60% of the respondents claimed that they had been beaten by their partner on one or more occasions (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). Estimates on the incidence of woman abuse and its impact shows that 1 in 2 women attending a Community Health Centre in the Western Cape reported experiencing past or current abuse by their male partners. As a result, 84% of these women suffered severe physical or mental health consequences.

It is postulated that these atrocities against women have culminated from years of carving an image from a societal perspective in which women were regarded as the inferior sex. It is intimated that the issue of inequality between the sexes is in essence an issue which is most certainly at the heart of the debate on woman abuse. Our history of colonial domination, patriarchy, segregation, and apartheid has burdened us with a legacy of racism and sexism.

Since 1994 a plethora of legal mechanisms have been developed to restore justice, provide redress and establish a culture and ethic of human rights consciousness and practice (Abrahams, 2002).

Section 9 of the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, describes the right to equality and provides impetus to women's empowerment (South African Human Rights Commission, 1998). Despite this progress, the changes in women's lives seem minimal as women still continue to be the victims of abuse (Roopnarian, 1999; Kruger, 2004; Suffla, 2004).

This study will provide insight to the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships using a phenomenological analysis. It must be noted that there is limited research undertaken using this method. Instead of relying on quantitative research, the qualitative approach succeeds in opening human experience to empirical study and provides a richer understanding of the phenomenon of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships.

1.2. Motivation for the Study

The rationale for the study was based on the fact that although the South African government has committed itself to the eradication of violence against women, the problem still carries on unabated. Society therefore needs to develop better tools to define the extent of the problem

Currently, intimate partner abuse and sexual abuse is South Africa's most pressing problem. This study will shed light on the experiences of intimate partner abuse and why some women remain in their abusive relationships. At present there is a lack of research in KwaZulu-Natal with concern to this field. In addition, much of the research on abused women has employed a positive quantitative approach that aims to simplify phenomena and there is a need for research to move beyond the surface to a richer, deeper and sensitive understanding of abused women and their predicament.

The findings of this research will provide some indication of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships, the current status as to why women remain in abusive relationships as well as the lack of adequacy of facilities which are available for women who are victims of abuse. There is also a need to update and record the present reasons, myths, and facts in this vital area. Outdated attitudes, practices, and intervention procedures have no place in our rapidly changing society. The present study allowed women to voice their perceptions and relates their experiences of abuse against them.

1.3. Aims of the Study

Worldwide, millions of women are wounded, crippled, disfigured, traumatized and maimed by their intimate partners or they die. Intimate partner violence is not only a leading cause of injury but also a leading cause of chronic and mental and medical illness (World Health Organization, 2002).

Research suggests that many victims remain in the abusive situations or actually return to their situations (Walker, 1999). If that is true, then it is obvious that more research needs to be done in order to determine the reasons why women choose to remain with their abusive partners, despite the devastating trauma and abuse they suffer.

According to various studies, it is a trite principle that abuse transcends all boundaries irrespective of race, creed and social status. It is a serious public health problem. Hence these factors establish a sufficient ground which lends itself to the aims of the study which are twofold:

- To investigate the experiences of women in abusive relationships
- To explore the reasons as to why women choose to remain in abusive relationships.

1.4. Outline of next chapters

Chapter 2 examines the different types of abuse. The occurrence of abuse in the different settings of society will also be discussed. Chapter 3 views the different theories of violence and how it applies to violence against women. Feminist theory will be used as the frame of reference in the study and this is related to the theory of patriarchy, which looks at the origins of power and social control. Culture, tradition and the situation in South Africa relating to domestic violence will also be discussed. Furthermore, the rationalizations and reasons as to why women remain in their abusive relationships are discussed.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology of the study. Firstly a rationale for utilizing the phenomenological approach is provided. Thereafter the aims, sample characteristics, the use of interviews, information gathering process and method of analysis will be discussed. A statement of ethical clearance is also provided. Chapter 5 deals with the analysis of the data using a phenomenological analysis. Finally, chapter 6 concludes findings of the study and contextualizes its significance. The limitations of the study are highlighted and recommendations for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2

Forms of violence against women

The abuse of women takes many forms. In the literature, these are mainly identified as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and psychological and financial abuse. Many women are subjected to one or more of these forms of abuse. In this chapter the different forms of abuse will be described.

2.1. Physical abuse

Padayachee & Singh (1998), state that physical abuse is any slapping, punching, kicking, or choking. It is also being slammed against a wall or being injured with a weapon or object. Brutal beating can result in bruising, lacerations, broken bones or death. Physical abuse is often the most visible form of abuse and perhaps the easiest recognized. The physical injuries inflicted most commonly range from minor cuts and bruises to the murder of women by their intimate partners.

According to Hanmer and Stanko, cited in Frank (2004), assaults begin with an odd scrape or scratch. However, over a period of time it becomes more frequent and more severe. It may begin with slaps and punches, then results in cuts and bruises, later advancing to being knocked to the floor, kicked and punched (Dobash & Dobash, 1998).

More severe injuries then become common, such as fractures, burns, miscarriages caused by violent attacks, internal injuries, attempts to strangle and drown, being pulled by the hair and having clumps of hair pulled out (Deane, 2002). In addition to the physical injuries sustained from such abuse, abused women often develop somatic symptoms, such as headaches, backaches, fatigue, abdominal and pelvic pain, recurrent vaginal infections, sleep and eating disorders, sexual dysfunctions and other signs of moderate or severe depression (Walker, 1991).

A 1993 study of 398 battered women in Alexandra Township near Johannesburg, found that intimate partners inflicted physical injuries with fists, knives, bricks, traditional knobkerries, bottles, hammers, axes and screwdrivers (Suffla, 2004). The most common injuries requiring hospitalization were fractures to the head, limbs, sternum and ribs, followed by scalp and facial lacerations as well as penetrating chest wounds, involving the lungs.

Research conducted by Paul & Binney cited in Frank (2004) discovered that violence towards women by their intimate partners resulted in damaged eyesight, ruptured spleens, stab wounds and fractured skulls. These researchers also recorded accounts of women being pushed into a fire or through glass. One woman described her head being banged repeatedly against the cupboard so violently that her injuries necessitated medical intervention which included x-rays and stitches.

Research carried out in Soweto in 1995 found that 1 in 3 women attending a clinic for any reason had been abused at some time by her husband or boyfriend and required medical attention because of the severe beatings (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Spinal injuries as well as head injuries are common in victims of domestic violence. In particular, head injuries can cause diverse problems – physical, cognitive, behavioral and emotional. Women who deny or minimize abuse are often misdiagnosed as mentally ill when in fact they may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or the effects of head injury (Walker, 1991).

While it is commonly believed that only married women are subjected to violence, girls as young as thirteen years, experience violent attacks from their boyfriends and intimate partners. In a study done in the Western Cape, 60% of teenagers reported being physically assaulted by male partners (Abrahams, 2002). According to a qualitative study conducted in Khayelitsha (Cape Town), it was found that violence by male partners is a consistent feature of teenage sexual relationships (Levy, 1991; Jewkes, Dunkle, Brown, Gray and McIntyre, 2004; Sathiparsad, 2005). Many women have to live with permanent damage such as facial and bodily scars, loss of property or possessions etc., caused by horrendous attacks on them by their male partners.

According to a study conducted by the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation, it was revealed on average that 1 woman is murdered every 6 days in South Africa (Vetten, 2004).

Women have been subjected to abuse from centuries ago, but in South Africa it has been and is still on the increase (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991, Foster, 1999, Van der Hoven, 2001, Combrinck, 2005) even leading to the death of many women.

2.2. Emotional and psychological abuse

Emotional abuse can be defined as constantly doing or saying things to shame, insult, ridicule, embarrass, demean, insult, belittle or mentally hurt another person (Walker, 1991). Emotional abuse may include calling a person names such as fat, lazy, stupid, bitch, silly, ugly, failure, telling someone she can't do anything right, is worthless, is an unfit mother, undeserving and unwanted. It also involves withholding money, affection or attention (Berry, 2000). Other forms include threats, accusations, isolation from family and friends and also abuse of children in the relationship (Walker, 1984; Padayachee & Singh, 1998 and Berry 2000), define psychological abuse as verbal and non-verbal behaviours intended to isolate, humiliate, demean or control a woman in an intimate relationship. This definition affirms that a violent relationship is characterized by incidents of more than one form of abuse. Relationships that are characterized by ongoing violence include at times a combination of forms of violence. Archer (1994), states that a physically aggressive act may cause severe physical damage, but it may have a psychological impact as well.

It is very often stated by women that the emotional abuse they suffer at the hands of their partners is far worse than the physical abuse (Follingstad & Polek, 1990; Walker, 1991; Berry, 2000; Abrahams, 2002).

Some of the common psychological problems associated with intimate partner abuse are depression, anxiety, low self esteem, sleep and eating disorders, suicidal behaviour; alcohol and drug misuse PTSD and suicide (Cascardi & Leary, 1992; Arias, 1999; Coolidge & Anderson, 2002). Therefore, it can be assumed that any form of abuse experienced has some kind of psychological impact on a person, although emotional abuse can be seen as one form of abuse.

Although physical forms of violence have been more compelling to address in the research, psychological forms of abuse can be devastating. Some abused women describe psychological degradation, fear and humiliation, as constituting the most painful abuse they had experienced (Walker, 1984). This type of emotional abuse is seen as having long term debilitating effects on a women's self esteem which in turn diminishes her ability to cope with the abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990; Padayachee & Singh, 1998; Berry, 2000; Abrahams, 2002).

Victim-survivors of ongoing psychological violence report that emotional torture and living under terror is often more unbearable than the physical brutality. There are also high levels of mental stress and incidence of suicide and suicide attempts.

Suicide is 12 times as likely to have been attempted by a woman who has been abused than by one who has not (UNICEF, 2000).

In Mpumalanga, the Three Province Study found that 50% of women had experienced some form of psychological abuse. A range of controlling behaviors by the male partner were reported, including not being given money to run the homes when the husband had money to spend, being evicted from the home, prevented from visiting family and prevented from working (Jewkes, Kekkana, Levin, Ratsaka & Schrieber, 2001).

A study of men in Cape Town reported the use of similar emotional tactics such as deliberate humiliation, belittling of women partners, damaging the women's valuables and the use of threats of physical violence (Abrahams and Mathews, 2001). Many men use these forms of abuse to control and dominate their partners.

Researchers have suggested that verbal attacks may happen at times and for reasons other than when physical force occurs. Specifically, clinical reports have indicated that ridicule, verbal harassment and name calling (e.g. verbal humiliation) are present in most physically abusive relationships (Walker, 1984; Bart & Moran, 1993; Berry, 2000). The function of this type of abuse appears to be one of control. By making the recipient of the ridicule believe that she is not worthwhile, she would remain within the power of the psychological abuser.

Walker, 1984; Follingstad et al. 1990; Berry 2000 included isolation, (either social or financial) as a form of emotional abuse. They viewed actions by abusive partners to systematically isolate women from social support systems and deny them access to finances as having harmful repercussions on their independence.

Jealousy and possessiveness appear to become abusive when the abuser harangues and interrogates his partner about strangers or others with whom she comes into contact (Bart & Moran, 1993). He may repeatedly accuse her of infidelity (Walker, 1984; Follingstad et al., 1990; Bart & Moran, 1993; Harway and Hansen, 1993). Jealousy may result in the man controlling the women's behaviour, (e.g. by him determining which clothes she will be allowed to wear or by restricting her contact with other people). Walker (1999) mentioned that abused women she interviewed reported verbal threats of abuse, harm or torture as an additional form of emotional abuse. The abused women reported that these threats were often directed towards members of her family, children or even friends. In addition threats involved graphic descriptions of how the man plans to torture the woman.

Two other forms of psychological abuse were considered relevant for this study (Berry 2000). Some abusing men will make repeated threats to divorce or abandon their wives or to have an affair if the wife does not comply with their wishes. The final type of emotional abuse considered pertinent to the study was damage or destruction of the personal property of the woman.

Many battered women have reported that men would select their favourite personal objects and destroy them, for example, damage their clothes or tear up their favourite pictures in front of them.

Battered women often exhibit fear, passivity, learned helplessness, depression and low self esteem (Bart & Moran, 1993; Walker, 1999; Maharaj, 2000; Abrahams, 2002; Christians, 2002). This kind of trauma can interfere with a women's ability to solve problems and can cause her to turn to self destructive coping mechanisms. The battered women's syndrome can also lead to vocational impairment that precludes a woman from fully participating in the work world (Berry, 2000).

2.3. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is forcing someone to have sex when she does not want to, forcing someone to engage in sexual acts she does not like or finds unpleasant, frightening or violent; forcing someone to have sex with others or watch others; criticism of sexual performance, sadism and anything that makes her feel demeaned or violated (Berry, 2000). Carden (1994), defines sexual violence as forcing an intimate female partner, through the use of physical or verbal threats or intimidation, to participate in sexual activities against her will.

South Africa has the highest number of rapes and sexual violence reported to police, pro-rata of its female population, than any other country. The South African Police Services annual report for 2004/2005 brings into focus the extent to which South Africa's women and girls continue to suffer from the various forms of abuse. A woman is raped every 10 minutes, 1 is beaten every 6 minutes and 7 women are murdered, on average, every day. These horrors emerged from annual crime statistics released by the police during September 2005 (Van der Merwe cited in Agenda 2005).

A Medical Research Council (MRC) study found that 2 in every 100 women reported that they have been raped in the previous year (Jewkes, 2002). In a Cape Town study nearly 16% of men reported that they had raped or attempted to rape an intimate partner within the last 10 years (Jewkes, 2002). According to the Institute for Security Studies, 119 persons per 100,000 of the population were raped in the 2001/2002 fiscal year. In the majority of the rape cases the perpetrators were known to the victim. Furthermore, in most of these cases the perpetrators went unpunished. A study by the South African Law Commission during that year reported that only 5 percent of rape cases ended with a conviction, so it comes as no surprise that many women do not report rape because they are not taken seriously.

Rape, including spousal rape, is illegal in South Africa; however it remains a very serious problem (Deane, 2002 and Kruger, 2004). Rape in marriage is an extremely prevalent form of sexual violence, particularly when we consider that women who are involved in physically abusive relationships may be especially vulnerable to rape by their partners.

According to the Treatment Action Campaign more than 55 000 rapes were reported to the police in 2005 (Naidoo, 2006). These statistics do not even reveal the full scope of the violence, as police explain that two thirds of all rape may not be reported because victims often depend on the perpetrators for a livelihood. Furthermore, not all the cases reported are prosecuted. For example, of the 55 000 rape cases reported in 2005, only 7% of cases were successfully prosecuted.

This sends a message to the communities that rape is not a serious crime and that the survivors of rape, who are usually women, do not matter (Naidoo, 2006). The existence of spousal exemptions in the majority of other countries indicates that rape in marriage is still treated in certain quarters as a lesser crime than other forms of crime (Tshesane, 2000; Deane, 2002; Kruger, 2004). This perpetuates marital rape by conveying the message that such acts of aggression are somehow less reprehensible than other types of rape. Furthermore, the existence of spousal exemption also indicates an acceptance of the understanding that wives are the property of their husbands and that the marriage contract is an entitlement to sex (Foster, 1999; Lewis, 2000; Moodely cited in Agenda, 2005).

It has been more than ten years since the Beijing Conference, but women who report violence to the police are still being blamed for the attacks. A recent study in Gauteng revealed that 8 in 10 young men believed that women who were raped had asked for it. Two in 10 thought women enjoyed being raped.

Nearly 50% of young males said they believed a woman who said 'NO' to sex meant 'YES'. Nearly a third of both men and women surveyed said forcing sex on someone you know is not sexual violence (Van der Hoven, 2001).

Many survivors of rape are always or in most instances subjected to secondary victimization. If a rape survivor decides to report her rape, she often comes into contact with the various arms of the criminal justice system such as the police, the district surgeon, prosecutor, interpreter and magistrate (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991, Abrahams and Mathews, 2001; Carter, 2002). The process of interacting with these systems and officials can be extremely traumatic when survivors are treated with suspicion, antagonism and insensitivity and as objects, instead of, as people in need of help and protection. Since this treatment can exacerbate the sense of violation and powerlessness experienced during the rape attack, it is known as secondary victimization (Abrahams & Mathews, 2001 and Abrahams, Mathews, Martin & Vetten, 2004).

2.4. Financial abuse

Financial abuse includes any coercive act or limitation placed on an individual that has adverse economic implications on the woman and/or her dependants. This includes not allowing a woman to work, forcing her to hand over all or part of her earnings, or drawing from her personal or a shared bank account without her knowledge or consent.

Financial abuse is also said to include taking or spending another persons money; taking or destroying another's persons possessions; a man spending most of his and his partners money on himself or giving her a very small allowance or when a man expects his female partner to account for every cent or do more with the money than is possible (Abrahams, 2002).

Research supports the notion that violence is a reflection of power struggles within a relationship or family (Dangor, Holt, Scott, 1998; Aberle & Littlefield, 2001; Abrahams, 2002; Liedeman, 2002). According to a commonly believed myth, that the abuse of women is associated with low income and marital dissolution, high income families also experience woman abuse (Padayachee & Singh, 1998). However, it appears that women, who remain in abusive relationships, tend to be unemployed or earn a low wage.

This leaves them economically powerless and therefore unable to fend for themselves or their children so they have no choice but to remain in the relationship. The abuser often creates a situation where his partner is financially dependent on him and then he uses the situation to abuse his partner (Bart & Moran, 1993 and Berry, 2000). The victim often endures the abuse as she does not have the means to support herself and or/her children.

2.5. Intimate Femicide

The killing of women by intimate partners (also known as intimate female homicide or intimate femicide) is the most extreme form and consequence of violence against women.

As stated by Dr. Naeemah Abrahams, a specialist scientist at the Medical Research Council, South Africa has the highest rate of intimate femicide of any country in the world where it has been studied (Abrahams et al., 2004).

According to Vetten (1996), women are more likely to be murdered by intimate male partners and less frequently by strangers. Findings of the latter study and subsequent research show that women are most at risk when they try to end the abusive relationship. Vetten's research also shows that the ages of women who fall victim of intimate femicide are getting younger each year. This is cited as a cause of concern as it suggests that even extremely young women get involved in abusive relationships.

According to another study by the Medical Research Council, of the 4 women who will die today, most will be killed in their own homes and will either be shot or beaten to death by their partner. They are also most likely to be between the ages of 30 and 40 years old. Nationally the study also finds that 2 % of those killed were pregnant and 16, 5 % were sexually assaulted (Abrahams et al., 2004).

In two-thirds of the investigations, police never questioned if the killer was beating up his spouse. The study also finds that 50% of the perpetrators of intimate femicide live in an intimate relationship with their victims, 30% call themselves the victim's boyfriends and 18 % are married to the victims (Vetten 1996).

The shocking truth is that slightly less than a third of those who killed their intimate partners are convicted and almost 70 % will get away because of ‘a lack of evidence’ (Abrahams et al., 2004). According to findings released by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr), the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at the University of Cape Town and the Medical Research Council, 1 South African woman is killed every 6 hours by a man she had chosen to spend her life with. In 50 % of all solved murders of women in the country, it was found that the perpetrator was an intimate partner (Ellis cited in Abrahams et al., 2004).

2.6. Conclusion

It is evident that there are various situations that make women especially vulnerable or prone to violence. The powerless situations in which many women find themselves increases their victimization, in the public and private spheres. Research has confirmed the diversity of women’s experiences, and therefore it seems appropriate to view the impact of societal power relations in contributing to violence against women.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. Historical Perspective

3.1.1. A brief historical perspective – From condonement to prosecution

Domestic violence has been reported in virtually all societies. In most countries it has been both legally and socially accepted until very recently. Historically, physical violence had been used to keep subordinate groups (women and children) in their place by the more dominant forces (men), in society. Men have always been physically larger and stronger than most women, and most societies have been male dominated. Therefore it comes as no surprise that women have been frequent victims of physical assault (Sigler, 1989).

In ancient Roman times, men were allowed by law, to beat, chastise, divorce, or kill their wives for adultery, public drunkenness or attending public functions. During the Middle Ages, a man's right to beat his wife was beyond question, yet a woman could be burned alive for so much as threatening her husband. It took centuries before any real efforts were made to reduce this problem, because very few people saw violence in the home as a public problem.

The origin of abuse lies in the subordination of women and their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship between women and men has been institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family. The power in the relationship is not divided equally and the man has unquestionable authority in the home.

This structure and ideology was reflected in two societies, namely the Romans and the early Christians (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Entrusted with this responsibility, men were given power and control (Sigler, 1989).

Men have had the power to use force, often taking the form of physical and verbal abuse, to control the behavior of their dependants and were expected to use so-called reasonable force in the exercise of their responsibilities. If wives committed crimes, husbands were held accountable for the damage. As the dominant sex, men were expected to discipline their women. In the exercise of this discipline, men were also expected to use reasonable physical force. Reasonable physical force often meant beating the woman to the point where she was left with black eyes and broken noses (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Unequal power relationships between men and women exist mainly as a result of patriarchal influences and contribute to woman abuse (Roopnarian, 1999 and Van der Hoven, 2001). Men's abuse of women serves to control and intimidate them. Repetitive patterns of psychological tactics used by the abuser results in the successes of achieving total control over his partner's behaviours and feelings (Mullender, 1996).

Wife battering has a long history as a deep-seated social phenomenon. Several social historians have documented the informal and formal sanctions that have encouraged wife battering (Sigler, 1989). In the early 19th century in America, a husband was permitted to discipline his wife physically without prosecution for assault and battery.

English common law permitted husbands to chastise their wives who transgressed by using a stick that was not thicker than his thumb, hence the 'rule of thumb' came into place (Dobash & Dobash, 1979 and Gelles & Cornell, 1990).

Only in the last 20 years have courts finally considered wife battering to be a criminal offence. These historical circumstances have led several social scientists to explain that men batter women basically because they are permitted and encouraged to do so (Markowitz, 2001). While reform efforts have been present since the Middle Ages, the unwillingness of society to intervene in family affairs remained firm until recently, where the use of physical force in domestic settings is now broadly publicized and public concern about the extent and severity of the problem has increased (Sigler, 1989).

In the past, little or no help was available for victims of abuse (Singh, 2003). Abused women and their children were mostly supported by welfare organizations. Services for battered women by other organizations only started to develop during the nineteen eighties (Van der Hoven, 2001). An organization called People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) was started in 1979 by a group of volunteers with a pager and a reference list. Their aim was to assist women traumatized by rape, emotional, physical and financial abuses as well as sexual harassment and other forms of gender violence.

The women's movement challenged the traditional roles of women in society and the abuse that women have accepted as their lot (Roopnarian, 1999). The women's movement has played a critical role in making the abuse of women a social issue by bringing it to public attention. Feminists' perspectives argue that institutions play a central role in women abuse. Feminists view women abuse as a function of women's oppressed position (Bart & Moran, 1993). They argue that the purpose of women abuse is to control woman. Feminists contend that men use abuse as a way to control their female partners. This is substantial in the literature that reports that women demonstrated that abuse occurred when men tried to make them comply with their wishes (Bart & Moran, 1993).

A significant advancement in reducing violence against women was the passing of the Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993 (Kruger, 2004). This law made it easier and cheaper for a woman to get a protection order known as 'interdicts' in South Africa. Once issued, an interdict requires the police to arrest the abuser if the abuse continues.

In the past, suitable legislation specifically formulated to address domestic violence, did not exist in South Africa. Although persons who committed crimes of violence within the family were criminally liable for their actions, offenders were seldom charged, mainly because family members were reluctant to testify against them (Van der Hoven, 2001 and Kruger, 2004). Furthermore, the existing procedures for obtaining court interdicts against offenders were cumbersome and expensive. Most women were either too afraid to pursue this remedy or they were not in a financial position to embark on such an expensive and complicated remedy.

In order to ameliorate this problem, the Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993 was incorporated into legislation to prevent family violence, and raise awareness around the issues of domestic violence and to enhance the plight of abused women (South African Law Commission, 1999).

The Domestic Violence Act of 1998 is a further improvement of the Prevention of Family Violence Act of 1993. The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 was enacted in the preamble to afford the victims of domestic violence the maximum protection from domestic abuse that the law can provide; and to introduce measures which seek to ensure that the relevant organs of state give full effect to the provisions of this Act, and thereby to convey that the state is committed to the elimination of domestic violence (Kruger, 2004).

The promulgation of the new Domestic Violence Bill of 1998 has firmly thrust domestic violence into the spotlight. Previously, domestic violence was regarded as an issue that should be kept behind closed doors. Until this legislation was passed, this act of abuse was perceived to be a private matter and nothing or very little of it was made public. However, the passing of the new Domestic Violence Bill has now shifted the paradigm and has strengthened the rights of victims of abuse.

This Act is progressive and constitutes a significant broadening of the previous definition. It applies to a wider range of people, namely any victim who is in a domestic relationship and not only to parties in a marriage (South African Law Commission, 1999). The Domestic Violence Act also makes provision for the granting of a protection order.

3.2. Theoretical perspectives

Since women's experience with violence differs across generations, social class, caste, region and country (Fernandez, 1997) this creates difficulty in explaining partner abuse cross culturally within a specific theoretical framework. Several theories have thus been proposed to explain abuse against women. In the ensuing discussion some of the theoretical approaches will be addressed.

3.2.1. The psychodynamic theory of violence

The central focus of intrapsychic psychodynamic theories was on the personalities of either the abuser or the victim. The abuser was viewed as helplessly driven by his naturally aggressive nature, psychologically deranged, sick or mentally ill (Harway and Hansen, 1993). It was proposed that poor ego development, unfulfilled infantile dependency needs or lack of emotional controls made him volatile and aggressive towards others when he felt deprived (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). These theories also assumed that certain psychological characteristics predisposed a woman to abuse.

Psychodynamic theories have proposed the masochistic role of women in abusive relationships. It is believed that women 'deserved it', 'liked it' or 'needed it' (Prozan, 1993).

The concept of masochism was used to explain women's submission and suffering (Dobash & Dobash, 1992 and Coolidge & Anderson, 2002); or learned helplessness to explain why she remained in the relationship (Harway, 1993). Women were also perceived to incite the abuse by their pathological behaviour. Criticism had been leveled against these approaches as they pathologize the problem by highlighting personality traits and psychopathology of the abuser and victim as being the main determinants of woman abuse. It has, however, been reported that very few instances of abuse are solely attributed to personality traits, mental illness and psychopathology (Gelles & Cornell, 1990 and Mullender, 1996). Research has shown that abusers are not necessarily sadists or psychologically ill (Mullender, 1996). They come from all walks of life, hold good positions in the community, serve in our courts, police agencies and mental health institutions (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

It has been argued that intrapsychic models that dwell on the past allow men to point formative experiences beyond their control and serve as an excuse for men to deny responsibility without ending their abuse (Bograd & Yllo, 1988). The men deny responsibility by claiming they were "provoked". This "provocation" excuse solidifies male domination (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

Since the abuser is seen as being emotionally and psychologically disturbed, he is not responsible for his actions. Bograd & Yllo (1988) asserts that woman abuse is far too prevalent to the deviance of a few; instead it is a psychological disorder of society at large.

A common myth that has been popularized is that women enjoy being physically or mentally ill (Dobash & Dobash, 1992 and Padayachee & Singh, 1998). Considerable research has been conducted that refutes the myth of the masochistic abused woman. Research found that economic, emotional, cultural and social factors constrain women from leaving abusive relationships (De Sousa, 1991; Padayachee & Singh, 1998; Abrahams and Mathews, 2001). A woman may accept being abused because she does not think that she can escape from her partner. Her victimization often causes her compelling psychological problems, which then binds her to this symbiotic relationship (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Follingstad, Neckerman and Vormbrock, 1990; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Coolidge & Anderson, 2002). Blaming the abuse on individual psychological or physiological factors, in the abuser or victim, attempts to dilute men's abuse of women into a depoliticized, individualized and professionalized issue rather than focusing on socio-cultural and political perspectives (Harway and Hansen, 1993).

These psychodynamic approaches have been challenged since they ignore male domination and power and the prevalence of male abuse by substituting men as victims. These approaches tend to encourage women to believe the victim-blaming messages from their abusers and society (Bograd & Yllo, 1988 and Coolidge & Anderson, 2002).

3.2.2. The cycle of violence perspective

Lenore Walker has done extensive work with women who have experienced violence and has worked with them to relieve their situations. She proposed that a cycle of violence exists which can be described in three phases (Walker, 1984).

The first phase is the tension-building phase, which is characterized by minor incidents and gradually increases until the tension becomes unbearable (Walker, 1984). The woman may feel angry and terrorized but denies these feelings and rather acts to avoid abuse to please the abuser (Whalen, 1996). The explosion phase or the acute battering incident follows where the batterer loses complete control over his behaviour (Padayachee & Singh, 1998). According to Wallace (1999), this intense aggression is what distinguishes the first phase from the acute one. The attack is more serious, and both partners may feel shock, disbelief and often denial. Women tend to deny the injuries, for example, by not seeking help.

The third phase is the phase of contrition, which is characterized by kind and loving behaviour. In this phase the abuser is apologetic for his actions and focuses on his need for the woman to remain in the relationship (Padayachee & Singh, 1998). Since the partners are so dependent on each other, bonding occurs. The loving and kind behaviour of the abuser during this phase appears to provide reinforcement for the cycle, allowing the abused woman to convince herself that the abuser is capable of change.

This then keeps the woman trapped in the relationship, and the violence usually escalates in frequency and severity (Walker, 1984). This cycle creates the idea that women stay trapped in an abusive relationship for years on end. While many women do make efforts to escape from their violent relationships, many do not succeed in their efforts (Abrahams, 2002). Society also does not have enough structures in place to help these women when they decide to free themselves from an abusive relationship.

3.2.3. Learned helplessness theory

The theory of learned helplessness is related to the idea of women being masochistic in their involvement in abusive relationships. According to Gondolf & Fisher (1988), abused women tend to 'give up' in the course of being abused; they suffer psychological paralysis with an underlying masochism. This theory postulates that the abuser, by persistent and intermittent reinforcement, conditions women to have some ideas of him (Gondolf & Fisher, 1998). Abused women may learn to believe that nothing she can do will permit her to escape or protect her from her husband's violence, and she loses the ability to predict that what she does can affect the outcome (Harway, 1993). Walker (1984) theorizes that learned helplessness, is one of the reasons that battered women do not feel that they are able to escape the violent relationship.

It is further argued that the abusers ensure that the women feel insecure and helpless by reinforcing ideas of uselessness. It is usually these feelings of helplessness that prevent women from seeking help.

These dynamics are linked to the Stockholm syndrome, which occurs when persons who are held as hostages, captives or prisoners of war, begin to identify with their captives (Wallace, 1999). This means that over time women may begin to positively identify with the abuser.

Another dimension of this theory, according to Gondolf & Fisher (1988), is that learned helplessness may be rooted in childhood exposure to violence. Salzinger, Feldman, Mojica, Stockhammer and Rosario (2002) supports this notion stating that once the seeds of learned helplessness are planted in childhood, it apparently takes root in women's adult intimate relationships with men. Markowitz (2001) has reported that women who grow up in violent homes learn to accept or tolerate and to expect it in their own adult relationships. Psychological evidence has demonstrated that violence is a learned behaviour (Bandura cited in Salzinger et al, 2002), that is passed on from generation to generation. This means that if women have been exposed to violence as children and learned helplessness, they may grow up and think that abuse is normal and acceptable. This makes them vulnerable to remain in abusive relationships.

3.2.4. The social learning theory

The social learning theory suggests that abusive behaviour is learned from observing others being abusive (Gelles & Straus, 1988 and Bandura cited in Salzinger et al., 2002).

The social learning theory operates from the fundamental premise that human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and benefits, and the avoidance of punishment and costs. It holds however that not all observed behaviour will be repeated. In order for it to be reenacted by an individual he or she must recognize that it will bring a reward. The social learning theory describes how aggressive behaviour can be acquired through direct experience and shaped through trial and error.

The rewards from domestic abuse include working off momentary anger. This includes the immediate gratification that the violent individual gets from hitting. Thus, if a husband who wants no more discussion on his behaviour and slaps his wife and gets her to stop talking about it (because she is too afraid to bring to raise the topic), he is 'successful'. According to Gelles and Straus (1988), if the force is sufficient, the victim will stop what she is doing that has angered the abuser. The immediacy of the reward is quite valuable to some individuals who do not have the patience to use the lengthier, more reasonable approach. Power, control and self-esteem are other rewards for family violence (Sigler, 1989; Bart & Moran, 1993; Harway and Hansen, 1993, Tshesane, 2000; Van der Hoven, 2001; Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005).

The consequences of intimate violence further increases the rewards for an individual who desires to control another. Repeated violence tends to beat down victims to the point where they will do anything, or say anything, to please their batterers and avoid punishment (Bart & Moran, 1993).

This feeling of greater control can also increase the abusers feeling of self-esteem. For the abuser whose sense of self-worth has been diminished by external forces, control at home is very important.

“The hitting served to make these men feel that they could control something, in their lives” (Gelles and Straus 1988, p 34).

Another reward for those who hit is revenge. When conflict escalates between partners, it is easier to hurt each other because partners are more cued into each others specific vulnerabilities, “If the conflict escalates and the one partner goes for the others ‘jugular’ violence may be the only way the partner can defend himself or herself” (Gelles and Straus, 1988, p 34).

3.2.5. Family systems theory

Under the family systems theory, domestic violence is directly attributed to a dysfunctional family set up. Both partners seek to dominate the relationship and there is a complete lack of communication and coping skills. The violence is seen as something to which both partners have contributed. Harway (1993) describes battering as the way in which ‘over adequate women’ and ‘under adequate men’ relate, with violence used by the husband to reestablish the equilibrium in the relationship.

Harway (1993) sees the violence as resulting from the partners complementary needs to maintain homeostatic patterns. According to family systems therapists, men and women in violent relationships are said to be separating from their families of origin and use violence as a way to regulate the closeness in their relationship. These theories have been criticized by feminists as they fail to take cognizance of the lack of power and control experienced by many battered women.

3.2.6. The codependency theory

According to Beattie (1987), co-dependency is a behavioral, emotional and psychological condition that develops as a result from prolonged exposure to oppressive rules that prevent a person from expressing their feelings and problems directly. Co-dependent behaviour is developed as a way to survive emotionally, mentally and physically. Coping mechanisms are said to develop over time and are considered as maladaptive, because they tie people into destructive relationships.

According to Subby and Friel, cited in Beattie (1987), the word codependent was first used to describe people whose lives were affected as a result of them being involved with a chemically dependent person. They were seen as having developed a pattern of coping with life that was a reaction to someone else's alcohol or drug abuse.

In recent years the definition of codependency has expanded to include many other situations.

For example, a situation which encompasses a relationship with a troubled, needy or dependant person. A second common situation would include the silent rules that usually develop in the family prohibiting open expression of feelings, direct honest communication, realistic expectations and trust in others or oneself. When applied in the context of partner abuse, the assumption is that the abused partner may have developed codependent characteristics as a response to the abusive experience (Beattie, 1987).

3.2.7. Feminist theory

This perspective views society, in the past and present, as dominated by males with women being left in a subordinate position (Harway, 1993). Women are treated mainly as men's possessions. This approach has been translated into laws and customs that legitimize this differential status of men and women. Violence is used by men to enforce those laws and customs, control and suppress any rebellion from women.

According to Bograd & Yllo (1988) male striving for control and dominance, coupled with a need to demonstrate power, is seen as the root of domestic violence. Campbell (1997) and Bassadien & Hochfeld (2005) proposed that in the times of social change, when appropriate sex roles are not clear, men are most likely to use violence to keep women in their place.

There are three central elements that characterize the feminist approach. Firstly, gender is central to understanding social relations, institutions and processes. Secondly, domestic violence mirrors the patriarchal organization of society, and maintains the notion of the male dominance within the family. Thirdly, gender relations are viewed as problematic since they are linked to dominance, inequality and conflict.

One of the significant themes of feminist theory has been to try to account for women's subordination in society. This has been important in producing some idea of how gender inequality could be challenged and transformed politically. Feminist theory offers critical explanations of women's subordination. It also offers an explanation of how and why women have less power than men and how this imbalance could be challenged and transformed.

Feminists argue that traditional mainstream research has been male dominated (Harway, 1993). The dominating principles and rules of science are regarded as part of the general patriarchal domination. Traditional mainstream research reflects the sexist values and ideology of men and thus contains hidden expressions of sexism in its focus, language and results. In this way the asymmetrical gender relations in society are legitimized and reproduced. Women's experiences and perspectives have largely been disregarded.

Feminists critique existing theories, most of which contain gender bias. Feminists indicate neglected areas and show how elusive conditions can contribute to create a variety of social structures (Richardson & Robinson, 1993).

In the 1970s an important outcome of the feminist movement was the identification of woman abuse and publishing it as a major social problem. In an attempt to intervene and prevent further abuse of women, social scientists sought to determine the causes of woman abuse. Several cultural factors were cited as contributing to the occurrence and social tolerance of woman abuse.

The historical tradition of patriarchal rule over woman, a legal tradition of “wife chastisement” laws, authorized a permissible level of abuse against women (Sigler, 1989).

In light of the above, the term patriarchy has provided an important concept in understanding how and why women are oppressed. This is useful as it provides an understanding of male dominance in society. All feminists acknowledge woman abuse as significant and assert women are oppressed by a patriarchal social system on which women’s subordination is built (Harway, 1993 and Kelly, Hester & Radford, 1996).

Feminists point out those historically major institutions sanctioned the use of abuse by men to control women. Feminists argue that physical abuse is just one of a variety of controls that men try to exercise over woman; others include anger and psychological abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990 and Berry, 2000). Men use abuse as a way to force female partners to comply with their wishes.

According to Berry (2000) and Harway & Hansen (1993), abusers also increasingly abuse women through the use of intimidation and isolation. Men believe that they are justified in their use of abuse against their intimate partners and by what they feel they are acceptable norms.

Radford and Stanko, cited in Frank (2004), asserted that men use sexual violence to secure and maintain the relationship between male dominance and female subordination. In support of this notion Richardson and Robinson (1993) postulates that one of the main reasons there is a high increase in woman abuse is due to men exercising their dominance and control over women.

In summary, the preceding section shows that social scientists differ greatly in their interpretation of the causes of woman abuse. Each perspective views women differently and therefore each has consequences for our understanding of woman abuse. Feminists argue for widespread public educational campaigns to arouse support for reforms that will make institutions more responsible to abused women.

3.3. Traditions, views, perceptions, and attitudes with regard to domestic violence in South Africa

A woman's powerlessness in the home is deeply entrenched across a variety of cultures and communities in South Africa. Culture is an effective tool for affirming and maintaining male authority, across all race, religions and ethnic groups in South Africa (Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005). Domination of and violence towards women are ingrained in the tradition of family relationships (Deane, 2002). Patriarchal control is based on the idea that men are heads of families. This traditional belief still prevails in many relationships today.

However, control of women by their husbands is a complex aspect that cannot be regarded as a sole contributory factor to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The cultural and socialization processes men and women are subjected to, also contribute extensively to abuse.

In many traditional Black communities, certain traditions contribute to domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence. In these communities, adolescents who are initiated into manhood, are taught that they should consider themselves to be the rulers and leaders and that woman are subordinate to them and inferior beings (Van der Hoven, 2001). As a result of this indoctrination, violence toward women is likely to be encouraged.

The differential socialization processes between men and women seem to be basically the same in every race group (Tshesane, 2000). That is, women are socialized differently from men. Women are brought up with perceptions that they should not fight, as fighting is associated with aggressive behaviour which is not believed to be part of women's behaviour. They are told to be respectful and not to argue with men (Ahuja, 1992; Suffla 2004; Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005). The socialization process is internalized during childhood stages and practiced throughout life and in this way men tend to take advantage of women. As a result they treat them in an unequal manner. For example, by being aggressive towards women, a man proves that he is strong and able to prove his manhood. Russel (1990) supports this statement by saying that males are trained from childhood to separate sexual desire from caring, respecting, liking or loving. As a consequence of this men view women as sexual objects rather than as human beings.

Box (1983) asserts that the idealization of femininity involves the notion of passivity, dependence, submissive and mindlessness. Women are taught to be emotionally and economically dependent on men and to look for protection in a harsh and brutal world of 'male predators' (Bassadien and Hochfeld, 2005). Family relations between men and women also play a significant role in promoting and encouraging physical and sexual abuse of women. Tshesane (2000) contends that social conditioning has become an umbrella for how and why women's oppression is reproduced. According to her, women learn their subordination through familial relations, media representations of masculinity and femininity or at school through books or praise or punishment for appropriately gendered behaviour by teachers.

In South Africa, as in many societies, men and women are socialized into viewing their pair bonding as an anticipated outcome of adulthood and that such bonding usually involves engaging in specific role behaviour (Tshesane, 2000). For example, one of these role stereotypes is the view of men as the initiator of such relationships and women as reciprocators. In marriage and other heterosexual relationships, it is usually expected by both parties that men will assume greater power and control and make all the important decisions (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton and Buck, 2001; Combrinck, 2005).

There are various cultural perceptions about how women should be treated and how they should respond to the treatment. In many South African communities the ideology of a dominant male still prevails and women are not treated with the same respect and authority that men are (Roopnarian, 1999).

In most cultures women are taught to adhere to their husband's dominance and to show respect (Soul City and National Network on Violence against Women, 1999; Roopnarian, 1999; Van der Hoven, 2001; Kim, 2003; Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005). For example, in the African culture, some cultural beliefs generally expect women not to talk back to their husbands and women must always listen to their husbands because they are the heads of the families.

Traditional beliefs play a role in woman abuse in the family context in the sense that most rural women believe that for the sake of protection and care they should listen to everything that their husbands say (Soul City and National Network on Violence against Women, 1999; Kim, 2003). They are therefore not supposed to question their husband's whereabouts. If they do, it means that they do not have respect and failing to respect means getting a beating. The ironic part is that some men want to know where their wives have been, whom they were with and what they were doing.

Tshesane (2000) states that husbands monitor their wives movements and they must account for every second away from home. The general fear women have is that they have been socialized not to divorce otherwise they will be labelled divorcees. Also, what takes place at home is private and should not be discussed with anyone outside the family.

Discussion with family may often lead to biased advice being given e.g. with the greatest emphasis being placed on trying to keep the family together as a unit over and above what may be in the best interest of the woman (Padayachee & Singh, 1998 and Dunham & Senn, 2000).

Divorce may never be an option and hence the woman is coerced into staying in the relationship for reasons such as protecting the family name, financial constraints (that she may be a burden on her family if she decides to leave the relationship) or for the sake of the children.

It is contended that females themselves, play a role in encouraging woman abuse. In some case women blame themselves for causing the abuser to abuse them either sexually, financially, emotionally or psychologically. Women are socialized to be completely dependent upon men for emotional, economic support and physical protection Abbey et al (2001). Vogelman and Eagle (1991) argue that many women who are abused lack economic means to establish an independent household of their own. Consequently, many women are afraid of becoming poor and/or homeless if they leave their abusers. Van der Hoven (2001) conducted a survey to investigate the attitudes of female members of the community in Pretoria, Gauteng Province. A stratified random sample of 123 White women of the lower and middle class socio economic strata revealed that more than half the respondents had a patriarchal attitude.

They believed that the wife should be submissive to her husband and she should not let him feel that she can do something better than he can. She should keep her mouth shut to reduce her husband or partners aggression and to avoid abuse. This implies that if a wife is to be more assertive, she is to be blamed for the abuse. The majority of women in the study believed that women should play a passive role in the marriage. These findings revealed a very conservative, patriarchal attitude, which actually supports and encourages wife abuse.

The laws and rituals surrounding marriage also re-enforce this powerlessness that women experience at home.

Certain cultural practices such as lobola and dowry may have originally meant well, they have become so open to blatant abuse, that they have become willing instruments of oppression and violence (Bassadien & Hochfeld, 2005 and Sathiparsad, 2005). The still common custom of lobola exchange in many African marriages is a process negotiated by men around women's values as assets to the family and may have proprietary implications for how a husband perceives his wife (Tshesane, 2000). Traditionally, in Black tribes, it was expected from a girl to leave her own family group when she gets married and be incorporated into that of her husband. The bridegroom is required to pay lobola in the form of cattle, or as has become common practice today, in the form of cash, to the bride's family to compensate for their loss. This custom had the effect that the husband considered his bride to be his possession, to use and abuse as he wanted (Naik, 2001). According to Van der Hoven (2001) and Bassadien & Hochfeld (2005) men could perceive lobola as the right to own the women and children.

In a survey in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, 82 % of women reported that it is culturally accepted that if a man pays lobola for his wife, it means that he owns her (Liedeman, 2002). The women's role as a family member remained insignificant. She had to accept, without question, the authority of her husband. Her role was clearly defined as being restricted to the kitchen, bearing children and looking after the family. Furthermore, men considered it their right to discipline their wives and children.

Dowry is a form of wedding gift prevalent in some parts of South Africa within the Indian community, which is also sometimes called price-of-the-groom (Fernandez, 1997).

Dowry in the Indian culture includes the exchange of gifts, property, jewellery and clothing and is viewed as a transfer of the women's burden to her marital family (Ahuja, 1992). It is customary in marriage and this has been practiced for many centuries. This demonstrates another symbol of a women's ambivalent position which seems to extend across many cultures and this may influence her choice to leave a violent relationship (Fernandez, 1997).

In the Indian community it is common practice for married couples to live with their extended families. They often live with their husband's parents and/or relatives, grandparents and siblings. This can often lead to various pressures being exerted on the married couple. Differences in opinions with her in-laws, often leads to confrontations between the marital couple, resulting in violence (Ahuja, 1992). The husband may feel obliged to protect his parents.

The husband's mother may compete with her daughter-in-law for attention from her son and she may feel jealous that her son is now showering attention on his wife. The son may find himself being placed in the middle between his wife and his parent/s. He may be pressured into showing loyalty to his parents and this often leads to him 'disciplining' his wife so that she respects his parents. He may verbally and/or physically carry out his 'discipline'. This scenario is very complicated and is more often than not a catalyst for domestic violence. The wife may feel betrayed than her husband sides with his parents and does not listen to her. The in-laws may bad mouth their daughter-in-law with other members of the family which can make her feel isolated, deprived and even suicidal.

She may also be emotionally abused by her in-laws and her husband may turn a blind eye to this.

The belief that the children must look after their parents, when they are old enough and/or married is a cultural practice that also exists in the Indian community (Ahuja, 1992). Any attempt by the husband to satisfy both parties often leads to the wife being compromised. Her feelings and needs may be ignored in favour of his parents. This form of domestic violence is very apparent and common in the Indian community.

It is common knowledge in the Indian community that if a son or daughter fails to look after his or her parents (and this often includes his or her parents living with him or her and his or her wife) in their old age it is a grave sin. This is but one example of the many problems that these women experience which may often lead to domestic violence.

In predominantly Coloured communities (people of mixed racial origin) such as Eersterust, near Pretoria (Gauteng Province), domestic violence is pervasive. According to social workers dealing with the problem of woman abuse, young girls start dating boys at the age of fourteen or fifteen years, and their boyfriends start dominating and abusing them physically from the beginning of the relationship. The girls tend to accept the boyfriends aggressive behaviour, because they all come from violent families where they often witnessed the father beating the mother (Van der Hoven, 2001). Other family members and neighbours do not interfere although they may be aware of the problem.

Abrahams, (2002) and Nadar (2005) describes religion as a major indoctrination. They argue that certain religions play a very important role in shaping peoples attitudes towards women, including women themselves. For example, in Christianity the Bible is used in many ways to justify the violent acts of husbands, partners or fathers and manages to remind women that God expects obedience (Van der Hoven, 2001). This is a powerful tool to ensure patriarchal submissions which is reinforced in many churches today.

The following beliefs contribute to guilt and continuation of the abuse:

- It is your Christian duty to forgive,
- The Bible instructs us to love each other. The family is a very important unit to God,
- Sacrifice for your family. A wife is secondary to her husband. Her husband should always come first,
- The Christian woman must keep her family together,
- Pray for a violent man to change his ways. God has the power to change him,
- Put your marriage in God's hands and your family will be happy.

The danger is that fundamentalist Christian women may use the Scripture to rationalize inexcusable abuse. The same problem is experienced in dealing with abused women of Jewish, Hindu or Islamic religions. Women are also treated as inferior beings in synagogues, mosques and temples (Van der Hoven, 2001).

Women are still controlled by men irrespective of their employment status (Smythe & Artz, 2005). Traditionally, men were seen as breadwinners and heads of their families (Padayachee & Singh, 1998 and Kim, 2003). As women gradually became more enlightened and better educated, they started entering the labour market and becoming financially independent. Men began to feel that their authority and position of dominance was being challenged. This contributed to an increase in violence towards women to 'put them in their place' (Smythe & Artz, 2005).

3.4. Contemporary Perspectives

South Africa as a nation is emerging from a destructive pattern of violence, both repressive and revolutionary, and in the process many South Africans have come to accept violence as an ordinary and legitimate solution to conflict (Padayachee & Singh, 1998). The result is that women and children have become the main victims of violence and human rights violations in South Africa.

The demise of apartheid has resulted in the transformation of the South African socio-political environment, with gender equality becoming a pivotal element for the building of a new democracy. The South African government has at the highest policy level made a commitment to eradicate violence against women (Abrahams & Mathews, 2001 and Carter 2002).

Due to the enormity of the problem, the South African government has committed itself to the eradication of violence against women through the ratification of international treaties and the reformulation of legislation to protect women (Abrahams and Mathews, 2001).

This commitment is evident through the government's ratification of international treaties such as Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) and Beijing Platform of action, the country's Constitution and the reformulation of policies and legislation to protect women and advance gender equity. This culture of working towards gender equity has resulted in the continued highlighting of the pervasive nature of domestic violence in South Africa by many gender activists. However, violence and discrimination against women has escalated notwithstanding the legislation currently in place. South Africa reportedly has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world. For example, during 2003-2004 a total of 52 733 cases of rape were reported to the South African Police Service. This constitutes a 15 percent increase from the number of cases reported in 1994-1995 (Combrinck, 2005).

Due to the ingrained nature of gender violence, in particular domestic violence and the complexities of a country in transformation, women are still being inhibited to enjoy the rights and privileges that they have been granted as citizens of South Africa (United Nations Children's Education Fund, 2000).

While the 'new' South Africa is lauded for its successes in achieving the advancement of women (for example, the achievement of strong representation of women in parliament) it simultaneously is one of the world's most dangerous countries for women (Carter, 2002). Statistical evidence tells us that post apartheid South African women are more likely to be murdered, raped, mutilated than women anywhere else in the democratic world, including the rest of Africa. Their assailants are South African men, most often the men with whom South African women live with in intimate relationships (Naik, 2001 and Carter, 2002).

Policy is however only the first step in the process of developing an appropriate response to reduce levels of domestic violence. The Human Rights Watch of 1995 described the criminal justice systems response to domestic violence as unsympathetic and hostile and also as failing to uphold the rights of women due to reluctance to intervene because of entrenched attitudes.

In addition service providers assert that there is a massive problem of under reporting of domestic violence crimes, as mentioned above, due to the sensitive nature of the issue, fear on part of the survivor, lack of public awareness rights, and lack of access of transport, police stations etc.

According to the Constitution and Bill of Rights, women have rights. Despite this commitment to women's rights under the law, violence against them is accepted. The violence has a direct correlation to poverty. As of 1995, the poorest 40 % of the population were almost entirely African (Jewkes, 2002). This situation was most egregious in townships, where Blacks were required to live.

These still are severely overcrowded and poor, and there is an extremely high level of violent crime. Some of the most pervasive violence against women occurs in townships, where women are unlikely to get police or government attention (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991).

In the apartheid townships and other Black areas, the police were mostly responsible for repressing any political activity. Today, the police are ill-suited for responding to violence and abuse against women and many Black and Coloured women are extremely reluctant to seek help of the police (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991).

According to some abused women, some of the new Black recruits into the South African Police Services, are picking up the police tactics of their predecessors such as blaming the victims for the abuse and 'asking' to be abused (Jewkes, 2002). It must also be remembered that part of the legacy left by the apartheid regime is that the criminal justice system has traditionally been the enforcing arm of an oppressive regime.

Accurate statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence are currently not available in South Africa. The data which is available is based upon victim surveys; a series of estimates by national governmental organizations (NGO's) working with survivors and police statistics.

Since 2000, the fact that these crimes occur within the domestic arena has been recorded by the South African Police Service, so that in theory a clearer picture of the number or reported crimes is being established, but the sustained and pervasive nature of domestic violence is not reflected in these figures (Abrahams and Mathews, 2001).

Most of the data available on violence against women is believed not only to be conservative, but also unreliable. Studies vary in the sample size of women chosen, and the ways in which questions have been posed. It is difficult to compare these studies because of inconsistency in the definition of domestic violence and in the parameters used, which can range from physical abuse to financial abuse. Indifference and hostility toward domestic violence on the part of the police and judicial authorities, combined with the distrust of the police carried over from the apartheid era, have made women victims of violence, particularly Black women, reluctant to seek redress and report the abuse (Padayachee & Singh, 1988 and Carter, 2002).

Although the new national police commissioner, Jackie Selebe has pledged to transform the police force into a government body that serves the needs of the community, regardless of race and gender, there has only been negligible change in the manner in which women who report domestic violence are treated by many police officers (Jewkes, 2002). The unsympathetic treatment of women by the criminal justice system has been considered to be “secondary victimization”, with the police identified as being the most problematic for women, as they continue to regard family based violence as a domestic problem (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991; Fedler, cited in South African Law Commission, 1999; Carter, 2002).

A survey of 10,697 women conducted by the Advice Desk for Abused Women and the National Women's Coalition, found that women's reluctance to report abuse to the police and legal and social services stemmed directly from their negative experiences with the police (being blamed for the abuse and asking to be hit) and the inadequacy of the legal system in dealing with domestic violence (Padayachee & Singh, 1988).

Fear of social stigma and reprisal from their abusive partners further compounds women's reluctance to report abuse (Padayachee & Singh, 1998). Traditional values discourage some women from revealing details of what takes place at home. Often, battered women's own relatives discourage them from reporting assault because of the shame that disclosure may bring to the entire family (Ahuja, 1992; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Jewkes, Kekkana, Levin, Ratsaka and Schrieber, 2001).

Debate regarding the magnitude of the problem is also clouded by the fact that domestic violence is a crime that is under reported and under recorded. When women file a report or seek treatment, they may have to contend with police and health care officials who have not been trained to respond adequately or to keep consistent records. On the other hand, shame, fear of reprisal, lack of information about legal rights, lack of confidence in, or fear of, the legal system, and the legal costs involved make women reluctant to report incidents of violence.

3.5. Why do women remain with their abusive partners?

One of the most frequently asked questions about abused women are: “Why doesn’t she leave the abusive relationship?” and “Why does a woman stay with a man who repeatedly abuses her?”

Despite the repeated assaults, which can often result in trips to the emergency room, irreparable physical damage, alienation from family and friends, deteriorating self-esteem, children who live in fear, repeated calls for police protection and threats of death, many women still remain with the men who abuse them (Abrahams and Mathews, 2001).

Qualitative studies have confirmed that most abused women are not passive victims but rather adopt active strategies to maximize their safety and that of their children. Some women resist, others flee, while others attempt to keep the peace by giving into their husbands demands. What may seem to be a lack of positive response by the women may in fact be a calculated assessment of what is needed to survive in the relationship and to protect herself and her children (World Health Organization, 2002).

It might seem obvious that if a women is being beaten up to the extent that she is trying to cover bruises with heavy make up and making frequent and repeated trips to the emergency rooms for treatment, that it would be clear to her that she is a victim of abuse (Bruhn,1997).

However, according to Faulkner (1997), this is not necessarily true. She states that after working for several sessions with a domestic violence victim, who had been referred to therapy for other reasons, she suggested that “perhaps you should check out some women’s shelter.” Faulkner reported that the woman seemed puzzled and responded, “But those are for abused women!” A women’s response to abuse is often limited by the options available to her and it is therefore difficult to leave the abusive relationship for many reasons (Deltufo, 1995; Berry; 2000; Abrahams & Mathews, 2001; Christians, 2002). When many women contemplate leaving the abusive relationship, they fear that if the abuser establishes her whereabouts, he may become more violent than in the past.

Furthermore, the process of being confronted by the courts lawyers and judges may be a terrifying experience for women to contemplate (Abrahams and Mathews, 2001). According to Walker (1984), women may also fear not being able to survive on their own and are thus reluctant to leave the abuser who has been a financial provider for her and maybe her children. This is also related to a fear of loneliness and the unknown, as she may find being on her own to be absolutely terrifying (Engel, 1990; Bruhn, 1997; Berry 2000; Abbey et al., 2001; Singh, 2003).

In most developing countries like South Africa, women also cite the stigma associated with being unmarried as an additional barrier to leaving abusive relationships (World Health Organization, 2002).

Denial and fear of being socially ostracized often prevent women from reaching out for help. Studies have shown that around 20 – 70 % of abused women never told another person about the abuse until they were interviewed for the study (World Health Organization, 2002). Those who do reach out, mainly do so to family members and friends rather than to institutions. In most instances family members try to keep the couple together.

According to Fernandez 1997; Combrinck 2005; Singh 2003, economic factors that may influence a woman to stay in the abusive relationship, include the fear of reduced standard of living, having no money of her own or having no other affordable place to live and a real or imagined inability to get a job. Women generally do not have the equivalent earning capacity of men and the decision to leave their abusive partners often condemns many women to a substantial decline in their standard of living (Padayachee & Singh, 1998).

Guilt may also be a factor that prevents women from leaving the abusive relationship. Women often face hearing constant criticisms from their abusers, including among other things, that they are crazy, sick, a terrible housekeeper, too fat or too thin. These criticisms often lower their self esteem and it becomes easier for her to assume blame for the abuse and to feel guilty (Engel, 1990 and Bruhn, 1997). Sometimes, they may even believe that the beatings were justified punishment (Singh, 2003). Many victims, after years of beatings and verbal abuse, have lost their self-confidence, and doubt their ability to cope on their own (Follingstad et al., 1990 and Kirkwood, 1993).

Many women choose not to leave the abusive relationship because they become emotionally dependent on their partners. They are committed to their relationship and/or love their partner and hope for a change in the relationship. Some abused women are fearful that their partner will not cope with a separation, and that he might commit suicide (Padayachee & Singh, 1998 and Singh, 2003). Despite the levels of abuse, according to Goodman & Fallon (1995), women still express anxiety and concern about where the abuser may stay, what he may do and how helpless he may become without her. They stay in the relationship because they assume that they still 'love' their partners and keep hoping, and may even be convinced that their partners may change (Kirkwood, 1993; Bruhn, 1997; Abrahams, 2002; Singh, 2003).

3.4. How do women rationalize their abuse?

A study by Ferraro and Johnson (1983) looked at how women make sense of their abuse. The authors described six techniques of rationalization, used by women who were in abused relationships. Ferraro and Johnson interviewed a sample of 120 shelter residents to study how women experience battering. Information was obtained by means of records and verbal accounts of women's experiences, crisis phone conversations, informal conversations and staff meetings. They also taped interviews with 10 residents and five battered women who had left their abusers without entering the shelter. They focused on rationalization as a way of coping and constructed a typology of rationalizations used by battered women.

The rationalizations are as follows:

3.6.1. Appeal to the salvation ethic

Women assume responsibility for helping their “sick” partners overcome their problems. The appeal to the salvation ethic is a common response to an alcoholic or drug dependant abuser.

3.6.2. Denial of the victimizer

This is similar to the salvation ethic, but women do not assume responsibility for the abusers problems. They perceive battering as an event beyond control of both spouses and blame external forces such as work, pressure, loss of job or legal problems, to be the catalysts of abuse.

3.6.3. Denial of injury

This involves a refusal to acknowledge the pain, defining it as normal and tolerable. For some women the experience of being battered by a spouse is so discordant with their expectations they simply refuse to acknowledge it. They return to a routine life as if nothing has happened.

3.6.4. Denial of victimization

Women often blame themselves for the violence, thereby neutralizing the responsibility of the abusing partner. Women in this study did not believe that the violence in the relationship was justified, but some felt that it could be avoided had they been more passive or conciliatory.

3.6.5. Denial of options

This comprises a denial of two options: practical options and emotional options. For a variety of reasons some women did not take full advantage of practical opportunities which are available to escape from an abusive lifestyle and some return to abusers voluntarily even after establishing an independent lifestyle. The denial of emotional options imposes further restrictions with abused women feeling that no one else can provide intimacy and companionship. While physical beatings are painful and dangerous, the possibility of a lonely celibate existence is often too frightening to risk.

3.6.6. Appeal to higher authorities

This appeal involves enduring battering for the sake of some higher commitment, either religious or traditional. Some partners depicted their partners as victims whose behaviour was a result of childhood injustice.

This method of coping redefined bad behaviour as sick behaviour, strengthening the perception that he could get well and improve, and establishing her duty to help him.

Ferraro and Johnson (1983) found that only when battered women reject these rationalizations and begin to view themselves as true victims of abuse, will there be a change in their perceptions and behaviour. Various catalysts usually operate to initiate this process and may include changes in the level of violence, available resources, the relationship, the visibility of violence/ and or external definitions of the violence as well as despair or the loss of hope.

3.7. Conclusion

The literature reveals that there is a considerable debate amongst social scientists as to the causative explanations for explaining woman abuse.

Feminists argue that patriarchy is a social construction and needs to be dismantled in order to bring about gender equality and the demise of woman abuse. The current status of woman abuse in South Africa has also been reviewed. The South African government has committed itself to the eradication of violence against women; however the problem still carries on unabated.

Important measures (such as the Prevention of Family Violence Act 133 of 1993 as well as the Domestic violence Act 116 of 1998) have been taken by the government as well as non-governmental organizations to support abused women and their children. However, socially, there is along way to go to reduce the level of domestic violence.

It is essential that society's attitude towards women must change. Also, women's own perception of and attitude towards themselves should change.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The operative word in phenomenological research is 'describe' (Giorgi, 1985). In preference in attempting to explain a phenomenon within a pre-given framework, which has a tendency to be deterministic and prescriptive, the researcher aims to describe, as accurately as possible, the phenomenon as it appears.

The phenomenological method will become apparent once the methodology is detailed more explicitly as to sample, data collection and analysis.

4.2. Methodological considerations

According to Kruger (1989) this is the basic principle that the investigator remains true to the facts as they are happening. The phenomenological researcher remains wary of theoretical observations and accepted opinions because it is considered that in prejudging descriptions and facts which have yet to be fully comprehended, the researcher would fail to be true to the phenomena as they appeared.

The attitude of the phenomenological researcher toward the world of human experience- a world with which he/she engages in an ongoing dialogue, accepting as real and relevant whatever is dialectically disclosed- is one of openness to whatever emerges as significant for the adequate understanding of a phenomenon (Kruger, 1989, p 143). Kruger defines the mode of existence of the phenomenologically oriented psychologist as one in which a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon is sought: "as it manifests itself, with the least possible imposition of psychological theory or method, personal and cultural prejudice or need, and language habit" (Kruger, 1989, p 143).

What this implies is that the researcher should begin with a description of the phenomenon as it manifests itself before establishing any hypothesis about it. Thus, although the phenomenological researcher will have a pre-existing understanding of the phenomenon, guided by the information which already exists, any particular phenomenon should not be pre-judged nor seen through any given perspective simply because that previous knowledge about the phenomenon exists. Priority is thus given to the phenomenon under investigation rather than its being secondary to an already established methodological framework (Kruger, 1989). It is important to note that when conducting research in psychology conceived as a human science, the design is now centered around a subject-subject relationship. This means that the object of research must be seen as an experiential being who is fully present to the research situation.

As such, he/she not only brings to the situation his/her past but also his/her future, which is full of possibilities, anxieties and questions which have as their natural frame of reference his/her behaviour in the present moment of the experiment (Kruger, 1989).

It is not viable in the human sciences to consider the paradigm of the independent observer, because in all experimental situations there exists a convergence of two intentions, those of the researcher as manifests in the research design and those of the participants as they experience the particular experimental situation. That is, a participant's response is not the result solely of the stimulus characteristics of the experimental situation, but also of the meaning that the entire research has for that person, not only as the participant in the research but also as observer (Giorgi, 1985). What this implies is that the particular manner in which the participants' experiences the research must be included as an integral part of the data of the research- taking into cognizance that one aspect of the participants' experience of the research is how the researcher experiences the research. In other words the researcher cannot be viewed as an independent observer, but must be seen as a participant observer (Kruger, 1989).

The researcher as participant observer is obliged to make explicit what is observed in an attempt to understand the phenomenon. The intention at this point is not to explain but to describe. Thus the concrete reality of the experience of both participant and participant observer enters into the research situation and needs to be articulated by written report or recording.

While the researcher strives to attain a consistency of meaning that is trans-situational (Giorgi, 1985) his primary aim is to listen to what the incidents, the phenomena, tell him (Kruger, 1989).

4.2.1. Method of Investigation

4.2.2. Type of Study

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenological method was selected as the type of investigation of the phenomenon of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships. The phenomenological method allows for an exploratory and descriptive-orientated approach into the meaning attached to the phenomenon experienced by abused women. Through listening to the womens' experiences, a better understanding of the world of the abused woman will be obtained. The abused woman is understood within the context that she experiences hence a contextual understanding is obtained. Abused womens' experiences and feelings will be described and interpreted in human terms which involves rich, descriptive detail rather than quantification and measurement.

4.2.3. Sampling

Since this study intended to examine the experiences of abused women, the researcher approached various crisis centres within the Durban area. Permission was granted to conduct research at the Aryan Benevolent Home, a safe care centre (Appendix 2).

This organization is a crisis centre and provides support and counselling to families and individuals in crisis. This organization plays an active role in helping abused women with legal advice and counselling.

Due to the phenomenological nature of the research, experience has shown that 6-8 data sources will often suffice (Durrheim & Terreblanche, 1999) and increases the probability of discovering underlying themes in the many forms of experience. In this study a sample of women were selected from the Aryan Benevolent Home, a Safe House located in Durban. The participants of the study were battered women who had approached the crisis centre for assistance. The original sample consisted of eight South African women of Indian origin. At the time of the interviews, four women were still living in abusive marriages and four had recently left their abusive partners.

As suggested by Stones (1989), participants were selected on the basis of whether they met the following criteria that corresponds with phenomenological research.

- Participants needed to express a willingness to speak openly to the researcher about their experience.
- Participants must have had experience relating to the phenomenon under investigation.
- Participants should be able to express themselves verbally in English and communicate their feelings and thoughts about the research phenomenon.

Informed consent (Appendix 3) was obtained from all the women to participate in the study. The participants thus represented a sample of abused women seeking help from this institution during the three month period of the study. The detailed nature and volume of the data collected, as well as the in-depth nature of the analysis legitimized the small sample.

According to Stones (1989) it is unavoidable that many of the recorded descriptions will be incomplete or deficient due to forgetfulness, difficulty expressing themselves and poor vocabulary. Therefore of the original eight participants, two were excluded from the final analysis as these recordings were too distorted to transcribe and the participants could not be located to be re-interviewed. Follow up interviews were made thereafter with five of the participants to clarify certain distorted recordings. The six participants, who were included in the final analysis, all lived in the Chatsworth area of Durban. Their ages ranged from 18 to 55 years of age. All participants had at least one child. The educational level of the participants ranged from no formal education to matric, whilst the majority fell in the standard 8 to matric range.

Only one of the participants had a university degree. The household incomes of most participants were in the range of R2000 to R4000 a month. The majority of the participants were home executives. Only, two of the participants held full time employment. The most common marital problems, aside from the abuse, were violence towards the children, alcohol or drug abuse and financial problems. Five of the participants lived in a nuclear family arrangement and one with the extended family.

The frequency of abuse ranged from daily to a few times a month. Two participants had been abused before marriage and the remainder within the first year of marriage. All the participants had sought medical attention at least once. One of the participants was in the process of divorcing her abusive husband.

4.2.4. Data Collection

Research shows that structured interviews are impregnated with subjectivity in the form of working assumptions made by the researcher and hence they are likely to yield little understanding of the experiential world of the participant. An in-depth semi-structured interview was utilized in this study. The great advantage of the semi-structured, non-directive interview was its flexibility, which allowed the researcher to grasp more fully the participant's experience.

This technique was chosen as it is known to create a safe place in which to have an open discussion of such a sensitive nature. This method of data collection allowed the research participant to explain his/her feelings, experiences of situations and phenomenon as they occur in their natural setting. Therefore, this method was a more natural form of interacting with people and fits well with the qualitative approach to research (Mouton, 2001). This method was also considered appropriate because:

- It creates and sustains rapport and improves response rate.
- The researcher is able to analyze both verbal and non verbal response.

- Open-ended questionnaires can be included to allow for the respondent to allow for the respondent to say what they think and to do so with richness and spontaneity.
- The researcher has the opportunity to probe further in order to elicit appropriate responses.
- It maintains order in which the questions are to be answered.
- It allows the researcher to reach those respondents with reading difficulties and who cannot fill out questionnaires.
- Data can be systematically collected.

The research interview was open ended and conducted in an informal and non-directive manner with the interviewer influencing the participant as little as possible. The researcher attempted to remain sensitive to the participants' nuances which were often used in an attempt to mask real feelings. It is for this reason that it was important to establish a good rapport between the researcher and the participants. A level of trust had to be established whereby the participants felt able to relax and whereby anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Interviews were carried out in the English language for approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length, which allowed for a prolonged engagement with the participant.

An interview schedule was utilized (Appendix 4). All interviews were recorded by the researcher on audio cassette. The interviews were taped because it has been found that as opposed to filling in written questionnaires, taped interviews allowed the subjects to respond as closely as possible to their lived-experience. It also did not preclude the possibility of dialogue during this early phase of research and did not entail the inhibiting effect of the process of writing on spontaneity of expression.

Permission was sought from each participant to tape record the conversation in order to ensure accurate transcriptions. The researcher explained the rationale for tape recording for each participant and also indicated that the tapes would not be made available to anyone except the researchers. The participants were also made aware that once the research study was complete; all tapes would be stored in a safe place or disposed if necessary. The interviews began with the researcher introducing herself and asking participants about their biographical data. This was to comfort and help the participants become accustomed to the tape recorder. All taped interviews were transcribed verbatim using the phenomenological reduction as suggested by Stones (1989).

Each participant was individually interviewed. Participants were informed of the ethical issues (such as confidentiality, consent forms, biographical information, etc.) before the recording of the initial interview started. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions in order to clarify any issues thereby establishing rapport and allowing the participants to feel more relaxed.

As stated before, a biographical information form was completed at the start of the interview which allowed the researcher to take into account any biographical information that may impact upon the participant's responses to the traumatic event. The participants were requested to describe verbally their experience of the first abusive incident.

The following statement was used to initiate the interview:

"I would like you to describe to me your first incident of abuse. Everything you say or think is important no matter how unimportant or trivial you may think it is. Please take your time. There is no time limit and you may start when ever you are ready."

If at any stage clarification was necessary, the researcher asked the participants to repeat or enlarge on what was said, without using leading questions. Once the interview was complete, a recommended data-gathering procedure is to ask the participant to complete a form designed to elicit feedback concerning the participants' experience of the interview. The researcher may then use this information to decide whether or not to accept a given interview for use in the study.

4.2.5. Transcripts

All interviews were treated as narrative, rich and revealing when examined as a complex whole, rather than a series of answers. Once the interviews were taped they were transcribed verbatim and the phase of formal explication commenced.

This was done based on an understanding of phenomenological research as represented in the work of Stones (1989). It involved reading and re-reading the protocols to get a thorough understanding of the described phenomenon, delineating Natural Meaning Units (NMU's); reflection of the phases and then an analysis of the experience. The results yielded rich description of the phenomenon in a psychologically relevant way. The five procedural steps involved in the analysis of the data are described in detail.

1. An Intuitive and holistic grasp of the data

In the first step it is important that the researcher read the subjects descriptions several times to gain a sense of the whole. In the initial reading of the protocol, the researcher should bracket preconceptions and judgments, and to the fullest extent “remain faithful to the data” (Kruger, 1989, p. 153). The second reading of the protocol requires more reflection in order to prepare for further phases in which a more exacting analysis is required. In addition, the repeated reading of the protocols helped the researcher retain a sense of the wholeness of the data despite its dissection in subsequent phases.

2. Spontaneous emergence of Natural Meaning Units (NMU's)

The protocols were then broken down into naturally occurring units, called natural meaning units. This is defined as a statement made by the participant that is self-definable and self-delimiting in the expression of a single recognizable aspect of the experience. Where ever possible, the participants own phraseology was used in order to allow the data to 'speak for itself'. Each NMU conveys a meaning. The shared nature of our lived world suggests that we will be able to understand other meanings. The researcher was then able to articulate the essence of each NMU in words other than those used by the participant. The task of this phase is an "articulation of the central themes that characterize the respective unfolding scenes of each protocol" (Fischer cited in Kruger, 1989, p 153).

3. Reflection and transition

The researcher then reflected on the given meaning units and transforms the meaning of each unit from the everyday language of the participant into expressing the psychological viewpoint of the phenomenon. It was important to express the meaning of each NMU as accurately as possible. This also helped eliminates NMU's that are repetitive or irrelevant to the question.

4. Synthesis and description

This stage comprised of two steps. The researcher first synthesized the insights acquired by taking into account all expressed intentions derived from the natural meaning units. Also, the researcher did not ignore themes that were contradictory or that did not make conceptual sense. According to Colaizzi, cited in Stones, 1989, all themes are to be treated as 'existentially real and valid'.

Secondly the researcher had to convey this phenomenological synthesis into the world of critical opinion. This was conveyed either as a specific description of a situated structure or as a general description of a situated structure.

A general description is one which communicates the meaning-structure of a phenomenon in general and which attempts to overcome the limitations imposed by a specific context (Stones, 1989). Where there is more than one participant, as in the case of this study, a general structural description is developed that expresses the shared or general aspects of the phenomenon as experienced by all participants.

5. Rigour of explication by the use of Intersubjective judgment

A panel of judges may be used in phenomenological research for consensual validation of the outcome.

Stones (1989) states that the criterion for validity is not whether another researcher would use the same words, expressions or descriptions of the phenomenon, but rather, validity is indicated by the extent to which such words, expressions or descriptions are intersubjectively understood to reflect a similar theme or meaning to those explicated by the original researcher. In the case of this study, the researcher's supervisor assisted in the consensual validation of interview material.

4.2.6. Ethical Considerations

With regard to the nature of the topic and the psychological discomfort participants may have to undergo in this study, ethical issues were raised. It was envisaged that during the interviews, the participants would have to verbalize their experiences of a traumatic event to a relatively unknown person. Participants were treated in accordance to ethical principles of the American Psychological Association. Full informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interview and biographical information was treated as strictly confidential. Participants were briefed on the nature of the research topic and the type of questions asked. After being briefed they were allowed the opportunity to continue or discontinue with the interview.

Participants were informed of their right to halt or terminate the interview at any time. Simple English Language was used to inform participants of the nature of the research. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Once participation was complete, participants were debriefed, that is, all questions pertaining to the study were answered and misconceptions were removed. Feedback was offered to them after the research had been completed.

After completing interviewing, the researcher decided to hold a 2 day workshop/support group for the participants and they were offered the option of attending these. This was co-facilitated by a social worker from the Aryan Benevolent Home. The workshop focused on increasing personal safety, improving self esteem, attributions of blame and responsibility, assertiveness training, legal options and general discussions about coping with the situation. Follow up sessions and/or telephone contacts were offered to assist with any problems experienced.

Approval to do this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Appendix 1).

4.2.7. Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are both important issues in field research. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman, 2001).

The reliability of interview schedules is a central question in quantitative method textbooks. According to these books, it is very important that each respondent understands the questions in the same way and that answers can be coded without the possibility of uncertainty. This is achieved through a number of means, including:

- Thorough pre-testing of interview schedules
- Thorough training of interviewers
- As much as possible of fixed-choice answers
- Inter-rater reliability checks on the coding of answers to open-ended questions.

Neumann (1997) postulates that it is rare to have perfect reliability; however there are ways to increase reliability. We can use ‘member checks’ which is a process that takes place when we take our transcripts and analyses texts back to our respondents and check with them whether what we have constructed from our data is actually what they said. Member checks were also carried out in this study in order to increase reliability in this research study.

Validity is interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers (Silverman, 2001). Validity is more difficult to achieve than reliability. Validity is part of a dynamic process that grows by accumulating evidence over time, and without it, all measurements become meaningless (Neuman, 1997).

According to Guba & Lincoln (1994), the following strategies can be used to enhance validity.

- Thick description- since validity in a qualitative study depends on similarities between sending and receiving contexts, the researcher collects sufficiently detailed descriptions of data in context and reports them, with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgments about validity to be made by the reader.
- Purposive Sampling- Qualitative research seeks to maximize the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about the context, by purposely selecting locations and informants that differ from one another.

4.2.8. Conclusion

The method presented in this chapter should not be seen as inflexible or prescriptive but rather as one way of translating the phenomenological approach into praxis. It is appropriate to conclude this section with a reminder from Giorgi, 1985, p146, “The search for adequate descriptions and their interpretations is an important part of science itself. It is not something that is done once, historically speaking and then assumed and forgotten- but rather, something that has to be done again and again”.

The next chapter explores the analysis of the research.

CHAPTER 5

Data Analysis

5.1. Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, the data collected was analyzed according to the five stages of the phenomenological reduction, which involved making explicit the subjectively lived experiences of women in abusive relationships.

During the analysis the central theme of each Natural meaning unit (NMU) was then elicited and transformed into revelatory psychological themes which expressed the participants meaning. At this point, repetitive and unimportant units and unneeded detail was precluded.

The following stage entailed integrating and synthesizing the themes into a psychologically meaningful description. The essential themes were integrated into a condensed specific description, articulating each participant's experience of a violent incident in their relationship. Finally, the specific descriptions of each of the participants experience were reflected upon. Common themes were identified and integrated into a single general description of the psychological meaning of each of the participant's experience of abuse in their intimate relationships with their partners.

The specific situated structure of each respondent, which was described in the previous chapter, will be presented below and thereafter the general structural description will follow.

5.2. Situated structure of participants

5.2. 1. Situated structure of participant 1 - (N)

N is 33 years old. N is not married to her partner and they have been in a relationship for the past 14 years. N had two children, whom have both subsequently died. N has been admitted to a psychiatric clinic twice and is on anti-depressants. N's partner was charged with the murder of her two children. N appeared to get her 'story' mixed up many times during the interview. N also appeared to be in denial and believed that her husband is innocent. At the time of the interview her husband was in jail and she was living at the shelter. N does not keep in contact with her family and hopes to get back with her partner, as soon as he is released from jail. N still loves her partner very much. It is postulated that N's dependence on her partner which has manifested as love is typical of some women involved in an abusive relationship.

Her first violent episode occurred after she went out with her friends and did not tell her partner about her whereabouts. He did not approve of her going out and to socialize with friends. N's partner was controlling and manipulative. N's partner beat her severely.

N suffered a broken jaw and her knee was badly injured as a result on the violent assault on her. N mentioned the numerous times she had to be hospitalized as a result of the injuries that she sustained from her abusive relationship.

N's first incident of abuse was very scary and shocking to her. N stated that she could not bring herself to believe that this could have happened to her. N mentioned that she could not comprehend how her partner who hurt her so much could still claim to love her. N reported that she convinced herself that she deserved the beating because she had not informed her partner of her whereabouts, and that if she told him where she was going the situation could have been avoided.

After the first initial incident of abuse N reported the case to the police and had her partner locked up for domestic violence. However, N returned to her husband after her first violent incident. Her reasons for returning were twofold. Firstly, she felt sorry for him and secondly she returned so that she would not deprive her child of a father figure. A year later, her baby died under suspicious circumstances. N's partner was initially implicated in the murder but was later released from police custody as a result of there being insufficient evidence to prosecute him successfully on a charge of murder. N became depressed and was hospitalized as a result of this. It was clearly evident during the interview that N is very emotional and unstable and finds it difficult to talk about her children. It is postulated that she might have lied to protect her partner when the police investigation was ongoing.

N expressed feelings of helplessness and hopelessness through out the interview. N had many suicidal ideations. N felt her life was empty and worthless and that she had nothing to live for.

N's second child then died. The cause of death was a 'blow to the head' but N insists that the child fell and hurt her head in school. However, there was evidence that linked her husband with the deaths. Her partner was once again charged with the murder of the child. N does not believe that her partner is capable of murder. N seemed to be in denial about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of her two children and still maintains that her partner is innocent and has not committed the heinous crimes of murder. N did not want to talk about the deaths of her children and was very eager to end the interview.

5.2.2. Situated structure of participant 2 - (M)

The participant M had been dating her boyfriend for just 2 weeks before he began sexually abusing her. M's recollection of her first experience of sexual abuse by her boyfriend was at the young and tender age of 14 years old. The abuse carried on until she was 18 years old. Thereafter, M got married and fell pregnant. M was regularly abused physically, emotionally and sexually by her husband through out her marriage as well. M attempted to terminate the abusive relationship on at least 2 occasions.

However, on both occasions M was forced to return to her abusive partner due to her financial dependence on him. M does not have any family from whom she can seek not only emotional but also financial assistance in order to attempt to release herself from the bondage of co-dependence that she has found herself trapped in. M's desperation to free herself from her abusive relationship has seen her seek help from social workers as well as the pastor from the church that she attends. However, M's situation has not changed.

After the initial stages of the abuse began, M confided in her parent's but they did not believe her. This made her feel helpless as she knew there was nothing that she could do to stop the abuse. She was still young and very much in 'love' with her boyfriend.

However, M's partner decided to terminate the relationship. M was shocked. M felt used, hurt and betrayed. M's partner had promised to marry her. M was emotionally distraught and believed that she was now 'damaged goods' and that nobody would want her.

M attempted suicide, by overdosing on tablets. M confided in a social worker about her situation whilst she was recovering at the hospital. Whilst in hospital her partner's mother came to visit her. His mother was very sympathetic and promised M that M would marry her son. Shortly, after M was released from hospital. She married her partner.

M fell pregnant with her first child soon after the marriage. M stated that during her pregnancy, her husband was extremely abusive to her. He physically and emotionally abused her. M reported that her husband never cared for her nor did he show any concern for her well-being. M had no voice in the relationship. M could not discuss anything with her husband, as he would not listen to her. He would instead beat her when she tried to assert her independence. M's husband always blamed her for his abusive behaviour. Eventually, M stopped asking questions, to avoid the abuse.

After an occasion where M had a violent altercation with her partner, she took some medication and went to bed. M awoke in the middle of the night and found her husband in bed with a prostitute in the same room. M was disgusted by her husband's behaviour. M was depressed, hurt and felt rejected by her partner.

M found out she was pregnant once again and this caused her much anguish and concern. Also, she had other matters of concern to worry about. They lived in a one bedroom and kitchen flat. Her daughter was getting older and more conscious of her body. Her daughter was not comfortable to change clothes or get undressed in front of her father. Their daughter required privacy. Their daughter needed her own room. M believed that if she discussed this with her husband, he would feel that M is acting like the man in the house. M was not allowed to make suggestions nor share her opinions with her partner.

M mentioned an incident where her husband had come home in an angry mood. He began screaming at her for no apparent reason. He was in such a rage that he slapped his two daughters, and started screaming at her. M's husband beat her severely until she bled. Thereafter, he took a pot with boiling water from the stove and threw it on M. M suffered severe burns to her stomach and had to be hospitalized. M mentioned that she had never experienced so much of pain in her life.

Upon her release from the hospital, M was taken to the safe house by police officers. M regretted that she had brought two children into a world of pain and suffering. M considered seriously that taking the lives of her children and her own life was the only way out. M did not want to leave the children at the hands of their abusive father.

M consulted with many social workers the abuse. M contended that the social workers would merely listen to her husband and then to her but their intervention was ineffective in remedying the problem. The social workers always told M to give her marriage a chance and to think about the children. M responded by saying that her husband needed to decide whether he wanted a 'family', or whether he wanted them around so that he could abuse them.

M retorted that her husband's behaviour was unpredictable. M did not know how to gauge his mood. He would be in a good mood and the very next minute he would snap, and then he would start screaming and beating her.

M and her children lived in constant fear. M did not know what to expect when her husband got home. This made her nervous and anxious.

M always made sure the house was clean and the food was ready so that when her husband got home he would not find anything to pick on and start a fight. M tried to be the perfect wife, doing everything to the best of her ability. However, it did not help, her husband continued to be abusive towards her.

M had fantasies of harming her husband. Sometimes, when her husband would be drunk on the bed, she would block his nose and mouth, but then she would get scared and remove her hands. The thought of buying poison to kill him, crossed her mind many times. However, M never really carried out any of her fantasies and mentioned that she did not really think that she could hurt him. M mentioned that harbouring these evil thoughts gave her a peace of mind for the moment, and helped her cope.

M would return home, to her husband after her stay was over at the safe house. M has decided to forgive her husband and his abusive behaviour. M does not want to be selfish and worry about herself. M believes that her children need their father.

Her husband has promised them that he will not abuse them anymore. Furthermore, he has given his word to the social worker and promised, to stop telling lies and having affairs with other women. M believes in God and believes that her situation will change this time round.

Contrary, M did wish that she could teach her husband a lesson, by not going back to him. However, M is only allowed to stay at the safe house for a period of two weeks. M has no resources at her disposal, such as money, family or a place to go to with her children, so her only alternative is to return to her husband.

5.2.3. Situated structure of participant 3 - (C)

C is 56 years old and has two children. C's husband is 58 years old and works for an import company in Durban. C is a home executive who has not completed high school. C met her husband at school. He too did not complete school and found a job instead. They are married for 33 years. During the marriage C's husband was very abusive, both physically and emotionally. C and her children had to deal with the abuse on a daily basis. C's husband consumed alcohol daily. He was in and out of jobs and she had to take on odd jobs to sustain their family.

C's first incident of abuse started when she asked her husband to help her wash the baby's bottle. He got angry with her and then he started beating and punching her until she was black and blue all over her body.

C was shocked and could not believe what was happening to her. After the first incident, C took her baby and went to live at her parent's home. While she was there, her in-laws telephoned her parents, and told them that they should not get involved in their children's lives.

Her parents were told to let C return to her home, to her husband where she belongs. C's in-laws knew about the abuse, but did nothing to assist her. Her in-laws replied that all newly weds experience these problems

C mentioned that she had no 'voice' in the relationship. C was not allowed to make any decisions or question her husband's decisions. C's husband made all the decisions. If she questioned anything he said or did, he would hit and swear at her. Eventually, C stopped asking questions, so as to avoid being abused.

C's marriage was an arranged marriage. C did not want to get married but was forced to by her parents. C did not receive any financial or emotional support from her family. C's brothers and sisters had their own lives and did not want to get involved in her problem. C was very angry and frustrated as the situation made her feel helpless. C believed that she had no alternative but to continue living with her husband which inevitably meant living with the abuse. C reported that her financial instability contributed immensely to her decision to not leave her husband.

C reported that although she lived with her husband, they did not have sexual relations for over 5 years. C did not receive any love or companionship from her husband and often felt unwanted and unloved. C was lonely. Although, C had two children, she still felt empty and worthless.

C and her children lived in constant fear. C's husband behaviour was unpredictable. C lived on the edge, never knowing what may trigger the abuse. C was concerned and afraid mostly for the well-being of her children. C did not want her children growing up in an environment, where they would witness their father abuse their mother continuously.

C revealed that she had a difficult married life. It was one of constant misery and abuse. C spent a lot of time crying, praying and going to the Temple. This helped her cope. C longed for peace and love and felt that her whole life was worthless and meaningless.

During one of the many violent altercations, C's son intervened to try and save her from being beaten. Her husband beat her son severely for protecting her and standing up to his father. C reported that there were many episodes of these violent outbursts and that she was angry and tired of the abuse.

C mentioned her last violent altercation with her husband. Her husband had come home very late one evening. He was drunk and demanded his supper. She got out of bed to give him supper. He started ranting and raving and complaining about the food. Eventually, he took the plate with its contents and threw it on her. He then awoke from the chair, grabbed her and started beating her. The children awoke and came to save their mother. He hit and swore the children. He then left the house and C and her children have not seen him since then.

Thereafter, C managed to secure employment for a short while. However, her children started truanting, smoking and misbehaving. Furthermore, her youngest son is born with a deformity, a cleft lip and palette. C could not afford to get a nanny to look after her children as she earned so little that she could hardly make ends meet. Since the youngest child had a deformity, he needed special care and attention and she could not leave him unattended.

These difficulties that she endured with her children compounded her troubles and caused her much frustration. C loved her children, but reported that she did not have the funds to provide for them. C's husband telephones the children some times. However, he does not support for his family in any way.

C stated that her biggest mistake in life was getting married. C and her children were constantly abused and had to flee their home on many occasions at night. Often, they would flee to a nearby park as they had no other place to go to.

C becomes very envious, when she sees other parents with their children. C feels that children should be happy, and that they should be kept in a safe place, and have proper meals and be loved by both their parents. C contends that her children never experienced this, but rather that they were subjected to a threatening and abusive environment.

C spoke a lot about her husband's family. Her husband lived a poor life and his parents did not take care of their children.

C's husband's siblings were all divorced and also had problems of a similar nature in their own relationships. C believes that her husband's upbringing may have had an impact on their relationship. According to C this is one of the main reasons that he now abuses her and their children.

C is of the opinion that her life would be better if her husband was no longer part of it. C yearns for a better life for all of them and contends that it is only then that they will have peace in their lives. C's ambition is to secure employment and a place to stay for her children and her.

C retorted that she is concerned about the well being of her children in the event that anything should happen to her. C constantly worries about her children's future, schooling and health. At the time of the interview C and her children were residing at the shelter. They don't have any alternative accommodation and their future is uncertain. C has strong feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and hopelessness. C spent a lot of time praying for a better life for the children and herself. C criticized her outward appearance. C did not always look this way. Her hair was not always grey and untidy. C stated that she has neglected her appearance and her image. C does not use make-up and does not feel like grooming herself as she did in the past. Furthermore, she states that she does not have financial resources to do these things.

C compares her married life to her spinster years. This she retorts pales in comparison to the way her husband provided for her and her children. C contends that her standard of living dropped when she got married. C states that her whole life has changed, for the worse.

C commented that a statement made by her son surprised her and has stayed with her as a constant reminder of the psychological impact that her many years of domestic violence has had on her son. Her sons statement was as follows: ‘mummy when you find a room, you find a house and if he comes back to our house, then I will get a hockey stick and the day he tries to hit you, you must go bust him up’. He has witnessed his father assaulting and emotionally abusing his mother virtually on a daily basis. This makes C feel extremely sad and helpless that her children had to endure so much of abuse in their lives.

C is saddened and deeply hurt about the environment in which her children have been brought up. C feels that they are not enjoying their lives and doing things children should be doing. C feels guilty that her children are ‘hidden away’ in a safe house. They are unable to visit shopping malls, or go out for a meal, or even enjoy a stroll in the park. C is adamant that she failed as a parent. C shoulders much of the blame for making a poor choice in choosing a life partner.

C contends that if she had married a better human-being then her children would not have suffered. C reports that her strength to cope is derived from the fact that she has resolved that she will never return to her abusive husband.

5.2.4. Situated structure of participant 4 - (K)

K is 22 years old and has a daughter. K has never been married to her partner. They have been living together for the preceding six years. K is a home executive. K has completed her matric but did not further her studies. K's partner also completed high school and is a successful businessman. K is currently separated from her partner. K has been to many safe houses around the country but she always returned to her partner. K related experiences of abuse from her partner which she contends was a decisive factor in their separation.

K was only 15 years old when she was physically abused by her partner. K boarded a taxi after school in order to return to her house. K's partner was angry that she used a taxi and he hit her and dragged her into his car. This was a huge shock for K as she was still very young. After the first incident her partner apologized and was extremely remorseful about his actions. K mentioned that he even bought her flowers. K was confused about the situation but convinced herself that it would not happen again. K forgave her partner. K thought that her boyfriend was really concerned about her and hit her, to show her how much he loved her. K blamed herself for the abuse. K stated that if she had listened to her partner, the altercation would have been avoided.

K related the following experiences of abuse that she was subjected to her by her partner: 'he would stop the car and make me run after it.' 'This belittled me and I felt ashamed and humiliated'. K revealed that the forms of abuse worsened as time passed.

K contended that there was a lack of communication in her relationship. K's partner did not respect her. He never bothered listening to her. K could not raise certain issues that she had about their relationship as any mention of these issues would be met with greater aggression by her partner which often resulted in her receiving fists and blows from her partner. K was miserable and helpless.

K was not allowed to leave the house without her partner. He even employed a security guard to keep track of her every move. However, it was the security guard, who helped her escape from her abusive partner. The security guard gave her some money and put her onto a bus so that she could return to her mother's house. K reported that she never spoke to anyone about the abuse. The security guard and her mother were the only people that she confided in.

K's partner lied to her frequently. He lied that her family had opened a charge of rape against him. He also lied about his life. K was flabbergasted to discover that her partner had been married twice before and that he had fathered five children.

K felt helpless about her situation. K thought that if she reported it, she would be the laughing stock around, and this changed her mind. K mentioned that although her partner did the most horrible things to her, K could not live with herself, if he had to go to jail. K stated that although she 'hated' her partner, she did not want him to suffer and live in the terrible conditions in prison.

K lived in fear. K could not talk to anyone about her situation. K's partner had isolated her from her family and friends. He had threatened her family with firearms and told them to stay away from K. K stated that her partner stole her independence and made her centre her life around him. K lost her family, friends, self-respect and dignity. K always hoped and prayed that the abuse would stop.

K stated that her partner was crazy. K used the term 'psycho', saying that he even sent love messages to her phone and make it seem as though she was having an affair with some other person. K reported that her partner would return home from work and would go straight to her cell-phone. He would look at the messages and scream at her and he would get into such a rage that he would beat her and accuse her of being unfaithful. K attributes her partner's upbringing and the fact that there is a history of intimate partner abuse in his family as having an effect on her partner's behaviour towards her.

K experienced numerous terrifying incidents of abuse. The worst incident, according to her recollection, was when she telephoned him on his cell-phone, to remind him to buy napkins for their baby. His phone was switched off, so she left a message on his voice mail. Once her partner returned home, he went straight into their bedroom, locked the door and started beating her. K had just given birth to a baby girl 10 days before the incident, and her stitches were still fresh. However, that did not stop her partner. He hit her, and flung her across the room. He also flung ornaments at her. The beating was so brutal that K reported that she had never experienced such excruciating pain.

K survived the brutal attack on her but decided once again that she had no alternative but to leave her partner. K's partner left the house after the assault. K's mother treated her wounds and looked after the baby. They woke up early the following morning and left the house before K's partner returned.

K's mother wanted to take her to the police station to charge her partner for domestic violence. K was too embarrassed and ashamed to go to the police station, and charge her partner. K contends that her partner only wants to have someone to control and abuse. K feels that she has been through this ordeal too frequently and she given her partner too many chances to change his behaviour towards her.

K reported that she was dissatisfied and disappointed with the justice system. K felt that she did not receive assistance and support that she needed. K related stories about her being shunted around, from one safe house to the next as one is only allowed to stay at the safe house for a period of two weeks. K retorted the following: 'So where are you supposed to go to go after that, when you don't have a job or money?'

K stated that she had found herself in a predicament whereby she was forced to return to the abuser simply because she did not have any other alternative accommodation. This she claims is the reason that she fell pregnant again with their second child. K believes that abused women should receive help that would assist them in building their lives so that they could exist without requiring any assistance from their intimate partners. K believes that the lack of financial and social support systems available to abused women forces them to return to their abusive partners.

5.2.5. Situated structure of participant 5 - (S)

S is 39 years old. S has two children. S's 16 year old son was born from a previous marriage. S's first husband was a policeman. He was killed whilst on duty. S met her second husband five years later. S completed high school and has a teaching degree. S is currently employed as a teacher. S husband is a rich and successful businessman. They have a two year old daughter from the marriage. S's second husband was verbally abusive. He abused her verbally and physically assaulted her at least once a week.

S was shocked after the first incident of abuse, as she did not experience violence or abuse during the subsistence of her first marriage.

S stated that she was horrified that this could happen to her because she heralded from an upper-class family. S reported that it took her a while to realize that she was a victim of domestic violence.

S disclosed that she had experienced a lot of pain at the hands of her husband. S stated that her husband had dragged her on the floor, pulled her hair and punched her repeatedly. S felt humiliated and worthless. S reported that if she had the strength to retaliate, she would have hit her husband.

S mentioned that she was stunned after first incident of abuse and did not know how to react. S convinced herself that she had no alternative but to accept the abuse as her husband was a well-respected person in the community. S reported that she did not speak about the abuse, because she believed that no one would believe her. S's husband portrayed an image of a kind, calm, peace loving person, to his colleagues and other people in the community, yet at home he was an extremely abusive man.

S modified her behaviour so that she would not antagonize her abuser. S became withdrawn and depressed. S made sure the food was cooked and laid on the table timeously. S made sure that the house was spotless. S made every effort to ensure that everything was perfect so that her husband would not find an excuse to abuse her.

S revealed that she was a happy go lucky person and everyone around her always knew her to be as such. S described herself as an outgoing, free-spirited, open-minded and jovial person. S reported that all this changed after she met her second husband. S reported that each time her husband beat her; it killed a part of her inside. S became a very emotional, fragile and sensitive woman. Her self-esteem and confidence has diminished.

S did not want to disclose the abuse to her family and friends because she believed that it would have demeaned her character and she believed that people would have looked down upon her. S pretended to be happy when her family visited her at her home.

In order to cope with the abuse, S spent most of her time praying. S became very spiritual. S spent a lot of time reading self-help books and meditating and writing about the abuse in her journal. S reported that this gave her the release that she required in order to cope. S reported that these activities made her feel at peace with herself.

S really hated her husband when he abused her. S felt that the abuse brought her husband intense pleasure, for the moment, when he verbally and physically abused her. S felt that he used her as a punching bag to vent out his frustrations. S contended that the next day her husband would be a completely different person. He would be romantic and buy her chocolates and flowers and take them out for supper.

He would never apologise to her but would always buy her expensive gifts. S felt that he was just 'bribing her', to buy off her feelings of resentment towards him. He would be a wonderful person for a few days and once the guilt of what he had done wore off, he would beat her up all over again.

S's husband's behaviour was unpredictable. S and her son lived in constant fear and dreaded him coming home at night. Her husband would return late at night and demand that she cook something for him to eat. If she did not do it quickly enough, he would pull her hair and drag her through the kitchen and abuse her verbally.

S mentioned that her husband was more violent and aggressive when he consumed alcohol. However, S reported that there were many instances when he abused her when he was sober. *Social outings and family gatherings were a nightmare for S.* S's husband would embarrass and abuse her in front of her family and friends.

S stated that she enjoyed watching television but that her husband had even used that to start a fight and abuse her. He would scream at her and state that she should not waste her time watching television when she should in fact be cleaning the house. S reported that her husband also kept an eye on her every move.

S stated that she fantasized about torching or destroying the pub, where they had lived. The pub was frequented by many men in the neighbourhood, who would return to their homes in a drunken stupor and that they would emotionally and physically abuse their wives. S believed that if the pub burnt down, then the men would have no place to drink alcohol and this would stop women from being abused. S also thought about killing her husband, but didn't want to deal with the consequences of going to jail for murder. S reported that she began thinking like a common criminal.

S's husband was so violent and abusive towards her that all that she could think about was killing him in order to get away from him forever. S even thought about using cyanide. S **weaned** herself back to reality and convinced herself that if she murdered him she would have to face the consequences of spending the rest of her life behind bars. S *would not have been able to face her family and she had her children to think about.* S contends that the fantasies gave her temporary gratification and helped ease the pain of reality.

S stated that she is still confused about her feelings towards her husband. S contended that on the one hand, she loved her husband, but not in the same way that she did when she first met him. On the other hand, she reported that apart of her hated her husband. S believes that her husband does not deserve her undying and unconditional love.

S mentioned that even though her husband abused her she would still go out and buy him gifts, chocolates and flowers, and take the initiative of being the peacemaker and send him a card of apology. S stated that she was the passivist in the relationship. S performed all these gestures to make her husband happy, so that when he returned home he would not be angry and abusive towards her.

S cannot continue living in this way. S reported that her husband has broken her heart and her spirit. S contends that irrespective of any changes that she may make her situation with her husband will never change.

S is financially dependant on her husband. S reported that if she was financially stable she would have left her husband a long time ago. S has two children who are still minors. S has no alternative but to remain with her abusive partner. S reported that she did have a full-time but that her salary was extremely low. S reported that she would certainly not be able to survive solely on her income. S mentioned that she will be returning to her husband after her stay at the shelter comes to an end.

S never charged her husband for domestic violence. S's friends were also victims of domestic violence. They sought legal assistance in an attempt to terminate the abuse but they did not receive much assistance there from. S felt that she was wasting her time as her husband has befriended many policemen. S was also privy to information that these policemen had ridiculed their own wives so how could she now expect them to come to her assistance.

Furthermore, S stated that her friends who sought help from the welfare services did not receive any help either, because social workers made it clear to them that every marriage had problems and that marriage was certainly not a bed of roses. So, women should try and work out the problems and keep the family unit together at all costs.

5.2.6. Situated structure of participant 6 - (J)

J is 44 years old and has two children. J had been married to her abusive husband for 25 years. After completing high school, J was forced into marriage. The marriage was arranged by a family member. J's husband is self employed. J's husband is an alcoholic. He has been physically, emotionally and sexually abusing her for the entire duration of her marriage. J is the process of divorcing her abusive husband.

J mentioned that the first incident of abuse was when her husband slapped her. Gradually, the abuse got worse and more brutal. He would drag her on the floor, pull her hair and beat her severely. J stated that even though her child witnessed the abuse, it did not affect her husband and he would continue swearing and beating her.

Initially, J revealed that she did not believe that there was anything wrong with being abused by ones husband. Furthermore, J was still very young at the time. Many family members convinced her that it was part and parcel of marriage and to go through these problems were normal. J believed that it was an adjustment that she had to make to overcome the abuse.

J stated that she had an arranged marriage and that this meant that she had to work at getting to know her husband, well enough, so that she did not do anything that would make him angry with her. J believed that they just needed some time to get used to one another.

J expressed how that it was a 'nightmare' to go out in public with her husband. He was 'like a time bomb' with a very short fuse. J stated that if they were out shopping and if her husband became angry about something, he would scream and shout at them. He would throw the groceries at them in front of everyone. J retorted that he would jump into the car and drive off, leaving her and the children stranded.

J's husband did not care about the children. He would raise his voice when talking to them and abuse them even in the presence of their friends. J's son was terrified of his father. When his father returned home, the child would run to his mother and tell her to hide in the empty room and wait for the father to fall asleep. J reported that there was the odd occasion when her husband was sober. J stated that her husband would be extremely nice to them and that she could actually have a conversation with him. J mentioned that in public her husband portrayed the image of being a perfect gentleman. He would act as though he was concerned about them and would give them hoards of attention.

J was afraid to disclose the abuse to anyone even though the situation worsened over the years. J stated that the children grew up in an environment which was not conducive to bringing up young, healthy and emotionally stable children. J mentioned that the children were always in the middle of the violence. J feared for the lives of her children and this fear convinced her to break the silence. J confided in her general practitioner. The doctor spoke to her husband but it did not make any difference to him. J's husband would listen for the moment, but as soon as he would return home, the abuse would start all over again.

J stated that a lack of communication and the fact that the marriage was arranged was one of the main reasons that they had so many problems in their marriage. They could not talk about anything, because whenever they spoke, it always led to an argument and to her being abused. Eventually, they stopped talking to each other. J believed that it was better to keep quiet and avoid altercations and arguments than to try to resolve the dispute by talking about it.

J and her children lived in fear most of the time, especially when her husband was at home. J reported that they only had peace when her husband was asleep. It was during this precious time that they could eat proper meals and that the children could do their home work without any interruptions. They did not know when their father would return home after work and abuse them or lock them out of the house. J's son feared going out with his friends because, as soon as he would leave, he would be worried and stressed about his mother.

J's son would return home numerous times just to check up on his mother and he would telephone her constantly to make sure she was fine. J and her children dreaded going on an outing with her husband. Eventually they did not accompany him anywhere because they were ridiculed by him.

J reported that she had changed her personality and her lifestyle so that she would not be abused by her husband. For example, her husband did not like her wearing too much make-up, so she would apply it sparingly. He did not approve of her talking to people, so she isolated herself from everyone. J disclosed that she soon learned that although she changed her persona, it did not stop the abuse.

J decided to seek employment many years after her marriage. J was employed by a company where she was the only female who worked in the office. J reported that her husband emotionally abused her when he found out about her job. He was extremely angry and would attend at her work place unannounced, just to keep an eye on her.

J mentioned that over time her parents, siblings and extended family learned of the abuse that she was subjected to on a regular basis. However, the response that she received from her family was that divorce in her culture was forbidden. It brought disgrace and embarrassment to the family and that the wife should tolerate the abuse at all costs.

J revealed that her husband verbally abused her by swearing at her, calling her degrading names and making her feel inferior to him. He used to take the car away from her so that she could not get to work and if she took a bus to work, then he would follow her to the bus stop and embarrass her in front of all the people at the bus stop. He accused her of having extra-marital affairs and would humiliate her in front of her children, family and colleagues.

J recollected the most violent attack on her. J stated that she had made up her mind to leave her husband after he had assaulted her. J thought that he was asleep so she took her clothing and decided to jump into her car and drive-off. He heard her open the door and followed her outside. He asked her where she was going to and J replied that she was going to pick-up her daughter at school. However, her husband telephoned his daughter on her cell-phone and asked her if that was the arrangement that her mother had arranged with her. J's daughter replied that they had no such agreement.

Thereafter her husband locked the gate and proceeded to the front of the car. J stopped the car because she knew that if she decided to drive-off he would have damaged the vehicle. Her husband accused J of going out, to meet her lover. He picked her up and threw her on some scaffold boards, got down on his knees and started beating her up. He took a plank and hit her on her face, head, and body and slit her nose. He then picked her up from outside and carried her inside, where he threw her on the floor and beat her mercilessly. J screamed and begged him to stop but he continued, until he reached a point of exhaustion. He then raped her over and over again.

J stated that the beating was so severe that she could not walk. The next day J went to her place of work to drop off some documents. Her colleagues saw the condition that she was in and they begged her to seek medical assistance and to charge her husband at the police station. J reported the incident at the police station. The police removed her from her home and placed her to the safe house.

J and her daughter had a good relationship, however, her daughter was much closer to her father. During her stay at the safe house, J noticed that her relationship with her daughter became strained. Her father lied to their daughter that J was having an affair. J's daughter believed her father. J mentioned that her husband was the reason for the rift between her daughter and herself. J will never forgive him for destroying their relationship.

J spent many days at home crying and praying. J disclosed that this was her only means of coping. J did not have any friends. Her husband prevented her from talking to anyone and forming any social relationships. J's job gave her a sense of self-satisfaction. It made coping with the abuse easier, as her mind was pre-occupied with her work and she had spent less time at home.

J mentioned that her mother had ill-treated her when she was a child. J reported that her mother had verbally abused her. They did not have a good relationship and argued about everything. J was not allowed to further her studies or empower herself. J was taught that once you were married, you had to live through all the misery and abuse. Furthermore, J was not allowed to take her problems to her parents.

One of the main reasons that J stayed in her abusive marriage for so many years, was because of her children. However, as her children got older, they did not want J to discuss the abuse to anyone. They were very embarrassed about it, and did not want people to look down upon them.

J had many fantasies of harming her partner. J revealed that she could never really go through with it. J mentioned that she hoped and prayed that her husband would die. J mentioned that in all the years of marriage, she did not hit him back, although she did get very angry at times, and retaliated by throwing objects at him.

J retorted that when she separated from her husband it was very traumatic. It was a huge adjustment. J felt lonely and sad, and it felt like “she had murdered her husband and her two children.” J felt like she had done something terribly wrong and everyone blamed her for deserting her family. J’s daughter rejected her and did not want to have anything to do with her.

J mentioned that she was afraid of seeing her husband, as she believes that it will invoke many painful memories of the last violent encounter that she experienced at his hands. J becomes very emotional and her speech becomes cries when she talks about her husband. J trembles with fear when she talks about him.

The initial period after the separation, was quite distressful for J. J stated that it took time but her life did improve. J has started feeling good about herself again. J does not live in constant fear anymore. J can now do things that she could never do, when she was married. J can talk to friends, wear make-up and go to a shopping mall and not be afraid. J can be herself in the presence of others.

J does not want to get involved in an intimate relationship again. J has become paranoid and she is afraid to commit to anyone else. J gets excited and anxious when she is around men, because she is not sure what they are capable of, or if they are going to harm her, or hit her.

5.3. General description/Summary

The participants were all abused women who had been living at the safe house at the Aryan Benevolent Home. They had all been in abusive relationships ranging from 5 to 30 years. All participants had at least one child. Of the six participants, J was in the process of divorcing her husband.

All of the participants interviewed in the study identified the first incident of abuse as a shock to them. They were caught unaware did not expect it. All the women interviewed reported physical violence as a common occurrence in their intimate relationships. All the participants described 'slapping, hitting and kicking' as the most common form of violence while M and K reported being 'kicked and punched' while being pregnant. M, C, K, S and J described 'their hair being pulled, being burnt with boiling water, being dragged and intimidated with firearms'.

During the interviews all the participants, except N mentioned that their financial situation was a major deterrent to leaving the abusive relationship. They related a myriad of experiences and described their partners as not having sense of responsibility toward the families. Their accounts involved tales of their partners withholding money, not giving enough money or not contributing financially. Sexual abuse and rape were also reported during the interviews. Only M and J spoke about sexual abuse by their partners.

During the interviews some of the participants tried to make sense of their partner's behaviour. N, K, S and J spoke about their partners being jealous and possessive, perceiving these characteristics as the catalysts for their partner's violent behaviour. M, C, S and J perceived alcohol as the main reason for their partner's behaviour. They attributed the change in their partners' personalities to substance abuse and S 'when he is sober he is not violent'. Many of the women also justified their partners' behaviour by blaming it on alcohol abuse or saying that he was stressed.

Fear played a significant role in the abuse for the participants in the study. M, C, K, S and J revealed that they constantly lived their lives in fear. M, C, S, K and J reported that the behaviour of their abusers was often unpredictable. This lack of predictability lends to the fear and stress women experience (Mullender, 1996). M, C, S, K and J always needed to be prepared for potential abuse. Their abusers tried to control and subjugate them. All the women stated that they were attacked during their partner's angry outbursts. This destroyed their confidence and made them feel on edge all the time because of their partner's unpredictable behaviour.

According to Berry (2000) the unpredictable behaviour of the abuser is a way of controlling the women especially since they were fearful and did not know when their partners would have another anger outburst and then take it out on the women. It is fairly common for abusers to keep their victim constantly on edge by changing the rules so that the victim may never know what to expect (Bart & Moran, 1983).

M, C, K, S and J constantly lived their lives in fear and did not know when the abuse would occur. When they were being abused they went into an emotional shock which according to Walker (1991) is a normal reaction when one is scared. S and J reported that 'when you think the abuser will react in one way, he will react in the complete opposite'. This then prevents an opportunity for the woman to feel any sense of stability. According to Moore (1979) this lack of predictability adds to the fear and stresses the woman experiences since she always needs to be prepared for potential abuse.

This leaves her in a constant state of uneasiness since she never knows what the abuser is going to do or how he is going to react. The victim becomes confused and is unable to concentrate on anything around her. Due to the severe impact of fear most of the participants experienced a great deal of stress and anxiety.

Psychological abuse was also referred to as a common form of violence. All the women described their experiences as being enmeshed with incidents of both verbal and psychological abuse.

Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness were commonly expressed relating to the abusers controlling and emotionally abusive behaviour. An overview of the literature revealed that women experience powerlessness and helplessness as a result of the abusive control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979 and Moore, 1979).

M, K, C, J and S all experienced helplessness as they did not have support from their families and friends and had no option but to stay in the relationships. Furthermore, they did not have the financial means to leave and start afresh.

Apart from the sense of helplessness the participants felt, they often referred to other feelings such as anger, bitterness, frustration and a general sense of hopelessness about their situations.

M, K, S and J changed their behaviour, thinking it would prevent the abuse; however the abuse did not stop. These participants felt that no matter what they did, it was of no use, the abuser would never change and therefore their situation would remain the same. They even changed their patterns of behaviour and became subordinate in an attempt to prevent violent outbursts from their partners. C, S and J described it as to 'rather keep quiet', while S and J stopped wearing make-up, going out with friends and family and laughing. M, K and S reported that they made sure everything was 'spic and span' before their partners arrived so that their partners would not find something to pick on.

M, C, K, S and J reported that they lost confidence in themselves as a result to being abused emotionally and psychologically by their partners. This resulted in them becoming more vulnerable to the abuse inflicted by their partners. Suffering continuous attacks on their self-esteem destroyed their ability to feel good about themselves. This resulted in them perceiving themselves as even more helpless and worthless.

According to Kirkwood (1993) psychological abuse often makes women feel helpless, powerless, confused and depressed. The experience of various psychologically and emotionally abusive behaviours by their partners often left the women with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness to change their situations.

The participants' responses showed that their sense of helplessness and powerlessness stemmed from their inability to make decisions due to their partners controlling behaviour.

Other factors include their perceived inability to cope as well as a lack of support and resources to help make any changes. Psychological abuse plays a major part in controlling relationships, as it is intended to destroy the women's self-esteem so that she will comply with demands and feel that she has no other options available to her.

According to De Sousa (1991), of women constantly experiencing psychological and emotional abuse, their self-esteem is eroded which results in them doubting their own abilities and strengths. This makes women perceive their abusive partners as extremely powerful and thus they believe that they cannot change the abusive situation. It has been found that experiencing emotional abuse such as humiliation, contributed to long-term detrimental effects on the women's health (Follingstad et al., 1990).

N, C, S and J expressed feelings of depression as a result of the emotional trauma they were experiencing. As a result of the severity of the pain and abuse, C and J sought professional help.

These feelings resulted in N being hospitalized and N was prescribed with medication to alleviate symptoms. The participant's feelings of sadness, pain and confusion may be an indication of depression. This contributed to suicidal thoughts for some of the women.

N, M, K, S and J reported that their husbands or partners restricted them socially and financially. According to Follingstad et al. (1990), restriction and isolating the woman adds to a greater degree of control on the woman. Restricting a woman's social contact is often related to jealousy and possessiveness (Follingstad et al., 1990). K, S and J reported that their abusive partners were jealous of everyone in their lives, including family and friends. Jealousy is used as a means of controlling a partner's behaviour by restricting her contact with others (Berry, 2000). S stated that her husband monitored her visits, phone calls and even the mileage on her motor vehicle. S also reported that her husband limited her outside involvement and monitored her social contacts. J's husband held her accountable for where she went and who she saw by checking her whereabouts with neighbours.

The abusers may also use phone calls to keep track of their partners' whereabouts or to harass them until they gradually restrict their activities (Levy, 1991). They may even interrogate them about strangers and other males with whom they may have had contact. K and J were even accused of infidelity by their partners where in one instance 'fake' cell-phone text messages were sent by the abuser to 'confirm' an illicit liaison.

In order to cope, participants mainly used strategies which were not always effective in the long term. M, C, K and S coped by not talking about it, by believing the abuse was caused by external factors, or by believing it was her fault and that her partner will change. M, C, K, S and J prayed in order to cope.

Child abuse was also found to be a salient theme from the interviews. Many children were affected by the violence in their homes. They not only witnessed the violence, but were often caught up in the middle or by being abused themselves.

All the participants showed signs of crying when talking about their abuse but then controlled themselves and apologized. It appeared that talking about the incident elicited many feelings and thoughts of sadness, hurt and pain.

On several occasions during the interviews, N, M and J reported attempts at self-harm and intentions and future intentions to end their lives. They felt they were better off dead. They felt that their situations were hopeless and their only hope of peace was, if they were dead.

For many of the participants this was the first time that they had really talked about the event and felt that they had lifted a weight off their shoulders by talking to someone. It was perceived that talking about the abuse was initially difficult, but as the interview progressed there was some feeling of relief.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The present chapter will provide a discussion of the study that was conducted. In the analysis participants focused on their general perceptions, their own experiences and their perceptions of the support systems that abused woman may require. It must be noted that quotes are used verbatim therefore grammatical errors will appear. The participants' names have been changed and pseudonyms have been used to protect their identity (Appendix 5). The themes that emerged from the six participants are outlined and discussed below.

6.2. Emergent Themes

The psychological sequelae of the abuse experienced by the women interviewed encompassed a wide range of effective, cognitive and behavioral symptoms.

6.2.1. Types of abuse

The types of abuse experienced by the participants included sexual, verbal, economic, psychological and physical abuse. The types will be discussed in turn.

6.2.1.1. Verbal and psychological abuse

N, M, C, K, S and J spoke about the verbal and psychological abuse they were subjected to, the constant put-downs, humiliations and blows to their sense of self-worth. Verbal abuses in the form of hypercritical, demeaning barrages were common in all their relationships. According to the participants the abuse included berating, belittling, name-calling, verbal insults, yelling, screaming, threatening, blaming, degrading the woman, having extra marital affairs and refusing to communicate with the woman. These were common experiences found in this study as well. This is clearly evident in the quotations that follow.

["He would swear at me if he did not like anything or call me names" (N)]

["I remember how he used to tell me...you is like an animal, an idiot! You are worthless. I used to feel worthless all the time. I never felt pretty, because he always called me fat and ugly" (M).]

["He's using abusive language, swearing me the worst language, you don't go to work you go sleeping around with men." (J)]

["He would scream and shout and hitting and ranting and raving and uhhh, I, I was the one who was like crying and uhhh telling him, begging him to stop. Just stop!" (S)]

["He tried to run me down with the car, then he would stop the car and make me run after the car." (J)]

In the above scenario, the abuser constantly attacked his partner's personhood by demeaning her, belittling her and undermining her.

The participants described how their partners verbally abused them by constantly taunting and making fun of them on a daily basis. These women were dominated and controlled by their partners who constantly verbally attacked and humiliated them. M, C, K, S and J suppressed their feelings in order to get through each day. M, K, S and J reported that it became a way of life for them. This humiliation and disrespect was an attack on their feelings of self-worth. In the above responses, the dehumanization of the woman is clearly evident.

["I used to be so scared to go anywhere with him....or what the situation is going to be, because then he will just using vulgar language, screaming or he would take all the parcels whatever shopping we did and throw it around in front of everybody" (J)]

Being berated and yelled at in front of others are common characteristics of an abuser (Dutton & Painter, 1981). It is clear that although verbal abuse does not leave visible bruises; it is cruel and scars your soul.

A common misconception about verbal and psychological abuse in our society is that some people believe that unless a person has bruises, a black eye, broken ribs or broken jaws, they have not been abused.

[“I used to be a very out going free spirited, open minded, laughable, jovial person. He killed my uhhh, self-image. He managed to deplete me of that self-confidence that I had in myself.” (S)]

[“I never felt pretty because he always called me fat and ugly” (M)]

M revealed how her partner always criticized and demeaned her physical appearance. She felt ugly and hopeless. According to Walker (1984) and Follingstad, Neckerman & Vormbrock (1988) abusive partners often use demeaning and insulting gestures in order to destroy the women’s belief that she may have in her attractiveness to others outside the relationship, thereby ensuring that she feels so worthless and ugly that she will remain emotionally attached to him believing that he is the only person who can still be with her even though she is so ugly, resentful and worthless.

The participant’s accounts in the study revealed that they were subjected to various kinds of verbal and psychological abuse. According to Walker (1984) emotional abuse that included verbal attacks, ridicule, hypercriticism, name-calling and public humiliation are considered to be the most severe forms of psychological and verbal abuse.

By making the recipient of the ridicule believe she is not worthwhile, she would remain under the power of the psychological abuser (Berry, 2000). The present study confirmed previous findings. The verbal abuse the women suffered was designed to control, subjugate and dominate them.

6.2.1.2. Physical Abuse

N, M, C, K, S and J gave compelling accounts of their experiences of physical abuse in their relationships. All the women described the first incident as a shock as well as descriptions of numbness and emptiness. According to Symes (2003), this response is a way of dealing with the many feelings experienced simultaneously which protects the individual from a flooding of feelings and thus being emotionally overwhelmed. All the participants described 'slapping, hitting and punching' as the most common form of violence. M, K and S described being 'booted and tramped' while pregnant or after just giving birth. Specific reference came from these participants:

["I uhhh, came into the room. He locked the door and he came straight towards me and started hitting me. He, he booted me, slapped me, flung me from one end of the room to the other end. He even put me on the floor and he was kicking me." (K)]

["He put me onto the scaffold boards outside, and he went on his knees, and he started to beat me, my head, my face, my earrings were all out, my nose ring the whole thing was slit. Everything was out! He finished beat me there, and I'm screaming and he took plank and whatever and he hit...that my one foot was gone swollen. I had to go and have the injection and the doctor had to remove the fluid. It was so bad. He didn't finish there. He takes me inside the house...he throws me onto the floor and then he goes down onto his knees again and he continues to beat me, and then he wants to uhhh, have intercourse with me, in that state." (J)]

Despite the pain, trauma and intense suffering these women experienced none of the ever retaliated or hit their abusive partners.

6.2.1.3. Sexual abuse

Descriptions of sexual abuse were also offered during the interview. S and M spoke about sexual abuse in their marriage:

["Sometimes I used to get so angry with him. He only wanted to have sex! All the time. I used to get so fed up with him. Sometimes I used to just lie there in pain. It used to be so sore."(M)]

[“Uhhmm, my husband was so abusive, that uuhh he was sexually abusive. Whether it was in the broad daylight, midnight, it was just anytime, he would uuhh force himself onto me uuhh if I uuhh.....I was so scared that the children were like teenage and they wouldn't understand, so because of them I used to go into the room and let him do whatever and then I used to get out.” (J)]

J spoke about how the sexual abuse against her devastated her and broke her confidence. It disgusted her and she felt like a 'tramp'. J mentioned that this was the turning point for leaving her husband who had also been physically violent, and abused her verbally.

According to the Tshenane (2000), women are portrayed as being objects of sexual gratification, as well as wife and mother who has to keep the family unit together. In the literature, it is postulated that this patriarchal understanding of women and their sexuality, creates a sense of inadequacy in women. Women may feel inadequate to challenge this type of oppression and suffer long term abuse under the control of abusive partners.

Harway and Hansen (1993) and Murray (2000) assert that men use sexual violence to secure and maintain the relationship between male dominance and female subordination. This is supported by Richardson and Robinson (1993), who postulate that the high increase in woman abuse may be attributed to men exercising their dominance and control over women.

6.2.1.4. Financial abuse

During the interviews M, C and J spoke about financial struggle they endured whilst they were at home.

["I couldn't like you know go and ask him anything, for money or anything for the matter." (C)]

["He doesn't give any money." (M)]

["He never provided for me and my children. He never gave me any money yet once I got a job there was more abuse because he would call me the worst words: 'bitch' you went out. You're looking for men, when I broke the news to him.... he was like you know, even madder, than ever, so he used to drink. He used to even come to my workplace, sit there and wait." (J)]

During the interviews many of the women spoke about their struggle to gain finances and to maintain a basic standard of living. M, C and S were economically dependent on their partners. S also stated that she did not want to divorce her husband as she was financially dependent on him. Although S descends from a rich family she did not want to burden her family because she always put on a facade in front of them. Furthermore, the shame and embarrassment of being abused by her husband heightened her unwillingness to seek help or disclose it to her family.

The above quotations show that by placing these social, personal and financial constraints on women's behaviour, abusers are able to control their behaviour. According to S and J since women are considered inferior to men, resources are often held from them. They believe that society's attitude must change and women should be treated with the same respect and equality as men.

Mullender (1996) argues that the use of abuse as a controlling mechanism in marriage is perpetuated not only through economic norms about men's rights over women in marriage, but through women's economic dependence on their husbands. This dependence is increased by the lack of job training which would otherwise enable these women to be employable and support themselves.

Dobash & Dobash (1979) argue that economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support patriarchal domination. Due to their ascribed status, men have greater access to resources and are in a position to control women. The political, social, and economic privileges that men are accorded relative to women enable them to control women. It is clear from the responses of these participants that their intimate partners, asserted their dominance by restricting these women. Policy recommendations suggest that women should be made more economically independent in order to provide alternatives in abusive relationships (Bart & Moran, 1993).

6.2.3. Power and control

According to the literature, men use oppressive behaviour not only to control but to remain in control of women. This is described by Murray (2000) that men use violence as a form of control over women. As this oppressive behaviour is deeply entrenched in the nature of men, it is deemed to be socially acceptable for men to react violently in situations with women. Abuse is used as an attempt to maintain women's submissive position in society (Harway & Hansen, 1993).

Women have been taught to accept this position in this patriarchal society. This is evident from the women interviewed in the study. An emerging theme that was relevant in M, C, K, S and J's interviews was that of the power and control their partners had over them.

The literature shows that women commonly reported that abuse occurred when they attempted to act independently. For example, J reported that when she secured an employment position, the abuse was worse than ever. Furthermore, many of the women interviewed reported that they were not to participate in making decisions or challenging any decisions taken by their partners, which is integral in a healthy relationship. As soon as they did so, they were physically and verbally abused. In this way, they were controlled by their partners and had to constantly live in fear if they did anything to upset their partners. Eventually M and S repressed their feelings. They decided that it was better to keep quiet and avoid being beaten for questioning their partners' decisions.

It has been reported that in most cultures, the patriarchal family still continues to express and generate rules and values that affirm the importance of the male's interest in relation to his partner. In the following quotations, the legacy of the patriarchal family is clearly mirrored whereby M, N and S spoke about their experiences.

["I must not say anything, have no voice. As soon as I say something, he raises his voice and start hitting me." (M)]

["He always, uuhh, used to uuhh question my whereabouts, why, why would uuhh, what uuhh, the speed limit a little way too high or where did I go or why did I go there. He always kept an eye on the petrol because he used to give me a certain amount of money to fill in the car so he obviously needed to know where I was at certain times." (S)]

["It was when I refused to say my where abouts were and my husband got angry and klapped me." (N)]

Patriarchal domination is still supported by a moral order which reinforces the marital hierarchy and makes it very difficult for women to challenge this as well as other forms of domination and control because a woman's struggle against this is perceived to be wrong, immoral and a violation of the respect and loyalty that a wife is supposed to have for her husband.

Abusers also use emotionally controlling behaviours to establish and/or maintain power and control over their partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1992 and Bart & Moran 1993; Murray, 2000). Some of the women felt that their partners used their male privilege as an excuse to treat them like a personal slaves who catered for their every whims and fancies.

[“I was always scared that he would come home drunk and start abusing me for nothing. I didn’t want the girls to see him do those things. I always cleaned the house and had everything neat and tidy so that he won’t find ways to start a fight.” (M)]

[“I, I was like walking on uhhh, so to speak on egg shells and always uhhh, watch what I say and uhhmm try not, try to keep the peace at all times, that the house so to speak was like uuh, spik and span and the meals were always prepared in advance and uhhh it was always uhhh tip-top meals uhhh I could not uhhh give anything.” (S)]

It is evident from the above quotations that the women resorted to undoing, whereby they made sure that the house was cleaned and the food was cooked in order to avoid the abuse. Undoing is a defense mechanism whereby a person tries to 'undo' a negative or threatening thought by their actions. The abusive partners used intimidation to enforce compliance to their demands.

However, in their own way, these women also challenged the 'system' by problem solving, for example, by cleaning the house, cooking the meals and making sure everything was spik and span. In a sense she also has some control and power which he does not approve off. He may feel intimidated that she gets every 'right' so to speak given the situation at home. She defies him by finding ways to cope with his abusive reactions and thin coping mechanism makes him even more aggressive and abusive.

["I used to think, ok in public in times when he is socializing with friends and family uhhmm, he just didn't like me laughing and joking with people so I thought, ok, I stopped that. Stopped that and there were times he would say Ok, I don't want you to use too much of make-up because its not like a very nice thing and stuff then I tone down a little bit, until I saw you know what , toning down or stopping certain things that he didn't like, he never reformed, he just got worse. So then it struck me that you know what, this is like a you know, an old dog who keeps on learning new tricks." (J)]

["Even if he came home at 10 o' clock in the night he would demand, uhhh, uhhh, supper to be cooked at that part of the hours, so I was supposed to be cooking a meal. Although I was used to be so exhausted uhhh, but I was supposed to and if I wasn't quick enough then I was either getting my hair pulled or getting pushed around and uhhh abused verbally." (S)]

Rigid traditional gender roles are reflected in these two participants' relationships. According to Dobash & Dobash (1979), men use abuse as a way to control their female partners to comply with their wishes. The abuser takes on a role of dominance, demanding their subservience. His needs are met by demanding compliance. According to M, K and S nothing that they ever did was not good enough for their partners, which resulted in constant criticism as the abuser was never pleased with their efforts. According to Engel (1990) through constant criticism, the abuser wears down the ability of the woman to believe that she has any self-worth or ability to think for herself.

6.2.4. Fear

Fear was a recurring theme in the women's accounts of abuse in their intimate relationships. Fear generally refers to feelings elicited by tangible, realistic dangers. Fear played a significant role in the abuse for the women in this study. The abusers often aroused fear in their partners by frightening verbalizations, including threats of physical violence of varying severity (Dutton & Painter, 1981).

M, C, K, S and J reported other powerful ways of forcing them to comply with their partners, which included yelling and screaming, hitting walls, prolonged silence, damage or destruction to property, so that they lived in a constant state of fear and terror.

The abuser instilled so much fear into these women that they were under their abusers' control and they were too afraid to break free and escape. The affective symptoms of anxiety and a strong sense of fear were indicated by most of the participants. According to Engel (1990) often the behaviour of the abuser is unpredictable. This lack of predictability exacerbates the fear and stress women experience in abusive relationships. According to M, her children and her had to always be prepared for potential abuse by her husband.

The participants' fear for their abusers is clearly evident in the following quotations:

[“I live in fear and silence.... I was always scared that he would come home drunk and start abusing me for nothing.” (M)]

[“We were like paralysed with fear.” (J)]

[“I should keep quiet and when he come home very drunk in the night sometimes keep quiet. I just put my head into the blanket and pretend like I'm fast asleep.” (C)]

These accounts illustrate the debilitating fear, which the participants endured whilst they were in their abusive relationships. This meant that the women were constantly on edge because they were afraid that should the abuser get angry, he would start abusing them. Many of the women showed constant apprehension and vigilance in preventing these episodes.

According to De Sousa (1991), since she is afraid of his anger, she ensures that he does not get angry by doing what he wants her to do or by changing her behaviour to please her partner which as such, for example in the case of M, S and J.

Due to the severity of the degree of fear, M, C, K, S and J lost their individuality, self confidence and were often dehumanized when they tried to express themselves. This made many of the women stressed and experience high levels of anxiety. It is as though women dissociate their mind from their body while experiencing what is happening (Walker, 1984). This is a psychological mechanism which helps women cope with the phenomenal amounts of pain she experiences at a particular time. The debilitating fear that the participants in the study suffered often left them feeling helplessness, and hopeless and even suicidal.

6.2.5. Low self-esteem, helplessness & powerlessness

All the participants in the study expressed feelings of helplessness which emanated from the abusers' controlling and emotionally abusive behaviour. Symptoms of derealization which are common in violence related incidents were also evident in the womens' descriptions. An overview of the literature revealed that women experienced powerlessness and helplessness as a result of being under the abusive control of their partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

According to Andersen, Boulette & Schwartz, (1985), the unpredictable and pervasive abuse eventually debilitates the abused woman, promoting her feelings of powerlessness and helplessness. Her failure to predict and control her abuse engenders learned helplessness. In this way her partners control over finances impoverishes her and the victim blaming postures of support systems who believe in a just world hypothesis promotes further self-blame and powerlessness (Dutton & Painter, 1981; Walker, 1984; Andersen et al., 1985).

The following quotations illustrate the sense of helplessness that the participants experienced.

["When I reached uhhh 18, uhhh, when I explained to my parents nobody believed me."
(M)]

["It's just that I'm going through something, No, No. I ...When and if I do happen to think about my children, I was told not to stress and told not to think about anything so that I don't get sick. So, actually I am not really worried about that because I have lost the two most important things in my life. I have lost everything. I have nothing to live for. (N)]

["You see there was nothing I can do or ask him because it would end up in a fight. I was not happy about it. I was miserable. He even had a security guard watching me so I don't leave the house." (K)]

["My two children don't wanna talk to people; they don't want me to discuss anything with anyone" (J).]

The lack of self-worth and dignity was another salient theme that featured prominently in the participants experiences. The destructiveness of verbal attacks on the women's self esteem was clearly evident throughout the interviews. The serious damage to woman's self- esteem as a result of verbal abuse and other emotionally controlling behaviours are well documented (Walker, 1984 and Follingstad et al., 1990).

["I still remember how he used to tell me... you is like an animal, an idiot, you are worthless. Those made me feel stupid. I used to feel worthless all the time. I never felt pretty because he always called me fat and ugly." (M)]

The pain, humiliation and degradation that M was subjected to impacted negatively on her self-esteem. Also, noted is the serious damage that the continuous verbal assaults had on her. M mentioned that she felt useless, inferior and had low self-esteem. M became depressed, withdrawn and even had suicidal ideations for herself and her children. Continuous negative comments eventually results in the victim having a low self-esteem (Cermak, 1986 and Cascardi & Learyu, 1992).

The above mentioned quotation illustrates the degradation, humiliation and disrespect verbal attacks had on the participant's feelings. For example, K was humiliated and disappointed with her partner for hiring a security guard to watch over her. She felt that he was crazy. She claimed that if he cared or loved her then he should have trusted her.

According to Harway and Hansen (1993) it is very confusing for her to be told she is worthless by the same person claiming to love her.

These forms of abuse can be a catalyst to a host of other deep rooted issues that can surface and often may result in the abused become the abuser or the abused. The low self-esteem and self-worth that the abused woman feels makes her lose her sense of hope and succumb to a life of abuse as she may not be able to perceive a better life for herself, than that which she is exposed to her at the hands of the abuser.

[“He took away a part of me, uuhh he killed my uuhh self image, my uuhh he tried to take away my spirit, uuhh you know, I, I used to be a very out going free spirited, open minded, laughable jovial person. Uhhmm, I loved life. I used to live it to the fullest, everything I did I did it with love and happiness and enjoyment, but uuhh, after the abuse, he uuhh, he managed to deplete me of that self confidence that I had in myself. My self-esteem uhhmm really he had diminished it, diminished it to such an extent where I thought if I cannot pull myself together and out of this uhhmm rut, that had been created by him, I would not be uuhh the person I am today.” (S)]

S's comments show the devastating impact of controlling and emotionally abusive behaviour and the harm that it causes to a person's self-image. This participant experienced reaction formation, where she actually begins to believe that she is the person the abuser perceived her to be. Reaction formation is a mental or emotional response that represents the opposite of what one really feels.

According to Bassadien and Hochfeld (2005) social power advantages for men mean that they are in a position to control her. Power in this context conotates a greater physical strength that men generally possess over women. He may engage in behaviours such as where he runs her down, ignores her needs, and demands her undivided attention at all times. This according to De Sousa (1991) makes her feel unimportant, useless and erodes her self-confidence.

6.2.6. Anger and resentment

All the participants in the study displayed a tremendous sense of anger toward their abusers as a result of the verbal and physical abuse they endured. In view of the negative impact of the abuse the women suffered, the responses below indicate the feelings of resentment that these women felt towards their partners. These feelings may be related to the built up anger that the women felt as a result of the control and domination they were subjected to. According to Barnett & Martinez (1996) anger is a predominant reaction to abuse. This study illustrates this as well.

["Half angry...half frustrated. Sometimes I just wanted to crack him with something but I could never ever pick my hand up to him. He would have probably killed me!" (C)]

["A lot of hard anger, uhhmm I think at that moment I,I. If I could have hit him I would have." (S)]

["Hurt, anger, betrayed...I had to pack up and go because I cannot stay with a person who is doing all the wrong things." (C)]

["To be quite honest with you what he's put me through and my first child through, now also my second child... I don't want him, having to do anything; if I don't see him again it won't be too soon." (K)]

6.2.7. Isolation

N, M, K S and J stated that their partners restricted them socially and financially. The literature identifies isolation, either social or financial, as a form of emotional abuse. In abusive relationships the women is virtually always isolated from outside sources of social support (Walker, 1984; Andersen et al., 1985; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Berry, 2000). Since she rarely encounters anyone else, the abused woman's world is limited to the abuser and her judgment may therefore be compromised. According to Ferraro & Johnson (1983) and Follingstad et al. (1990), restricting and isolating the woman may imply a greater need for control over her.

According to Yoshihama & Sorenson (1994) abusers often restrict their partners contact with family and friends; or by monitoring their visits, phone calls and letters.

["I was not allowed to have contact with my mother.....After I met him I didn't even have female friends as friends uhhh, because somehow they were so called influencing me or bad people." (K)]

["He used to check on my mileage, and uhhmm, he used to check on my where-abouts using my cell phone." (S)]

["I've got people keeping an eye on you and your stuff." (J)]

N K, S and J mentioned that their partners limited their outside involvement and monitored their social contacts. Their partners held them accountable for their every moment, often interrogating them to ascertain where they went and who they met, etc., basically demanding to know their whereabouts. K retorted that her partner only tried to isolate her from her family and friends was so, if she ever decided to leave him, then she would have no support systems available to her.

This is supported by Andersen et al. (1985) who proposes that when the abuser isolates the women from her friends and relatives, it weakens her support systems which produces a more influencable wife and prevents her escape.

K and J were continuously interrogated by their partners. They were harassed and questioned about friends, family, strangers and/or other males with whom they may have had contact. They felt that their partners' behaviour was extremely jealous, possessive and psychotic. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

["He isolated me from my family and friends as they were so called influencing me or they were bad people."(K)]

["You don't go to work; you go around sleeping with men. There is no need for you to work" (J)]

The participants' behaviour was controlled to the extent that they had limited social contacts. They were not allowed to go out nor have friends. According to Follingstad et al. (1990) this is a subtle, yet effective plan because then she has to give up everything in her life and he is all she will have. She will become dependent on him thereby giving him power and control over her which can not be challenged by her or anyone close to her as they would probably never find out.

According to Harway and Hansen (1993) abused women protect themselves against more beatings, by developing heightened sensitivity to their abusers emotional cues and placating them to forestall more violent episodes. This form of psychological control is of benefit to the abuser, who views the woman as being highly suggestible to outside influence (Bart & Moran, 1993).

Hence, the abuser thus fears any outside person who might minimize the abusers influence and control over the women's life. It is for this reason that he keeps her socially isolated as much as he can.

6.2.9. Coping

Abused women specifically resist the notion that they should leave their abusers, a fact consistent with the definition of psychological entrapment in which ones efforts to attain a desired goal (i.e. making the relationship work) are so strong that one must justify the effort by still greater commitment (Strube cited in Andersen et al., 1985). Therefore, participants used a variety of ways in order to cope in their abusive relationships. One of the ways in which the participants tried to cope or deal with the first incident of abuse, was by cognitive control. This was demonstrated in various ways. At least, two of the participants believed that their partners would change or that it would not happen again.

Also, two of the participants blamed themselves for the abuse. The following excerpts from their interviews substantiate this contention:

["I didn't really expect it, but knowing that it was my fault and I was wrong and I deserved it." (N)]

["I made a mistake by going to take the taxi and not waiting for him. If I listened the problem could have been avoided." (K)]

A second way in which most of the participants tried to cope was through the use of defenses. These were denial, rationalization and minimization. Denial usually involved trying to forget the abuse or not telling anyone about it. The majority of the participants rationalized their husband's behaviour. This involved attributing the abuse to external causes, for example, alcohol abuse, unemployment or stress at work. Minimization of the abuse was the least reported defense mechanism relied on by the participants.

["The impression he gave me was that it was not safe to travel in taxis and I couldn't trust anyone, he loved me and didn't want anything to happen to me so he got stressed and did all that." (K)]

["No, no we just like had our arguments, but because of the fact that he picked up his hand and stuff for me, he didn't do anything bad really." (N)]

["Because Monday to Friday he was quite a different kind of a character, uhhmm, you would probably think it was another person all together and when it came to weekend and the moment he consumed alcohol he would uuhh, assume this very, very violent role." (S)]

These findings are similar to those of other researchers. According to Ferraro and Johnson (1983), it has been found that in the earliest stages of victimization, the abused woman copes by means of cognitive strategies, for example, by believing the abuse was caused by external factors, believing it was her fault or, by believing her husband will change.

M, C, K and S relied on their faith and belief in God in order to cope. This can be seen in the quotations cited below:

[“I used to uhhh, only if I had money I used to go away to the temple. I used to spend time and pray, I used to cry.” (C)]

[“I used to always pray for him to change. I used to go to church and pray.” (M)]

Harway and Hansen (1993) asserts that coping strategies, allow abused women to maintain the illusion that she is still in control of her life, and to believe that a ‘just world’ exists in which people get what they deserve and bad things do not happen to good people. However, it is often her perception of control that serves to keep her in the abusive relationship.

6.2.10. Self-blame

Once intermittent abuse has occurred, the abused woman attempts to cope with her situation, and in doing so develops a sense of self-blame (Dutton & Painter, 1981 and Barnett & Martinez, 1996). Self-blame is a common theme in abused women, who invest more and more effort in the relationship to make it work, and blame themselves for the failure. This experience was common in this study as well. N and K blamed themselves for the abuse that they had suffered at the hands of their abusers.

An investigation of the literature shows that there is a link between women accepting responsibility for victimization and low self-esteem (Lawrence cited in Abrahams, 2002). It has been established in the antecedent paragraphs that low self esteem may result in the woman believing that the man was justified in his controlling and emotionally abusive behaviour. According to Follingstad et al. (1990) and Walker (1991) low self-esteem would thus be continuously reinforced. As a result of the diminished self-esteem, it is easy to understand why some women blame themselves for the abuse.

It is also important to point out that abusers are adept at convincing the women that the abuse is her fault and that she is responsible for what has happened (Bart & Moran, 1993 and Barnett & Martinez, 1996). The abuser often induces guilt in the woman by blaming her for the abuse until she comes to blame herself. Blaming the victim is frequently used to justify the use of coercive power (Walker, 1984). Abusers escape taking responsibility for their actions by always blaming their partners for the abuse.

Richardson & Robinson (1993) disagree with the theory, albeit medieval in its origin, that it was the woman who provoked their intimate partner's abusive behaviours. They argue that blaming the victim is a way of failing to take the totality of abuse towards women seriously and the responsibility of the man is denied and obscured

[“He feels like all the blame is onto me because I am doing all the wrong things. I never do anything wrong, he used to drink all the time. I tried to tell him not to, not to join friends. I mean, I never tell him not to go to his family, but when he goes he drinks, he over does it and when he over does it he tends to annoy me.”(M)]

[“That’s quite contradictory in fact, because it wasn’t me who was screaming and hitting and ranting and raving and, uuhh, I was the one who’s like crying and uuhh telling him to stop and begging him to stop but uuhh, so therefore it was quite contradictory by, by calling me psychotic. I think it was so inappropriate really, so and every time I mentioned the word it was me, he said oh its not me! It meant that it wasn’t him, it was me who had the problems, so I didn’t uuhh, take to that very well because especially for ... I’m the one who’s the victim but suddenly I became the abuser.”(S)]

Four of the participants in the study agreed that they did not deserve to be abused in the relationship. Their partners projected the blame on them making it seem that they were at fault. They realized that they were not to blame for being abused and controlled by their partners.

M, S and J explained that even though they modified their behaviour in order to stop or prevent the abuse, the abuse continued. Any attempts by the victims to please and pacify their partners were met with the same result, beginning with the verbal and emotional abuse and ending with the physical abuse.

The above mentioned quotations highlight the manner in which the participants challenged the 'morality' that forces women to find fault within themselves for the abuse that they suffer at the hands of their intimate partners. According to Dobash and Dobash (1979) and Tshesane (2000), women struggle against cultural ideas, which require women to submit to any form of treatment that her partner considers appropriate and against the policies and social agencies which sanctions her partner's authority and his use of abuse.

6.2.11. Suicidal ideation

The most commonly reported affective responses to the abuse were anger and/or hatred towards their partners, humiliation, embarrassment or shame, and hurt, sad or depressed feelings. Therefore, it is not surprising to note, given well documented levels of major depression experienced by abused women, that they often contemplate, attempt or commit suicide. This was evident in the following three participant's responses.

["I was told not to stress and not to think about anything, so that I don't get sick. So, actually I'm not really worried about that because I have lost the two most important things in my life! I have nothing to live for...sometimes I just feel like ending my life. What's the point?" (N)]

["I felt I wanted to run away, don't turn back, but I regret myself giving birth to these two children, even this third one. At one point I felt like killing myself including my two children because I didn't want them to stay and get the beating. To be honest with you, up till now I still regret life." (C)]

The above quotations are indicative of deep rooted feelings of utter helplessness, pain, turmoil, trauma, confusion and regret that the participants experienced. There also appears to be a sense of hopelessness that permeates their existence.

They believe that their lives have been worthless and that their lives can never improve or that they could never live 'normal lives'. The suicidal ideations mentioned in the above quotes, indicates the severity of the abuse, as well as, the victims pessimistic outlook of life in the future.

6.2.12. Concern for children

All the participants described their children's experiences in a range of violent exposure. These women related experiences wherein their children tried to protect them and being caught up in the middle. In this way, children were not only witnessing the abuse as, but they were also victims of the abuse.

[“He started hitting me and uuhh, my then my son started crying, he uuhh, he started hitting my son and asked him ‘what are you looking at’ and he was 6 years old at the time, and uhhmm it was quite a shocking experience at the time.”(S)]

[“But my boy was terrified, that the moment the father would walk in, he would ask me you know, at the age, from the age of 8 and 9 he would say to me mummy sit in one room and wait....we were like paralyzed with fear.” (J)]

[“My son tried to protect me and he hit my small baby... he hit him so badly, he started hitting him and booting him and all, he said you're trying to cover up for your mother.” (C)]

All the participants feared for their children's lives. The findings indicate that a large number of children are severely affected by violence in their homes. These children, were not only the witnesses to violence and abuse, but are often caught up in the middle, and are abused themselves.

It also clearly evident that there is a reversal in roles, as in the case of C, whereas instead of the mother protecting the child, the child tried to protect the mother.

This conclusion is drawn from the above mentioned quotations. In addition, the children were reported to have developed elaborate coping mechanisms to deal with the abuse that they were subjected to, with this having lasting effects on their perceptions of relationships involving intimate couples. When the women described the effect of violence on their children it was easier for them to focus on behavioural changes than to focus on the problems that the children experienced.

Many of the children were described as displaying behavioural problems, ranging from truanting, aggressive behaviour and substance abuse. Furthermore, the abuse disrupted their school life and social life as in the case of C and S. In the sense that if the children did go out with their friends, they were always stressed and worried about the well being of their mother, as is prevalent in the case of J. It was also evident from the findings that many parents were unable to deal effectively with the symptoms of the crisis that their children displayed due to them having endured such pain and suffering.

6.2.13. Support systems

In this study, the issues of support systems elicited various ideas and perceptions of what past support was like, what current type of support is like, and what future support should be like in order to help women integrate into an abuse free life.

The participants in the study provided accounts of how people understood their situation, what support women needed and what women could do to prevent abuse. Families were identified as an important source of support for women in abusive relationships. Some women who are from abusive relationships often turned to their families for support. Some of the women received the support and others did not. Some of the women used this support structure as a place to go to, when the abuse at home became intolerable. They also reported that although families are an important support structure, it also placed these family members in danger as they were often at the centre of the abuse.

For example, in the following case:

["I couldn't really go to them because they were threatened previously by him with firearms and where he would phone them and swear them and threaten them." (J)]

Contrary, C and J described the difficult role they were put in by family members. Their responses ranged from being hostile, to that of being unsympathetic and offering no help or support. C described how she went to her husband's family and they refused to do anything or offer any support to her although they knew of the abuse.

["Why are you'll keeping her because they are having problems? Why you'll getting involved and they wanted us to, if my husband hit me, I must shut my mouth and stay and that I couldn't keep quiet. I must just take the hiding." (C)]

["His side family kept on cutting up and saying No, do you know he works very hard because he is a builder by trade, so uuhh you must understand." (J)]

J further mentioned that her parents were of no assistance as she complained to them many times and told them that she wanted to divorce her husband but they were totally against this idea. They told her that divorce was a taboo in her culture and she had to do what was right in the eyes of her family and culture even if it was torture. J mentioned that she felt lonely and isolated and although she was a grown woman, a mother and a wife, in reality she felt like a 'nobody'.

Neighbours and friends have emerged as a support system that fulfils a peripheral function, since domestic violence continues to be viewed as a private affair. The participants explained that their neighbours and friends played a significant role in offering them solace and support.

["I had another friend you know, and I should tell her. I had another friend and I used to go there to my neighbours house." (C)]

["I did tell one person who was my best friend....she was on my side and uuhh she felt very sorry for me." (S)]

However, support systems have been questioned by K and S as a result of the negative experiences that they had with the service providers. Supportive services are the main component of the healing processes for survivors of intimate violence, in order for both women and children, to afterward function effectively within the community (Walker, 1984; Berry, 2000; Jewkes and Abrahams, 2001). Even though most of the women wanted to leave their abusive partners they had no choice but to remain, due to their financial circumstances and a lack of support systems. Most of them were unemployed, had no formal education or training in any trade and came from poverty stricken backgrounds.

Not having any means to support themselves, participants found themselves in a very compromising position. Hence the cyclic nature of domestic violence continued as they had no alternative but to return to their intimate abusive partners. All the women who participated in the study felt that there was a dire lack of long-term public services available to abused women.

These long term public services were identified as having more safe house counsellors as well as accommodation that would allow them to stay for longer periods so that they could have sufficient time in which to gain confidence in themselves and make the long walk of freedom. It is because of the lack of long term support structures that are readily available to abused women that they often find themselves returning to the abuser.

If these services were effective and offered them sufficient protection, many of the women felt that they would not have to return to the abuser and that they could make a fresh start of their lives. It is apparent that there is no 'quick fix' solution to the problem.

Furthermore, some of the participants spoke about their disappointment and resentment toward the police and social workers. K and S reported a lack of interest from police officials to become involved in intimate partner violence. They felt that the police service is ill equipped and lacks the skills to deal with the sensitive nature of intimate partner abuse. It was also reported that in some instances, the police collaborated with the abuser as they themselves were corrupt. Even though the policemen witnessed the abuse, they did not offer them any support. However, two of the participants reported that they were satisfied with the assistance that they had received from the police.

"Uuhh, the policemen are so underpaid so that they would do anything for money, even if it means lying to the person who is being accused." (S)

K and S were disappointed about the way in which the welfare and social workers had dealt with them. According to some of the women, the social workers main aim was to keep the women together as a family, and for her to remain with the abuser. Reported comments included:

["Well, uhhmm, as for the welfare uuhh, they always try to keep the family together at any cost and uuhh, they always say marriage is not a bed of roses." (S)]

[“As a person to be quite honest with you uhhmm, I’m really disappointed about uhhh, the justice system. Uhhh, things the extremes I went through last year. If I had only gotten the help then in October, I wouldn’t be pregnant right now with this child, and there wouldn’t be another child to bring into this sinful world to suffer. I just think that they should stick to their word when they say uhhmm, when they ask abused women to leave their homes and take over, take the children with them who are being abused. They should really go all out to help them and not eventually push them back into the arms of the abuser and make it seem that the uhhh perpetrator is the victim, not the victim is the perpetrator.” (K)]

6.2.14. Family history of abuse

During the interviews, some of the women tried to make sense of their partner’s behaviour. Three of the women spoke about their partner’s family history, perceiving it to be the catalyst for their partner’s violent behaviour. From some of the women’s experiences in the study, the family and the role played by the family appear to have an impact on the life experiences of men. It impacts on the ideas and values adopted by men. This is how two participants perceived the role of the family to be contributing factors to the abuse that they suffered in their relationships.

[“He has been brought up badly. He comes from a very poor family. His father never took care of him.” (C)]

["His mother, his father has done it to his mother; his brothers had done it to their wives. Ok. He's done it previously to his ex-wives and now he's doing it to me" (K)]

Some women in the study believed that the family plays an important role in the way men and women perceive their role in the family relationships. It appears that the men in the above quotes have been influenced negatively, by their own experiences in their families. As described, they were mostly exposed to abuse and violence in their families and therefore it carried over to their own families.

It has been argued that partner abuse is a learned behaviour that can be acquired on the basis of modeling, which might account for its transmission from generation to generation (Gelles & Straus, 1988 and Bandura cited in Salzinger et al., 2002). According to the literature on domestic violence demonstrates that it does tend to be learned in the home and had to be passed down between generations (Gelles & Straus, 1988). In this instance, the abusers own family upbringing has been stressed.

According to the social learning theory, abusive behaviour is learned from observing others being abusive (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Many women in the study mentioned that their husbands' family had a tendency to use violence. Abrahams (2002) states that when a male child grows up and experiences frustrations in adult life, particularly marriage, he will tend to use the violent behaviour he learned in childhood to solve the matter.

6.2.15. Fantasies of harming their partner

A salient theme that emerged whilst interviewing the participants was that many of the participants fantasized about harming their abusive partners. M, S and J reported to having vivid fantasies of harming their partners. It also helped them cope for a short while. They reported that this gave them a sense of solace and satisfaction for the moment. Two of the women reported that no matter how much hurt and pain, their partners put them through, the thought of killing their partners did not cross their minds.

[“If the man didn’t come home I used to lock up everything and I used to just think, I used to get myself done up and I used to think uuhh, one phone call then I must go maybe it’s the Police found a dead body. There were other times I used to just think you know I should rather just put something in his food.” (J)]

[“Sometimes when he was drunk and sleeping on the bed, I would hold his nose and mouth, but then I was scared if he got up. Sometimes I used to even want to buy poison and kill him.” (M)]

[“I thought about, at times maybe if I could kill him...cyanide crossed my mind....you would think like a criminal.” (S)]

6.2.16. Impact of the interview

Many of the participants expressed that this was, in fact the first time that they had felt comfortable about talking and relating their experiences. Most of the participants mentioned that they felt a sense of relief by opening up and sharing their stories. At least two of the participants expressed that they felt as though a weight had been lifted off their shoulders. It was perceived that talking about the event was initially difficult, but as the interview progressed, many of the women started feeling relaxed and opened up. Some of the quotes made by the participants are as follows:

["I feel good about it. I haven't spoken to anybody in a long time about my past. I feel very good and I think whatever I told, whatever it came out is good. It made me feel good about it." (C)]

["Uhhmm, it always helps to talk to someone about it and it releases the load off your chest. I feel much better, I feel at ease and somehow I don't feel ashamed and embarrassed talking to you." (K)]

["Yes it has and uhhh, I think millions of ways. Uhhmm, it has allowed me , I, I actually thought I closed off this 24 years but it has given me a chance to uhhh, release myself by expressing what I went through." (J)]

It is evident from the above quotations, that the women in the study felt that by just talking to someone in general, it helped them alleviate the negative feelings they gained through their abusive experience. It is important and pertinent to take cognizance of the fact that by simply talking and opening up about their painful past, the women in the study expressed that they felt a sense of relief. The interview allowed the women to give vent to built up anger that may have been an obstacle to the healing process that they must embrace upon in order to move on with their lives.

This study highlights the lack of support systems in place for abused women. All the women in the study were living in the safe house during the time of the interview. Most of them felt a sense of relief talking to the interviewer which clearly mirrors the importance of the lack of counsellors available to listen to them or share their experiences.

6.3. Implications

It is evident that the emergent themes in this research study are central to the experiences of women in abusive relationships. The following section provides an insight into some of the more pressing issues as raised by the participants which could assist health professionals, non governmental organizations and the criminal justice system in improving the level of service and empathy that they may offer to abused women.

6.3.1. Research

Direct qualitative research of abused women who were victims of intimate partner abuse is possible. Although, initially reluctant to talk, the women were willing to participate in the study under certain conditions, including confidentiality and privacy. Instead of relying on quantitative research, the qualitative approach succeeds in opening human experience to empirical study and provides a richer understanding of the phenomenon of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationships.

This study has been conducted in order to have a better understanding of the experiences of women in intimate abusive relationship, why they stay, how they cope with the abuse and the role of the support systems. The study has highlighted concepts previously identified, but it has provided greater clarity with regard to the thought process that women experience when making decisions to leave an abusive relationship.

6.3.1. Societal level

This study illustrates the point that raising public awareness about raising the non-tolerance of women abuse is imperative. We need to empower women so that they are able to recognize the different types of intimate partner abuse to deal with it, empower them to be in a position to deal with intimate partner abuse and finally empower them so that they have adequate information and knowledge about the alternatives available to them when confronted with intimate partner abuse.

To alleviate the mistreatment and/or violence against women, the following should be considered. Firstly, victims of abuse should seek the assistance of professionals (social workers, units dealing with abused women, psychologists) in embarking on an awareness campaign. The focus of the campaign should make people aware that the problem exists more frequently than they care to believe and by breaking the silence they can get involved in the campaign and this will enable them to make life saving changes to their lives.

Traditional views of male dominance and patriarchy have to be vigorously challenged by such campaigns. Perceptions and stereotypes of relationships between men and women should, in appropriate circumstances, be discarded altogether or alternatively, they should be modified so as to ensure that equality between men and women are maintained at all times. All women, regardless of whether or not they are victims of intimate partner abuse, should be made aware of their rights through these campaigns. These workshops will endeavour to benefit both sexes and men should be encouraged to attend and participate in these campaigns.

Children should be taught to respect women and the ideology of equality between their parents should be inculcated in their mindsets from a very early age. Children must grow with this mentality and in an environment conducive to encouraging these perspectives and attitudes towards women. It is in this regard that the school which operates as an important socializing institution, should play a far more prominent role in carrying forward this culture of thinking.

6.3.2. Organizational response

It is clear that there is a desperate need to greatly improve the practical resources available to women who experience abuse. These include, inter alia, the dire need for more assessable long-term safe houses for women who are victims of abuse. Individual as well as group counselling should be made compulsory for victims of abuse as well as for the abuser.

Skills training and development should be improved, so as to empower abused women thereby restoring their self-confidence, their self-worth and independence and ultimately in assisting them in enabling them to be able to sustain themselves and their families.

Family physicians are an important resource to women, who are victims of abuse. Family physicians are obliged to treat patients holistically, which includes psychological care and treatment. However, many physicians are hesitant to ask about abuse because they feel it is beyond their control. Family physicians working hand in hand with the other support systems have the ability to make an impact to make a positive impact and to act as caring and healing resources for abused women, helping them in their journey from violence.

The attitudes of police officials in the management of cases of intimate partner violence perpetuate secondary victimization. Responses from the women in the study included secondary victimization (unsympathetic, disbelieving and inappropriate responses) that they received from society at large and the criminal justice system. Resources should thus be allocated for the ongoing training of police officials so that they not only understand but are able to enforce the domestic violence legislation. Furthermore, gender sensitivity within the South African Police Services should be prioritized to help alleviate stereotypes that still exist when dealing with issues relating to domestic violence. Victims of abuse should be treated with respect and empathy at all times. It is contended that an increase in the number of police women in the police force, coupled with the relevant education in dealing with victims of abuse will go a long way in addressing these issues.

The impact of domestic violence on children has been highlighted in this study. An integrated strategy is essential for both women and children to deal effectively with the psychological effects of domestic violence. Support services should be linked to the Court. The Court process should be streamlined. It should strive to provide victims and their families with immediate and necessary protection against the abuse.

The socio-economic position of women within the South African Society does not enable women to break free from the violence that they are subjected to in their homes. The South African Government has committed itself to gender equality. This is a remarkable step in empowering women and addressing the wrongs of the past.

Further steps should be taken in addressing the imbalances created of the past by rolling out a national strategy whose functions would be primarily aimed at addressing violence against women.

6.3.3. Psychological intervention

The attitudes of healthcare professionals, to whom women turn to for help, has a significant role to play in determining whether or not women will seek help or change their ways of coping in a situation of abuse. One of the most important steps, in the right direction is to ask about the abuse.

It is postulated that when healthcare professionals such as psychologists and social workers initiate these discussions, they are able to advise their clients that the problem is not one which is shameful, demeaning or insignificant to talk about and that the client's discomfort and reaction to victimization are rational and normal. This would certainly create a situation in which victims would feel comfortable enough to open-up and seek help.

It is contended that, encouraging women to remain in abusive relationships is a controversial subject. Some women may never be protected whilst they remain in the relationship, and others may experience changing patterns of violence. Counselling services must endeavour to explore and adapt models of couple therapy, for those who wish to continue in their relationships.

6.4. Limitations

Although the present study has highlighted important aspects of the experiences amongst abused women, the applicability of the findings to the broader society is questionable. However, while the outcome of this study is not generalizability of results, but rather a deeper understanding of the experiences battered women from their perspectives, it is recommended that a larger study of this nature be undertaken so as to make the findings more applicable to a larger society.

Furthermore, all the participants in this study belonged to the Indian ethnic group. This was largely a function of the fact that during the period of data collection, all the residents at the shelter were in fact of Indian ethnicity. Due to time constraints I was not allowed the opportunity to wait and select for members from other race groups. It is therefore recommended that a study of this nature be extended to other ethnic groups as well.

6.5. Summary

This study examined the experiences of abused women in intimate relationships. The phenomenological method of analysis has been utilized in the study. The sample consisted of six females, all of whom were between the ages of 18 – 55 years old. All of the participants were South African women of Indian origin.

The development of ethical issues (informed consent, confidentiality and privacy) was specifically traversed in detail, and was pinnacle to the study.

The significant findings were as follows:

All of the participants in study were victims in intimate abusive relationships.

All the participants experienced shock and numbness, as the initial reaction to the abuse.

All the participants interviewed, reported physical violence as a common occurrence in their intimate relationships. It was found that serious, inhuman and atrocious; forms of physical violence were inflicted on most of the participants, which constitutes to grievous bodily harm. This highlights the seriousness and life threatening acts of abuse that the victims had to endure regularly.

The use of verbal abuse featured strongly in M, C, K, S and J's accounts. It was found that the abuser systematically degraded the women's feelings of self-worth, through verbal attacks. This was used as a way to control and dominate their female partners to comply with their wishes.

The abuser also enforced social and financial isolation on their partners. The use of isolation increased the abusers control over the women in the study. Friendships and family ties were destroyed which resulted in the woman becoming emotionally dependent on the abuser. Furthermore, most of the women in the abusive relationships were not just only isolated, but they were also entrapped. This form of entrapment is deemed to be a devastating form of psychological control that the abuser has over his victim.

Some of the participants were also financially dependent on their partners. They expressed that their partners had absolute control over the family income. Since, the abusers had greater access to financial resources; they were in a position to control the women.

The participants interviewed related their experiences of financial instability and dependence on their abusive partners. Three of the women intimated that once their 'stay' at the Safe House was over, they have no other alternatives available to them, but to return to their abusers.

Intimidation and fear were salient themes which threaded throughout the participants' accounts. It was found that abusers employ a variety of emotionally and psychologically controlling behaviours which are designed to frighten, control and intimidate their partners. This included the use of threats of physical abuse, which dominated the participant's accounts. Participants reported that their partners used a variety of threats to force their demands and gain compliance.

A perusal of the literature shows that threats are used as a way of demonstrating power and superiority over women, through the use of emotional abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Bart & Moran, 1993; Berry 2000). The participants' accounts revealed that their relationships were characterized by domination and control.

A sense of helplessness and hopelessness was also found to exist in all the participants' interviews. It was evident from the women's descriptions of the humiliation and degradation that they endured, that the abuser had used various controlling tactics, such as constant verbal attacks and actions designed to break their spirit and destroy their self-esteem and self-image.

These findings are substantiated in the literature and reveal that emotionally controlling behaviours serve to reduce the victim's status by lowering the victim's self-concept and self esteem, thus rendering them more easily controlled by the abuser (Liedeman, 2002). The participants' low self-esteem, coupled with the social and financial isolation enforced by their partners, meant that the women were 'cut' out from external sources of support such as their family and friends. This reinforced their sense of helplessness about their situations and thus rendered them even more emotionally and financially dependent on their partners.

A further theme that emerged strongly during the interviews was the anger and resentment that the participants felt towards their abusers as a result of the abuse that they were subjected to over the years. Anger has been reported to be a predominant reaction to abuse. Some of the participants reported that they wanted to retaliate by hurting their abuser in the way that he had hurt them. It emerged that after a long period of abuse, these participants expressed immense anger, towards their abusers. However, underlying this anger is a deep hurt and pain that they bear and live with as they claim that they were abused by the very people that claimed to love and care for them.

A salient theme which emerged, whilst interviewing the participants was that many of the participants, fantasized about harming their abusive partners. J and S mentioned that these fantasies gave them a sense of solace and gratification for the moment. The fantasies of harming her husband made M feel as sense of relief. She felt that if her husband would die then her children and her could live in 'peace'.

Symptoms of depression were found to exist in varying degrees amongst the participants. The most common symptom of depression was social ideation, social withdrawal, loss of self-esteem and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

During the interviews, C and K tried to make sense of their partner's behaviour. C and K spoke about their partner's family history, perceiving it to be a determining antecedent to their partner's violent behaviour.

6.5. Conclusion

This study has attempted to explore the experiences and reasons to why women remain in abusive relationships and has highlighted the significant themes revelatory of those experiences.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The issue of violence against women is far from over and remains, under-debated. South Africans can proudly boast with strict laws against perpetrators of violence and top presidential staff attempting to curb the problem. It is contended that regardless of how impressive the legislation is promulgated in our country is regarded to be, it remains ineffective and frugal, unless the people who are governed by this legislation experience a metamorphosis in their mindsets.

The thinking that should be inculcated in young minds from an impressionable age should be geared toward giving credence and 'breathing life' into the legislation, thereby discrediting stereotypes and false perceptions that women are inferior to men. Adolescence represents a critical point in the development of intimate relationships and presents an opportunity to inform youth about healthy, non-violent relationships. Interventions must provide support for men and women and must focus on enhancing self-esteem, building confidence, and developing non-violent conflict resolution skills. Education ought to promote a culture of sexual rights, where sexual relations are free of coercion and violence and are characterized by mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

Equality between the sexes should be at the root of the education that youngsters pursue. Much work on empowerment has focused on girls only. As the lives of girls and boys are intimately interwoven, successful intervention must include working with males and females, sometimes together and sometimes separately. This may help reshape the construction of gender roles.

Adults should be guided and made more knowledgeable about women's rights, with the emphasis being placed on the principle that that abuse against women and children is not acceptable by any standard. Society must accept the cyclic nature of domestic violence and the fact that children who grow up in such environments live out the phrase that, 'the abused become abusers'.

Abused women choose to remain in abusive relationships for various reasons, which have been traversed and explained in the study. Furthermore, the experiences of abuse women revealed that the severity of the abuse escalates rapidly into torture, attempted murder and assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm. Long-term psychological harm and damage is experienced by these women in intimate abusive relationships.

This study has given abused women a voice in which to shatter the silence that has encapsulated their minds and has revealed their innermost and darkest encounters of physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse that they endured, at the hands of *their intimate partners*.

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APPENDIX 2

ARYAN BENEVOLENT HOME COUNCIL

13 September 2006

ATTENTION: THE SUPERVISOR

Dear Sir / Madam

Student – Rooksana Rajkumar

This is to certify that Ms Rooksana Rajkumar undertook her research at the ABH V J Kara Respite Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence.

Ms Rajkumar interviewed Victims of Domestic Violence who are residing temporary at the respite Centre.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ms Rajkumar for her time and input in the programme.

We wish her all the best for the future and may all her aspirations be fulfilled.

Yours faithfully

**MRS RHONA CHETTY
PRINCIPAL
CHILD CARE SERVICES**

APPENDIX 3

CONSENT FORM

I,, hereby declare that I was not coerced into participating in this research study. Ethical issues were discussed with me, with regards to confidentiality and anonymity. I was informed of the nature of the study and its purpose. I am also aware that I am free to decline from participation at any time from this research study.

Participants Signature:

Researchers Signature:

APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. I would like you to describe to me your first incident of abuse. Everything you say or think is important no matter how unimportant or trivial you may think. Please take your time. There is no time limit and you may start when ever you are ready.
2. How did you understand what happened?
 - * Dangerous, threatening, irrelevant, did you think it would happen again, whose fault was it, did you feel you had control over the abuse (probe around these issues)
 - *What role did you think you played in the abuse?
3. What feeling did it invoke in you?
4. How did you react to the first few incidents? /What did you do about the first few incidents?
 - *Behaviour changes to prevent the abuse
 - *Tell anyone / get help
 - *What did you think would happen if you told anyone or got help?
What were the reasons for not telling others and not getting help?
5. What did you imagine would happen if people found out about the abuse?
6. What kind of help / resources did you think you had available to you?
 - *Probe around self-help, family, friends, legal, shelters, crisis centers.

*Did you believe you could get help? From whom?

7. Probe around messages women received about marriage, the role of a wife, the role of a mother and children's needs

*What prevented you from taking action in the beginning?

*After the first few abusive attacks, what did you think your partner felt towards you?

*How did this influence you coping with the abuse?

*How did you feel about him?

*How did this influence your coping?

8. Transition, current understanding, and coping strategies

*As the relationship progressed how did your beliefs / views you held about your.

*Partner

*The abuse

*Seeking help (what got you to take action to stop the abuse / end the relationship?)

9. What made you seek help in the first instance?

*Who did you tell first?

*What reactions did you get?

*How did this change affect the ways in which you coped with the abuse?

*How do you understand the violence now?

*Ways of coping? (What purpose did they serve / how did they help? Probe around these issues)

*Minimizing the abuse

*More religious

*Denial of victimizer

*Alcohol and drug use

*Seeking outside assistance

10. Fantasies of harming your partner

*Describe fantasies

*Did you try to carry them out (why not?)

*What did having these fantasies do for you?

11. Currently what do you think your partner feels towards you?

*Describe your current feelings towards him?

* How does this affect the manner in which you deal with the abusive situation?

12. What do you hope to gain from reaching out for help?

*Help to leave the relationship (probe)

*Help to stop the violence but continue with the relationship (probe)

13. How has this abuse changed / impacted on you?

*Probe around the role of religious beliefs – its influence on coping strategies

*Probe around attitudes of service providers and its influence on coping strategies

*Probe around impact of the interview on participant?

APPENDIX 5

KEY TO TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. No editing of interviews were taken.

(Pseudonyms) Each participant was given a letter of the alphabet in brackets through out the text to identify a specific woman.

.....Omitted material

APPENDIX 6

PARTICIPANT 4

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

NAME:	Kate (K)
SEX:	Female
AGE:	22
RACE:	Indian
MARITAL STATUS:	Single
YEARS IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP:	7

NATURAL MEANING UNITS

1. K was going out with her partner while she was still staying at home with her mother.
2. K was unaware that her partner was much older than her.
3. K decided to take a taxi home because it was getting late.
4. K's partner was very angry.
5. He punched her and pulled her hair.
6. K was dragged into his car.
7. The next morning he covered it up with flowers.
8. He apologized and said it would not happen again.
9. K believed him.
10. K did not understand what was happening.

11. Her partner gave her the impression that it was not safe to travel in taxis.
12. He made her believe that she could not trust anyone, except him.
13. He loved her.
14. He got stressed.
15. K did not feel that the situation was threatening.
16. K did not think it would happen again.
17. K made a mistake by taking a taxi and not waiting for him.
18. The problem could have been avoided.
19. K saw the abuse as an ongoing thing.
20. K told her partner that she was not a punching bag.
21. He used to get more aggressive and assault her more severely.
22. K could not say a word.
23. Her partner would hit and punch her.
24. He would carry her and throw her.
25. K's partner is three times the size of her.
26. K was afraid of him.
27. When ever K ran away from home, her partner would always find her.
28. He would harass her until she told him who helped her escape.
29. He tried to run her down with a car.
30. He would make her run after the car.
31. K's situation got worse.
32. K tried to leave him many times.
33. Eventually, K left her home and moved in with her partner.

34. He lied to K that her mother charged him with rape.
35. K believed him.
36. However, K did not really understand the terms.
37. K was not allowed to have contact with her mother.
38. The situation got worse.
39. K then found out her partner was married.
40. He denied it.
41. His wife kept on phoning K.
42. K had reason to believe that her partner was still in a relationship with his wife.
43. K was staying alone with her partner in Westville.
44. He beat her practically every day.
45. K could not question him about anything as it would always end up in a fight.
46. K was miserable.
47. K's partner had a security guard watching over her.
48. The security guard confronted her about the abuse.
49. The security guard agreed to help her escape.
50. K did not have any money.
51. The security guard gave her R20, 00 and helped her take a bus to Chatsworth.
52. K only disclosed the abuse to the security guard and her mother.
53. K went to her mother's house.
54. K's mother told her the truth, about why she laid charges against her partner.
55. K's partner was lying to her about her family.

56. K found out that partner was married, twice.
57. He had five children, 3 from the first marriage and 2 from the second marriage.
58. K also found out that her partner was involved in fraud.
59. K's partner threatened her mother with a firearm.
60. He threatened her mother to drop the charges that she had against him.
61. He threatened to kill her daughter if she did not drop the charges.
62. K was embarrassed about her situation.
63. K's partner was much older than she was and lied to her about his age.
64. He also lied that he had never been married.
65. K only found out about his marriages after she was in a relationship with him.
66. K did not want to lay charges against him. K could not stand the sight of him being in a dirty place.
67. K did not tell anyone about the abuse because she thought that she would be a laughing stock.
68. K was too embarrassed and ashamed to talk about it.
69. K's education was very important to her.
70. K thought that since she made a mistake, she might as well stay in the relationship with her partner.
71. K felt that since she was with her partner, she might as well live with it.
72. K had slept with her partner.
73. Her virginity was important to her.
74. K did not have friends after she met her partner.

75. K's partner told her that her friends were bad, and influenced her in a bad way.
76. He isolated her from everyone.
77. He isolated her from family and friends.
78. K could not turn to her family because her partner had threatened them with a firearm.
79. He used to phone her family and swear them.
80. Her family was scared and did not want to get involved.
81. They blamed K for the whole mess.
82. K's family was afraid of her partner.
83. K agreed that her mistake was not reporting the case to the police.
84. K's partner got used to the idea of using her as a 'punching bag'.
85. He always apologized to her after the abuse.
86. K always forgave her partner and believed it would be the last incident of abuse.
87. K became immune to the abuse and adapted to the situation.
88. He was the first man she had slept with.
89. He took away her self-respect and dignity.
90. He took away her family from her.
91. K prayed that the violence would stop and it would be the last incident.
92. K loved her partner.
93. He would go out of his way to apologise, by taking her out for supper.
94. He would cook dinner to spoil her.

95. As long as there was peace K coped.
96. The abuse became a way of life.
97. K kept quiet to avoid the abuse.
98. K did not want to anger him or frustrate him
99. K's situation just got worse.
100. K felt there was no way out.
101. K ran away from home many times, but her partner always found her.
102. He always managed to track her down.
103. He would forcefully take her back home.
104. The abuse would continue.
105. He would kick and boot her.
106. He would accuse her of sleeping with other men.
107. He would send messages to her cell-phone and make it seem that she was receiving messages from another man.
108. He would hit her.
109. K later found out, that it was her partner who was sending the messages.
110. He would beat her severely.
111. He would read the messages on the cell phone and get angry and abuse her.
112. K never had affairs with other men.
113. He would really abuse her.
114. He would hit her until she could not move.
115. The worst incident was after she gave birth to her first daughter.
116. K was still recovering from the stitches.

117. K telephoned her partner and left a message for him to buy napkins for the baby.
118. His phone was on voicemail.
119. K left a message on his cell phone.
120. K left a message, 'why aren't you answering your cell phone?'
121. He came home late and was very angry.
122. He locked the room door.
123. He started hitting and slapping her.
124. He put her on the floor and carried on kicking her.
125. K had just given birth 7 days, before that.
126. He didn't care and he just carried on hitting her.
127. K's mother heard all the screaming and fighting.
128. K's mother begged her partner to stop hitting her daughter.
129. The baby was screaming and crying.
130. He eventually opened the door and her mother took the baby out of the room.
131. K's mother then tried to calm the partner down.
132. He then went into the kitchen and started breaking dishes.
133. K had marks and bruises all over her body.
134. He broke all the dishes and then left the house.
135. K was so grateful that her mother was there with her.
136. K was in a lot of pain.
137. Her mother saw to the baby.
138. The next morning K packed all her stuff and decided to leave her partner.

139. K's mother wanted to take her to the police station.
140. K's mother insisted K open a charge against her partner.
141. K did not want to open a charge against her partner.
142. K then went to her grand mother's house.
143. K was too embarrassed to go to the police station.
144. K had blue marks all over her body and her face was swollen.
145. A security guard helped them get to her grand mothers house.
146. K never had fantasies of harming her partner.
147. K mentioned that although he did the worse things to her, she couldn't see herself doing the same.
148. K would always pray that her partner would change.
149. K knows that her partner wants her and the children back.
150. K knows that her partner only wants her back to control her.
151. If she goes back to him, he will kill her.
152. K is afraid of her partner.
153. K believes that he even has the tendency to kill.
154. K is currently nine months pregnant.
155. K does not want to have anything to do with her partner.
156. He has put her and her child through a lot of pain and violence.
157. K believes that if her partner is not around, there will be no one to control her.
158. K does not have to answer to anyone.
159. She is not scared at the safe house.

160. She is not always living in fear.
161. K can do what ever she wants, and have some peace.
162. K wants to be happy.
163. Even if K's partner gets professional help, it will not help.
164. He has a past of violence and abuse.
165. He is crazy, mad and violent.
166. His father abused his mother.
167. He abused his ex-wives.
168. His brothers also abuse their wives.
169. K left her partner many times.
170. He apologized to her many times.
171. The abuse would carry on, and get worse each time.
172. Sorry is just a five letter word with no meaning.
173. Her partner even lied to the psychologist.
174. He would cry in front of the welfare officers.
175. K knows that if she goes back to her partner, the situation will not change.
176. The abuse will start all over again.
177. K does not want to go back living like that.
178. K is very disappointed with the justice system.
179. She did not receive the desired help from them.
180. If she received the proper help, she would not have went back to her partner.
181. K would not be pregnant again.
182. The justice system should provide more services for abused women.

183. The justice system should not push abused women back, into their abusers hands.
184. The justice system only tried to reconcile her, with her partner.
185. K feels good talking about her experiences during the interview.
186. K feels like a weight has been lifted off her shoulders.

TRANSFORMED AND CONDENSED THEMES

1. K met her partner while she was still living at home with her mother. K was unaware that he was much older than her. (1, 2)
2. K first incident of abuse started when she decided to take a taxi home from school because it was getting late. This made her partner very angry. He punched her and pulled her hair, and then dragged her into his car. (3, 4, 5, 23, 24, 108, 110, 110, 113, 123, 124, 133)
3. The next day he apologized, for what he had done to her, and gave her flowers. K accepted his apology and believed him. (7, 8, 9, 35, 84, 85, 86)
4. K's partner gave her the impression that it was not safe to travel in taxis and that she should not trust anyone. At the time, she was very young and did not really understand what was happening at the time. (10, 11, 12, 36)

5. K believed that her partner loved her and was very concerned about her, and that is why he abused her. Her partner was just stressed at the moment, but he loved her and was concerned about her. (13, 14)
6. K did not feel that the situation was dangerous. (15)
7. K made a mistake by taking a taxi home. If she waited for her partner the situation could have been avoided. (16, 17, 18)
8. However, the abuse became an ongoing thing. Her partner got more aggressive and the violence became more severe each time. K could not say anything to her partner, and this frustrated her. Her partner was 3 times the size of her. (19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 105)
9. K was very afraid of her partner and lived in constant fear. (26)
10. K ran away from her partner many times but he always managed to track her down. He would harass her until she told him who helped her escape. He wanted a detailed explanation of her escapes. (27, 28)
11. K's partner abused her emotionally. He would humiliate her by making her run after the car. He also tried to run her down with the car. (29, 30, 31)

12. Eventually, K left her mothers house and moved in with her partner. He had lied to K that her mother charged him with statutory rape. (32, 33, 34, 59, 64, 65)
13. K believed him although she did not understand the terms at the time. K was not allowed to have any contact with her mother. (37, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 90)
14. K found out that her partner was married. When she confronted him, he denied it. However, K kept on getting phone calls from her partner's wife. (39, 40, 41, 42)
15. K was staying alone with her partner in Westville. He was beating her practically every day. K could not say a word and this made her helpless. (43, 44, 45, 46)
16. K's partner had a security guard watching over her so that she could not escape. The security guard confronted her about her the abuse and agreed to help her escape. K did not have any money. The security guard gave her R20.00 and helped her, to take a bus to Chatsworth. (47, 48, 49, 50, 51)
17. K went to her mother's house. K found out that her partner had been lying to her. K also found out that he was married twice and had 5 children from the respective marriages. K's mother told her, that her partner had threatened her mother with a firearm to drop the charges; she had opened up against him. He has also threatened to kill K if she did not drop the charges. (53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 66, 78, 101, 102, 103)

18. K did not want to open a charge against her partner, because she felt sorry for him and still loved him although he abused her. K also did not want to disclose the abuse to anyone because she was embarrassed and ashamed, and did not want to be a 'laughing stock.' (60, 61, 62, 63)

19. K believed that since she already slept with her partner, she might as well stay with him because her virginity was important to her. (64, 65)

20. K did not have friends after she met her partner. He isolated K from all her family and friends. He told her that they were all bad, and influenced her in a bad way. (74, 75, 76, 77)

21. K could not turn to her family for help because her partner had threatened them previously and warned them to stay away from her. They were scared of her partner. Her family also blamed her for the mess that she got herself into. (80, 81, 82)

22. K agreed that it was her fault for not reporting the abuse to the police. K's situation just got worse. It was a cycle of abuse. K became immune to the abuse and appealed to the situation. K became helpless and frustrated. (88, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 104)

23. K's partner had taken everything away from her including her self respect and dignity. (89)
24. K still loved her partner. After the abuse, he would always spoil her by cooking a nice dinner for her. (92, 93, 94)
25. The abuse would continue and he would accuse her of having affairs with other men. K mentioned that her partner used to send her messages from his cell phone and make it seem that she was receiving messages from another man. He would then go through the messages and then start abusing her physically and emotionally. Her partner would beat her up until she could not move. (106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112)
26. The worst incident was when K had just given birth to a baby girl. K was still recovering from the stitches. (114, 115)
27. She telephoned her partner to buy napkins for the baby. His phone was on voice mail so she left a voice message. When he returned home, he was very angry with her and started screaming at her. He then started hitting her, and throwing her around the room. He did not even care that her stitches were opening. K's mother was there during the incident. She was pleading with him to stop hitting her daughter, but he did not listen.

28. When he eventually opened the door, K's mother took the baby out of the room and tried to calm her daughters' partner. J had marks and bruises all over her body and was in a lot of pain. (116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131)
29. After breaking all the dishes in the kitchen, K's partner left the house and did not return home. (132, 134)
30. The next morning K decided to leave the house with the baby. K's mother wanted to take her to the police station to lay a charge against her partner but J did not want to. K was too embarrassed to go to the police station because she had bruises all over her body and her face was swollen. (138, 139, 140, 141)
31. K never had fantasies of harming her partner. She could not hurt him or see him get hurt, no matter what he did to her. (146, 147)
32. K always prayed that her partner would change. (148)
33. K does not want to return to her abusive partner as she knows that he only wants to control her and abuse her. K is very afraid of her partner and believes that if she goes back to him she will definitely end up dead. (149, 150, 151, 152, 153)

34. K does not want to have anything to do with her partner. He has put her and her child through a lot of pain and hurt. She is much better without him.
35. At the safe house she does not constantly live in fear, and does not have anyone to control her. (155, 156, 157)
36. K believes that her partner will not change, even if he goes for professional help. He has lied and even cried to the social workers. (163)
37. K's partner comes from a family of violence. His father abused his mother. His brothers abused their wives and he even abused his ex-wives. (165, 166, 167)
38. K is disappointed with the way the justice system has handled her case, because she did not get the desired help from them. If she received the desired help, she would have not returned to her partner and she would not have been pregnant again. The justice system should provide more services for abused women. (178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183)
39. K feels good about talking about her experiences and feels that a weight has been lifted from her shoulders. (184, 185)