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**SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SELECTED ACADEMIC
INSTITUTIONS IN ZIMBABWE: NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE AND
RECOVERY**

by

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all female students who have experienced sexual violence and still managed to succeed in their higher education journeys. Moving from victimhood to survivorhood is heroism that takes strength and power. I also dedicate this thesis to my family and friends who supported me and prayed for me throughout my doctoral journey. A special dedication to my late parents, my mother Naziwaya Erika and father, Waison who believed in my efficacy to achieve academically from a tender age and encouraged me to achieve higher. To my elder sister Mainesi, a special dedication to you for your love, support, and time, and always being there to share my responsibilities when I was away from home. My beloved little niece Tafadzwa, you lessened the burden when you took up the household chores to make way for me to concentrate on my PhD thesis.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how female student survivors of sexual violence trauma construct their journeys of resilience and recovery. The study adopted the critical paradigm and a narrative approach to examine the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students in selected tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. The landscape of sexual violence underpins the background and rationale for this study. This study aimed to explore the narratives of the experiences of sexual violence and how these female student sexual violence survivors navigated their journeys of resilience and recovery. Narrative interviews and poetry were used to generate data. Snowball sampling was used to select eleven female students from six tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, who had survived sexual violence trauma. The theoretical framework drew on Relational Cultural Theory, underpinned by the concepts of connections and disconnections, mutuality, and growth-fostering relationships, and the four theses of Feminist Standpoint Theory: situated knowledge, epistemic advantage, strong objectivity and power relations.

A key finding that emerged was that participants' narratives revealed conflicting discourses of fate versus agency. The study also highlighted complexities of oppression, resistance, and empowerment. In addition, the study found that sexual violence was influenced by sustaining ecologies and spatial environment. Findings shed light on the notion of the 'Open cheque' syndrome which symbolised the harm that a culture of sexual entitlement poses to heterosexual relationships. Another finding was that survivors of sexual violence depended on networks of friends and trust as support systems. The study found that survivors experienced diverse forms of social capital in their journeys of resilience and recovery. The significant role of agency in the resilience and recovery of sexual violence was also highlighted in this study. Findings of this study revealed that recovery of sexual violence is a complex, non-linear journey or process.

This study contributes new knowledge to the fields of counselling and social justice, and to the fields of resilience and recovery of sexual violence. Society benefits from this study in various ways that include raising awareness for survivors to break the silence, thus, leading to advocacy

for understanding their experiences non-judgementally. The study also informs policy and practice hence promoting social change and justice while improving the mental health and well-being of the survivors. The study recommends that future research on sexual violence should concentrate on a homogenous variable, for instance, survivors of rape or child sexual abuse, or incest instead of studying sexual violence broadly. Further research could explore how familial relationships are valued in this ethnic group in order to find ways of changing some practices that are harmful to the female child in such cultural groups.

ABBREVIATIONS

A' level	Advanced level
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
Doc	Doctor
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FACT	Family AIDS Counselling Trust
FSNT	Female Students Network Trust
FST	Feminist Standpoint Theory
HIV	Human Immuno Virus
HOD	Head of Department
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MRCZ	Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
O' level	Ordinary level
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCT	Relational Cultural Theory
SAFE	Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation
SRC	Students' Representative Council
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ZIMSTATS	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

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CHAPTER ONE

EMBARKING ON THE ADVENTURE

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one single step. (Unknown)

1.1 Introduction

Sexual violence is common within communities worldwide and is a serious public health and human rights problem with both short- and long-term consequences on women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health (Sardina et al., 2021, Schneider & Hirsch, 2020). Although it is very common in conflict and humanitarian contexts (Stark et al., 2021), some evidence suggests that sexual violence does not spare based on gender, status, or age, as women, girls, men, and boys are all at risk (Edström, & Dolan, 2019, Von Hohendorff, 2019). The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2015) echoes the sentiments of Petersson and Plantin (2019), emphasising that sexual violence can have a profoundly devastating and painful impact on survivors. Furthermore, the WHO notes that such experiences can be exacerbated by various contexts, including intimate relationships, community settings, and situations of conflict, all of which can intensify the trauma and pain endured by survivors. In many contexts globally, the sensitivity of issues surrounding sexual violence, the stigmatisation of victims, and the possibility of sanctions from the community and society often result in underreporting (Dworkin et al., 2017; Henry & Adams, 2018). Sexual violence, both physical and psychological, has profound short and/or long-term effects on the health and wellbeing of victims and could leave psychological scars that may never heal (WHO, 2012).

The nature of sexual violence on females in general and university female students in particular, the multiple, intersecting influences that shape the experience of sexual violence, and the

complexities of the journeys of resilience and recovery are briefly discussed. I present the key research questions that framed the study. Finally, I provide some insight into each chapter in the thesis, then narrate my own story which underpins the rationale for the study from a personal perspective.

1.2 Background to the Study

1.2.1 Defining sexual violence

Understanding the issue of sexual violence becomes complex in that different contexts present it in varied ways. In some instances, the term is defined within the perception of the harms a certain form of sexual violence results in. These can either be minimised or magnified depending on the context (Egbegi et al., 2019). In simple terms, sexual violence is described to include both unwanted non-contact and contact sexual experiences (WHO, 2012, Chen et. al., 2020, Borumandnia, et al., 2020). These researchers further describe it as either contact or non-contact whereby contact sexual violence encompasses completed or attempted rape, sexual coercion, and kissing or fondling. Tarzia, et. al. (2017) and Krahe et al. (2021), agree on qualifying sexual violence as a form of violence because of the unwillingness of the victim to consent to the act which may not necessarily involve direct physical contact.

On another dimension, systematically, sexual violence can be considered as perpetrated by a rape culture, a system of developed attitudes among a people, their beliefs, messages, inequities, and acts that are viewed to support aggression and violence (Ontario Human Rights Code, 2019). Such acts can be defined under the five common forms that include rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment. Traditionally the common forms of sexual violence in most contexts are rape and sexual assault, whose terms are usually used

interchangeably although they are different. Both terms are meant to describe sexual aggression whereby an individual, particularly male, obtains sexual gratification without consent of the other party, although both sexes can commit the crime. As expressed in Vetten's (2017) view, in the South African legal context both acts have a form of force involved.

Generally, sexual assault is meant to describe those acts whereby one intentionally makes physical contact with the intimate body parts of the other without any consent while in rape there is forcible sexual intercourse (Chen et al., 2020). Where minors are involved, it is usually termed child sexual abuse. In other instances, children are groomed into sexual activities and this would be termed sexual exploitation. As in sexual harassment, verbal, non-verbal, cyber flashing, and indecent exposure of a sexual nature would consist of sexual violence. In recent years, more descriptions have been given to unwanted sexual contact that can constitute sexual violence, depending on the context. As such victims can give befitting meaning to their experience based on how it has impacted their physical or mental health. WHO (2021) further classifies sexual violence under intimate partner sexual violence (IPV) and non-intimate partner sexual violence (NIPV). Intimate partner sexual violence is referred to as that sexual act which is perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner within a marriage, co-habitation, or any other formal or informal union. In non-partner intimate sexual violence, the perpetrator is someone other than a current or former husband or male intimate partner and this violation has been experienced since the age of 15. The perpetrator, in this case, can be a friend, a relative, an acquaintance, or a stranger.

1.3 Situating the problem

The magnitude of sexual violence against females both globally and locally is alarming. To situate the problem and draw attention to the global and local impact of sexual violence on females in general, I present the statistical estimates of the 2018 WHO analysis of 2000-2018 prevalence data on 161 countries including all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which Zimbabwe is part. These estimates show that 1 in 3 (30%) women globally were sexually violated by either an intimate sexual partner or a non-intimate sexual partner or both. These statistics could just be the tip of the iceberg, since not all cases of sexual violence are reported for various reasons. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2019a) indicates that 11.6% of females within the age range of 15-49 years experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

The table below highlights the global, regional, and local statistical estimates on the prevalence of sexual violence against females between 2000 and 2018 (ages 15-49 years):

sexual violence against females between 2000 and 2018 (ages 15-49 years):

Table 1

Global, Regional, and Country statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence from 2000 -2018

Area	Lifetime	Past 12 months
Globally	27%	13%
Regional		
Sub-Saharan Africa	33%	20%
Local		
Zimbabwe	35%	18%

Note: Source (WHO, 2021)

The statistics seemed to soar during the COVID-19 lockdown. A study carried out in South Africa, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Zimbabwe indicates that there was a sudden rise in statistics of sexual violence when COVID-19 was declared (Uzobo & Ayinmoro, 2021). Uzobo and Ayinmoro (2021) highlight an increase in cases of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe, especially sexual violence against girls. In support of this assertion, a report by Madya et al. (2022) indicated that 4959 teenage girls fell pregnant during the lockdown periods in Zimbabwe due to long periods of closure of schools, colleges, and universities. The girls were confined to their homes where they had no access to agents of social control which included teachers and community members to whom they could disclose the violation. In some instances, females would fall prey to sexual violation due to poverty which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdown. Transactional sex, sexual exploitation, and what was referred to as ‘sextortion’ dominated the lockdown periods within the Zimbabwean context (Matiashe, 2020, New Zimbabwe, 2020). Particularly in Harare, the country’s capital city, transactional sex, sexual exploitation, and sextortion were highly documented at mobile water points and boreholes (Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation - SAFE, 2020, Matiashe, 2020, New Zimbabwe, 2020). Water barons at public boreholes in the city would demand sex from the females for them to be given priority of getting the ‘scarce commodity’.

Mashonaland West Regional Magistrates’ Court, for instance, recorded 161 sexual abuse cases perpetrated on girls from the tender age of six years between October 2013 and October 2014 (Mashonaland West Regional Courts records, 2015). The figure may seem small but may be considered too large for a social scientist in view of the psychological damage caused to each of the 161 children affected by sexual abuse. Comparing the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (2019), which show a decrease of 5% in incidences

of sexual violence among women aged 15-49 years with 18% in 2011, and 8% in 2016, this raises many questions about whether it was, or still is, a result of under-reporting due to various factors surrounding the issue.

Research suggests that in a patriarchal country such as Zimbabwe, sexual violence against females is a serious issue since traditional and religious beliefs cause women to be viewed as subordinates to men and disempowers women (Nesango, et al., 2022). It was against this background that the need to conduct research with female student survivors of sexual violence arose, in particular, to explore their resilience strategies and recovery pathways.

Global responses to gender issues and calls for the protection of women against sexual violence have been made from many quarters. Several conventions have been held focusing on the issue. In 1995, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked an important turning point for the global agenda on gender equality and women empowerment. Gender equality and women empowerment are critical issues under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Ramme, 2019, Boluk et al., 2019). Babu and Kusuma (2016) acknowledged that the persistence of violence against women even after 15 years of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) has undermined the progress of other MDGs, given its crippling effect on women's ability to contribute to and benefit from broader developmental processes. To meet the MDG goals, the government of Zimbabwe passed the Domestic Violence Act in 2006. This was meant to protect women and girls who had been victimised by their male counterparts and had not attained justice under the patriarchal system of society. In the section that follows I give the forms and contexts in which sexual violence occurs.

1.4 Forms and contexts of sexual violence

The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency report (2016) indicates that the forms of sexual violence that females experience range from extreme violence, gang rape, and insertion of objects (bottles and sticks) into the women's genitalia. As indicated before, long periods of closure of schools, colleges, and universities resulted in early marriages and early pregnancies. The report highlighted a rise in transactional sex, sex exploitation, and 'sextortion' against females. Female bodies were exchanged for access to water due to its scarcity in Zimbabwe's urban areas (SAFE, 2020, Matiashe, 2020, New Zimbabwe, 2020). Where child marriages were concerned, whether in urban or rural settings, the common factor was seen to be survival strategies amid the economic crisis that the country was facing (Sachiti, 2020, SAFE, 2020, Tshuma, 2021). These studies also found that 15-to 16-year-old girls would seek shelter at safe houses to evade early marriages imposed on them by parents and guardians. Girls who were victims of early marriages would often face abuse and violence perpetrated by their husbands (SAFE, 2020, Matiashe, 2020, Tshuma, 2020). UNFPA (2020a) also indicates that most calls for support and protection made to organisations during the COVID-19 lockdowns were from female victims of Gender Based Violence residing in urban areas while a few were from rural contexts.

Of great concern, is the sexual violence in academic institutions, such as universities and colleges, globally (Wood, et al., 2017, Holland & Cortina, 2017, Moylan & Javoroka, 2020). Documented evidence shows that transactional sex plays a key role in the development of heterosexual liaisons for men and women in tertiary institutions (Wentzell, 2014, Ranganathan et al., 2017, Bauermeister et al., 2017). Furthermore, sexual harassment has been documented where female students voluntarily fall prey to older people in positions of trust, such as teachers and lecturers, to obtain better grades, gain access to accommodation at the campus, obtain financial resources,

and other favours in exchange for sex (Bennet et al., 2007, Ene-Okechukwu & Anazonwu, 2020). As such, sexual violence may be viewed as a social construct depending on how the victim or survivor views it. In some instances, there is controversy in the construction of sexual violence. The perceived victim can at some point be the perpetrator when she is motivated by the desire for certain privileges and finds a way to trap the perceived perpetrator. As indicated by Venema (2019), police officers attested to being lied to about a sexual assault case. This gives another dimension to victims' construction of sexual violence. They might have motives to express anger, revenge, regret, generate sympathy with the perceived victim, draw attention where one feels neglected, have mental instability, or just gain leverage where custody of a minor during divorce proceedings is concerned. In such scenarios, the perceived victims could be the perpetrators.

In a research study on sexual harassment in Ghana and Tanzanian with female students in higher education, Morley (2011) cites sexual harassment as a hidden norm of organisational life that frequently remains unchallenged, and that can involve both actual and symbolic violence. Morley (2011) further describes violence as often hidden, silenced, and displaced. Similarly, Qaane (2018) cites loss and questioning of honour when women in Afghanistan speak out on cases of sexual harassment. Such scenarios confirm how hidden and concealed the aspect of sexual harassment is and remains with the survivor, exacerbating the psychological pain. Ssali, Namaganda, and Bisaso, (2021) in their study on sexual harassment carried out at a large East African university, attribute the non-reporting of sexual violence by victims to fear of victimisation, stigmatisation, or low self-esteem to pursue redress. Zimbabwe's academic institutions have not been spared from this demise of sexual violence against young women in higher education institutions (Dhlomo et al., 2012; Ncube, 2019). It is also evident that young women who are about to begin their tertiary studies often lack adequate life guidance and resources to cope with university life. This increases their

vulnerability to unscrupulous men who are keen to prey on them, for instance, their faculty professors (Karami et al., 2020). Mukeredzi (2018) reported that the high rate of sexual violence against university students resulted in concerted efforts by women's Non-Governmental Organisations to attempt to mitigate against such social ills; however, with little success. It is against this backdrop that female students at selected academic institutions were chosen for the study presented in this thesis. The aim of this study was to understand the complexities of survivors' journeys of resiliency and recovery.

1.5 The impact of sexual violence

The experience of sexual violence has been documented in research globally. It may take forms of physical, psychological, or neurological damage. Lev-Wiesel et al. (2018) and Blanco et. al. (2015) concur that sexual abuse can cause psychological and neurological damage in survivors, hence inhibiting positive development and psychological well-being. Sexual violence survivors may suffer frequent interpersonal, relationship, and sexual adjustment problems, alcohol and other substance abuse problems, as well as eating disorders (Robinson et al., 2019; Chaudhury et al., 2017, Thomas et al., 2021). Some studies have also shown that individuals who experience sexual violence, especially child sexual abuse, may encounter complex struggles in trying to live fulfilling lives (Twinley, 2017, Khan et al., 2018, Tsai et al., 2020). Consequently, when some survivors feel overwhelmed by the sexual violence trauma, female students drop out of school. This was revealed in Kaye-Tzadok and Davidson-Arad's, Tel Aviv's 2017 report. Hui and Constantino (2021) noted that each aspect of the life of a woman who has experienced sexual violence is changed following this undesirable experience. This means migration from a sexually abused life requires a transition from a seemingly normal life to one where the individual has to cope with the consequences of fear, terror, and devastation. Moreso, in some instances, sexual violence may

result in severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences. The effects may linger for a considerable period in the aftermath of the violence. (Josse, 2010). Due to related depression, Ullman et al. (2018) found that the subjects may end up engaging in substance abuse and other ill practices that have adverse impacts on the survivor's mental and physical health. If survivors have agency and they build resilience, recovery can be attained. Next, I discuss the concepts of resilience, agency, and recovery.

1.6 Resiliency, agency, and recovery

Transitioning from an experience of sexual assault or abuse to a seemingly normal life requires the survivor to build resilience, have agency, and then finally recover. In this section, I briefly unpack what resilience, agency and recovery entail. From the global perspective on the concept of resilience, Masten and Barnes (2018) attest to the capacity of any system to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten its function, survival, or future development. Emphasis here is on the exposure to difficulties, fundamentally adaptive systems embedded in the lives of the individuals and their interactions with their environments, developmental timing, and the role of support systems around them. In an African view, resilience is measured in the ability to endure difficult conditions. Van Breda and Theron (2018) concur that among other adversities, children suffered sexual abuse; however, Ubuntu practices promoted resilience. Generally, Ubuntu is an African collective culture that promotes functional support systems within communities that enhance the belongingness of individuals. Within the group, an individual may be strengthened to persevere in life, although this could not be the case with the fate of sexually violated female students. Within the Zimbabwean context, Pswarayi (2020) described resilience in terms of economic survival as there is limited research on resilience after sexual violence trauma. Such a scarcity of studies on resilience after sexual violence trauma motivated me to conduct this study.

To build resilience or recover from sexual violence trauma, a survivor has to have some agency to change her fate. Globally, survivors, especially in the global north, have been known to have agency to change their fate. This can be attested in the ‘Me Too movement’ (Shukla et al., 2020) where females engage in activism against sexual violence. In the African context and Zimbabwe in particular, agency can be expressed in a different way. Kakuru (2023) contends that in an African context, agency might mean non-disclosure of sexual violence. This could be attributed to the cultural context where the choice to disclose or act depends on how the powers that be can validate the authenticity of the violation. Consequences such as rejection by potential suitors may force the victim to not disclose, which in turn, becomes some form of agency to protect the self from psychological pain. This controversial agency complicates the understanding of recovery in such a context. The question would be whether the pain would have disappeared or just been suppressed. Any triggers would then reopen the wound and recovery can be circular.

According to Kimberley (2017), recovery encompasses having a new balance and meaning in life in the aftermath of sexual violence. Despite considerable research on the potential of young women to recover from sexual violence trauma, there is limited research regarding how survivors do so (Anderson, 2012, Valdez & Lily, 2016) and whether or not they continue to be successful in their lives. In the same vein, I was motivated to explore how female student survivors, in their own frame of reference, describe their journeys of resilience and recovery. In the African context, research indicates that survivors’ views have only been explored mostly in war-torn zones such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zihindula et al., 2018, Aroussi, 2019, Hilhorst, & Douma, 2018) and in South Africa (Gouws, 2018, Sibanda-Moyo et al., 2017, Machisa et al., 2018). Nevertheless, such studies are scarce in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean population statistics indicate that the magnitude of sexual violence is appalling (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2016, 2019).

Does this scarcity of research on survivors of sexual violence in Zimbabwe suggest that the nature of the culture deprives the afflicted the openness to express their pain freely? It is also against this backdrop that I was driven to engage in this study.

Young women have the potential to recover from sexual violence, but there is a lack of research regarding how survivors do so and whether or not they continue to be successful in their lives (Anderson, 2012, Valdez & Lilly, 2016). Moreover, there is a lack of research on what assists an individual in arriving at such a state. Prior studies related adaptation to the management of distress signs and life demands (such as clothing, shelter, food and medication) but failed to address what assists the women to effectively adapt (Woods & Isenberg, 2001; Benight, Harding-Taylor, Midboe, & Durhan, 2004). This suggests a lack of knowledge on how sexual violence survivors achieve psychological and physical healing as they seek to meet new life demands. Therefore, research on recovery, capturing the process and outcome of resilience for women following sexual violence, is crucial.

Studies in England revealed the possibility of female survivors developing healthy and stable personalities even though they reside in highly stressful environments (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Kimberley, 2017). In some cases, the female survivors would not want to be a victim, rather preferring to be called a survivor. Similar findings were made by the WHO (2013) in Africa although such women were a minority. While these studies point to the possibility of leading a life in the aftermath of sexual violence, what was not captured in the study is how the women manage to cope with their situation.

1.7 Research Questions

As indicated in the previous section, research is scarce on how female student survivors of sexual violence navigate their journeys of resilience and recovery after experiencing sexual violence trauma in Zimbabwe. This led to the critical research questions that guided the exploration of the survivors' narratives on journeys of resilience and recovery as well as the analysis of the data:

1. What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence?
2. How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery?
3. Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma?

This thesis, therefore, aims to reveal the discourses embedded in the trajectories of sexual violence trauma experienced by female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe. In this exploration, the thesis would also aim to understand how the survivors (re) negotiate and (re) create their historical, personal, social, emotional, cognitive, and material spaces through their journeys to recovery. Next, I present my narrative journey through the study.

1.8 My narrative journey

Where the researcher is coming from, concerns an individual's beliefs about the nature of social reality and their knowledge about the world.... Social research is rarely value-free, it must account for its motivations.

(Holmes, 2020, p 1-2)

This study adopts a qualitative, narrative approach which is detailed in Chapter 4. I position myself as a bricoleur drawing on the feminist standpoint theory and the relational cultural theory. I propose collaborative text generation and analysis methods that pay particular attention to ethical and cultural sensitivity, within the paradigmatic spaces between interpretivism and critical theory. Researcher positionality has been deemed necessary in feminist research since its inception because feminists believe that research cannot be objective or value-free (Kassan et al., 2020). Sexual violence narratives involve concepts that include subjectivity, personal experience, emotions, and worldviews of both the participants and the researcher that need to be considered. In the same vein, I believe that it was necessary and ethical to reflect on my own biases, values, beliefs, and assumptions I had about the phenomenon under study (Holmes, 2020). I concede that my culture, gender, class, religion, and personal and social background might be reflected in my text generation, interpretation, and analysis of survivors of sexual violence narratives. As a result, the reader needs to know at the beginning of the thesis who I am as the researcher and what knowledge and experience I bring to this research, which seasons the writing of this thesis. I, therefore, place myself into the introductory chapter and in this thesis, with an outline of my personal narrative journey and multiple identities. I utilise a first-person approach of narrative writing to interlace a more personal relationship to this counsellor educator-researcher-author's personal and professional journey. In the next section, I share my narrative that highlights the significant individuals and critical scenes and sentiments that contribute to who I am.

Penning this personal narrative and professional journey compelled me to reflect on how critical incidents and significant individuals in my life contributed to the person I am as well as my spiritual, cultural, and moral values. Considering the aspects of the perception, identities or subjective opinions, emotionality and understanding of sexual violence trauma, power dynamics

involved, the concepts of oppression and resistance, agency, disconnections, and re-connections that occur in relationships that are central in this study, I reflect on these issues in both my personal journey from childhood to teacher and to counsellor-educator as well as my doctoral research journey.

I am fortunate to have been raised in a loving and caring family environment, where I was given the autonomy to be myself. Hard work, honesty, and being content with the fruits of honest labour was the ethic of the household. Being the sixth child, and the second of the only two female children in the family of eight, I not only got most of the attention but was also exposed to the power dynamics among the siblings, especially the boys. The patriarchal rivalry seemed to follow me into the school system. Although I enjoyed excelling in my schoolwork and received encouragement from my parents and siblings, there were conflicts with my class competitors who would try to downplay my achievements. The support of my family and my teachers who valued my performance, could have contributed to my resilience. Writing this narrative encouraged me to reflect on the people and important events that contributed to my identity, my life experiences, and my values and roles as an educator and counsellor.

My father and mother undoubtedly played a great role in the constitution of my identities. Their life principles, love, and support influenced who I am today. Although they themselves had no significant education, my parents believed in attaining education as a gateway to independent living. I remember my mother, in her late 60s saying, “Your achievement is my own success” when she handed me money to top up my undergraduate tuition fees. This emotional statement emphasised her passion for having educated children.

Additionally, I recall the role played by both female and male teachers in both primary and secondary school. Some served as role models while some were a protective shield from the

bullying class competitors and taught me how to take a stand in what I believe in. Their unwavering support must surely have contributed to my desire to self-actualise through enrolling for teacher training, followed by a bachelor's degree and Master of Science in counselling. My siblings, especially my only sister, played a great role in my life. With our mother on our side, it never hurt much when our father passed on. A year later, I recall how I felt sad and helpless when I lost my supportive mother in the early days of my PhD journey. She had succumbed to high blood pressure.

My interest in sexual violence issues dates back to 2005 when I was working at a primary school where I created a public speaking club. At that time, I had done my bachelor's degree in counselling and held group counselling sessions with school children. It was in these counselling sessions that cases of child sexual abuse were raised. I remember referring a case of child sexual abuse to the headmistress' office and it escalated to a court case.

I then joined the victim-friendly system, a multi-sectoral forum made up of social workers, medical doctors, nurses, the police force, and role players such as magistrates, prosecutors, counsellors, educationists, and psychologists. I would get referrals of victims of sexual violence from the magistrates' court, the police, and schools. I remember handling a counselling case of an eight-year-old girl who was sexually abused by a neighbour. It is in this multi-sectoral forum that I became aware of the stereotypical versions of victims and survivors of sexual violence, especially college and university students. The narratives of cases presented by the police officers and other players in the forum depicted survivors as contributing more to their violation. The magistrates, when passing judgements, use misogynistic language, and perpetuated stereotypes through the objectification of women's bodies, and glamorisation of sexual violence.

In addition to my work with children in the school and participation in the victim-friendly forum, the narrative of my mother's death cemented my passion for studying issues of sexual violence.

Her blood pressure increased after her step-niece narrated the predicament of her teenage daughter who had been sexually abused by an older man who was never convicted at court.

The age of the victims that I encountered during my participation in the victim-friendly forum made me more concerned about survivors of sexual violence. I wanted to know more about the aftermath of the trauma that was experienced by the survivors. At first, I thought I would study how the multi-sectoral system structure managed to address the issue of sexual violence. There was a time when a senior teacher was apprehended for sexually abusing schoolchildren. Some middle-aged women attested to becoming commercial sex workers due to the child sexual abuse they experienced during their school days by the same teacher. Although many of these women were forced to abandon their education, one remarkable individual who was referred to me had survived a horrific stranger sexual assault, yet she persevered and went on to complete her tertiary education. This was one of the cases that motivated me to explore issues of resilience and recovery. I was curious about survivors' psychological well-being and how they perceived their traumatic experiences.

It was difficult to come up with a befitting topic on the issue, although I had an idea of what I wanted to study. I managed to shape the topic with the help of my supervisors. They took me through the proposal which managed to sail through the Faculty Board and enabled me to embark on text generation. The analysis of participants' narratives was cumbersome and the emotional issues were overwhelming but my supervisors continued to guide me through the interpretation and how to structure the chapters. As I engaged more with the texts, my curiosity increased and kept me captivated in my research to explore the journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence of female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe. The following section provides an overview of the chapters of the thesis.

1.9 Overview of the thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters and this section outlines the key issues discussed in each chapter and how the chapters are interconnected.

In **Chapter 1**, I present an outline of the sexual violence landscape that sheds light on the background and rationale for this study. The aims and research questions are also described. Thereafter, I highlight the theoretical framework, followed by my motivation to study sexual violence. I then present a personal narrative that introduces me as a researcher and illuminates my positionality. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the chapters in the thesis.

Chapter 2 discusses relevant global, regional and national literature. In this chapter, I situate the narratives of experiences of female student survivors of sexual violence in the discourses of an ‘oppressive and painful space’ through which they travel their journeys, vulnerability to re-victimization, survivor-hood, agency, models of care, resilience and recovery and policy to address sexual violence and support survivors.

Chapter 3 explores the philosophical approach, research paradigm and the epistemological stance I take in research and in my approach to knowledge production. I elaborate on the philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have influenced my choice of research design and methodology. The chapter provides insight into the theoretical frameworks that provide the lens through which resilience and recovery from sexual violence can be understood. I explore a bricolage of the feminist standpoint and the relational-cultural theories blended with the narrative inquiry.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and design for the study. In this chapter, I describe the qualitative methodological approach and rationalise the narrative inquiry approach. I describe the techniques of sampling, process of data generation, and narrative analysis. I adopted the seven

steps of data generation as outlined in Creswell (2020). I explored the survivors' historical, political, and socio-cultural environments in which this research is undertaken. Issues of power dynamics, ethical considerations, and issues of voice in the co-construction of the narratives were discussed.

Chapter 5 focuses on the presentation and analysis of results. In this chapter, I present the participants' stories in brief to give the reader a view of the traumatic experiences narrated. The chapter responds to the first research question: 'What stories do female student survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence?' The following clusters of meaning are explored: oppressive social spaces as limiting ecologies, human rights violations in the African context, complexity of stigma in African culture, vulnerability shrouded in secrecy and privacy, dealing with law enforcement agents, normalisation of sexual violence, and lack of political will.

In **Chapter 6**, the analysis of the clusters of meaning related to sexual violence survivors' construction of their journeys of resilience and recovery. The chapter presents and analyses data that addresses the second research question: How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery? and the third research question: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence? The following clusters of meaning are explored to address the second research question: adopting multiple identities, agency: taking control and responsibility, oppression, resistance and empowerment, sexual entitlement and sustaining ecologies and spatial environments. Analysis of the third research question highlighted the following clusters of meaning: network of friends, emotional, psychological and social support, recovery: reconnecting to self and others. The chapter concludes by critically reflecting on the knowledge and

understanding that survivors express about the constructions of their journeys of resilience and recovery.

In the final chapter, **Chapter 7**, I knit together the theoretical, methodological, and empirical threads to respond to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. The purpose of the study and an overview of the thesis is presented, highlighting the connectivity of the chapters. My methodological reflections are presented. The key findings of the study are summarised and the original contributions as well as the limitations of this study are presented. Chapter 7 concludes with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

A LANDSCAPE OF LITERATURE ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE, RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

2.1 Introduction

The study sought to explore the landscape in which sexual violence occurs. Having set the scene in Chapter 1, this literature review examines the issues of the prevalence and impact of sexual violence on resilience and recovery, the global perspective and the Zimbabwean standpoint, oppressive painful spaces, social constructions of experiences of sexual violence trauma, vulnerability to revictimisation, survivorhood, agency, models of care, resilience and recovery, policy to address sexual violence and support survivors. The literature is reviewed from a global, regional, and national perspective. Debates on resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma are presented. I conclude the chapter with an outline of the responses to issues of sexual violence, drawing attention to Zimbabwean policy responses and survivors' views on journeys of resilience and recovery. As journeys of resilience and recovery are the central issue to this study, it is important that it gets some foregrounding at the initial stage of this chapter.

2.2 Sexual violence and its impact on resilience and recovery

In this section, I outline the prevalence of sexual violence against female students and its magnitude globally as well as in the Zimbabwean context. Furthermore, I draw attention to the impact of sexual violence in institutions of higher learning from which participants were drawn.

2.2.1 A global perspective of sexual violence and its impact

Sexual violence is common in communities worldwide and is a serious public health and human rights problem (Sardina et al., 2021; Schneider & Hirsh, 2020). Its consequences have both short-

and long-term impacts on women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. It is very common in conflict and humanitarian emergency contexts (Stark et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that sexual violence has no boundaries as all social groups are at risk, irrespective of gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, or age (Edström & Dolan, 2019; Von Hohendorff, 2019).

Globally, it has been noted that sexual violence spans all human populations and environments. Latcheva (2017) documents an estimated 83 to 120 million cases of sexual harassment of women in the 12 months before the survey interview in the European Union. Leading incidents of sexual violence seem to be recorded during conflict situations, for instance, high incidents of sexual assault, have been documented during international and internal armed conflicts. During the Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Rwandan, and Liberian wars, several forms of sexual crimes against women were perpetrated and documented (Chinkin, 2017). In these conflict-related incidents of sexual violence, gang rape is usually common (Koos, 2017) while in times of calm and poverty, other factors drive the increase in cases of sexual violence against women and girls. In South America, Ceccato and Paz (2017) contend that sexual violence occurs within daily routine activities – when people go and return from work. Other high incidents of sexual violence are prevalent in India. The 2021 Indian National Crime Report Bureau shows that a total of 38 947 cases of rape were recorded. Of these cases, 36 859 of them were incest and acquaintance-perpetrated rapes. In such instances, rape cases were recorded in normal circumstances when there were no wars. Closer to home, Botswana and South Africa also experience high rates of sexual violence. In South Africa for instance, Abrahams et al. (2020) present the 2009 population-based study that shows that 1 in 25 women disclosed lifetime rape exposure, while in a study on girls and women at the University of Cape Town, Ajayi et al. (2021) found that 24.9% of women between the ages of 18 and 49 years reported

being sexually assaulted in their lifetime. In Botswana, child sexual abuse is seen as a problem that is under-reported because parents refuse to take the cases up (Ramabu, 2020). The following section draws attention to the context of sexual violence in Zimbabwe.

2.2.2 Sexual violence: A Zimbabwean perspective

[m]any many were raped, especially the girls who were 17, 18, 19, 20. I think every girl in our village of that age was raped. It was only sometimes that the older women were raped. It is so hard to talk about it in our community.

(Source, Cameron, 2023 citing Operation Gukurahundi survivor)

Although sexual violence is rampant globally, Africa and Asia are among the regions that have the highest rates of Child Sexual Abuse in the world (UNICEF, 2017, Selengia et al., 2020). It is documented that 80% of Sub-Saharan African girls aged between 15-19 years are not safe, in and out of school (Evans, 2023). Of these girls, 28.8% have experienced sexual violence previously at one point in their lifetime. Zimbabwe has alarming levels of sexual abuse that occur in and out of conflict contexts. Cameron (2023) documents rape crimes that occurred during Operation Gukurahundi, a peacetime genocide whereby women and girls in the Matabeleland Province of Zimbabwe were raped between 1983 and 1984. This indicates a long history of sexual violence against girls and women in Zimbabwe. A 2000-2018 study done at a specialised clinic for post-sexual violence care in Harare conducted by Selengia et al. (2020) shows that 60% of females were victims of sexual violence at puberty. The 2022 Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (Zimstat) Crime Situation Report highlights a rise in sexual violence cases. This signals how overwhelming the sexual violence scourge is:

In terms of sexual violence offenses, 3 175 cases of sexual violence were recorded during the period from October to December 2022....

Taguma Mahonde (Director (Zimstat))

To some extent, some of the Zimbabwean cultural and religious practices fuel sexual abuse. For instance, the practice of sexual dalliance (*chiramu*) entitles a brother-in-law to the right to flirt or sexually indulge with his minor sister-in-law (Mawodza, 2019). Apart from these cultural and religious practices, the economic situation in the country exposes girls and women to greater risks of sexual harassment, for example, as they board crowded public transport (Dziva & Zhou, 2021) or fetch water from community boreholes (Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation (SAFE) Zimbabwe Technical Assistance Facility, 2020).

In the same vein, Murewanhema et al. (2022) highlight the economic meltdown as a driver of the prevalence of sexual violence in the form of commercial sexual exploitation of children in sex work. Such exploitation has risen whereby female minors are forced to engage in sexual activities to obtain money, food, access to shelter, education, or some other gains from adults who control their means of survival. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the lives of girls and women. Sexual violence was rampant in the homes where girls and women had to be behind closed doors with their perpetrators. An analysis by Stopping Abuse and Female Exploitation (SAFE) (2020) shows that between April and May 2019, 21.7% of cases of sexual violence were reported, while between February and March 2020, 37.4% of cases were recorded and 41% of cases were reported between April and May 2020. A significant increase in sexual violence incidents is evidence of the impact of sexual violence on girls and women in Zimbabwe. This scenario leads to the discussion of the oppressive and painful social spaces in which female students find themselves.

2.3 Oppressive and Painful Social Spaces

The social space concept is derived from Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space (Kinkaid, 2020). These social spaces can be physical, virtual, private, or public, for example, a residence, parks, playgrounds, churches, and schools (Budd et al., 2018). According to Lefebvre (1991), each of these places possesses an appropriate 'space' where a system of expectations and responses is constructed. As indicated by Kinkaid (2020), a space is viewed as the horizon of one's experience. This entails the social spaces whereby the 'personal space' (the individual) interacts with its 'outside space' (the society) and these interactions impact either positively or negatively on the individual's well-being. In society, various social spaces determine survivors' experiences of sexual abuse and their journey to recovery.

Human beings are social beings, and they need social spaces where they can interact with others. The wider social space, the society, serves the existence of human beings. Society is a broad term that has been defined variously by different scholars. Copp (1992, p.183) defines a society as "a kind of collective entity, as is a nation, a state, an organization, and a family". Kumar (2017) argues that the word 'society' is usually used to describe members of a specific in-group rather than the social relationships they share. In contradiction to Kumar's assertion, Luhmann (1992) contends that any definition of society should consider the role of communication. The latter's assertion highlights the interaction that occurs among individuals of a society. As such, this assertion portrays individuals as encountering space differently, embodying, and enacting ruptures and contradictions (Kinkaid, 2020). This means that there should be effective communication and interaction between the various components for people to be seen as a society.

In recent years, the developments in information and communication technology have made the definition of 'society' more complex as it is no longer limited to physically linked geographical territories. In a unique dimension, Redshaw (2020) described society as a digital society that is characterised by new forms of what he terms 'techno-social life'. Hossain (2014) expands the meaning by describing society's functions; and portrays it to be the regularities, customs, and ground rules of anti-behaviour. This could mean that certain groups regard some behaviours as unwelcome amongst them, regardless of the genesis of the perceived anti-behaviour. Society has become more complex, and in the context of this research study, society is viewed as any system that effectively links various known individuals either physically or through other communication platforms that represent their social spaces. This understanding of society takes me to its facets that serve the individual. Literature has identified the following environments as painful social spaces.

2.3.1 The home/family as a painful social space

In this section, I discussed the sources of trauma that female student survivors of sexual violence experienced within the home and family where safety is supposed to be guaranteed. Family can be viewed as the first social institution that grooms the individual to develop overall quality of life (Kapur, 2022). In Schoeni et al's., (2014) view, the family has the function of supporting its members at critical life stages. Families, for instance, in the African context may include extended family members, close friends, and other acquaintances (Makiwane & Kaunda, 2018). Relational interactions that occur within these relationships might lead to the violation of the individual. The discussion that follows elaborates upon how acquaintances become a 'painful social space'.

2.3.1.1 Acquaintance violation

Research shows that in many instances the abuse of women takes place in places expected to give them safety and protection (Gregory & Williamson, 2022; Al-Ali, 2020, Scorgie, et al., 2017). This suggests that those persons who are supposed to offer protection end up being abusers. Ngubane et al. (2022) conducted a study in KwaZulu-Natal prisons and concur with West's (2002) assertion that besides stranger rape, more cases of rape are perpetrated by acquaintances, boyfriends, and husbands. Where girl-child sexual abuse is concerned, perpetrators can be fathers, uncles, brothers, or family friends. In another South African study, du Toit (2014) found that about 84 percent of child rapes and 52 percent of adult rapes involve perpetrators known to the victims. In addition, Hester et al. (2017) contend that in the home or in the context of intimate relationships, abuse may not be defined as criminal and which, on account of the difficulty of diagnosis, may fail to elicit a medical response. The failure to obtain support and attention when faced with violation by acquaintances, erodes women's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect, hence the likelihood of suicide, other psychological disorders, and risky behaviours. Next, I discuss how lack of family support can exacerbate the emotional pain in female survivors.

2.3.1.2. Lack of family and community support

When a family creates a girl, it launches her into the community which is the second institution of socialisation and another social space where violation occurs. These social spaces that are supposed to offer women protection have been painful due to, in several instances, being the places where abuse happens. They have also been painful because these spaces fail to provide post-trauma comfort and primary counselling. In some families, rape survivors are not viewed as in need of family support, but they are constructed as purveyors of dishonour to the family and community (Hadi, 2020, Heidary, 2021, Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2020). Literature indicates that this 'damaged

goods' attitude is more evident in South Asia, Jordan, Bosnia, Rwanda, Pakistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo where in some instances a victim can be cast out of the family home or in the extreme, killed (Noll, et al., 2019, Rahim, 2017; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2018).

Those who survive the trauma of rejection suffer a double psychological wound. For instance, in the Rwandese case, genocide rape survivors in Kigali felt violated and this made them lose their dignity and respect, while social isolation and loss of hope for the future caused psychological harm to the survivors (Skjelsbaek, 2019; Di Caro, 2019). The isolation came from the society which the victims would have looked up to for psycho-social support in dealing with the trauma of war, in general, and sexual abuse, in particular. Psycho-social support which could be in form of financial support in order to live independently, is outlined in the following discussion.

2.3.1.3 Lack of financial and livelihood independence

An individual who is financially independent is able to make independent decisions. Most women lack financial independence in most societies. One of the reasons for the family and broader society being a harmful space for women is the overbearing influence of patriarchy. It has been a trend in the Global South, that several households still rely on the male figure for socio-financial security and control (Enaifoghe et al., 2021, Childress, 2018; Fletschner & Kenney, 2011). Dependence on their male counterparts has made women believe all rules influenced by the dominant group. Hence, in perpetuating the painful social spaces, elderly women in the family reinforce patriarchal ideas and ways of thinking, rather than challenge them (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). Knowles, (2021) describes this as women's complicity in their own subordination. This incongruity can also manifest in some modern females when they are forced by tradition to abandon their independence to become the family caretakers. Such behaviour can translate into a painful social

space. The concern is usually on the perpetuation of an abusive culture in the family by elderly women who accept the sexually abusive culture and actions as normal and help in their reproduction (Rodriguez Blanco, 2013).

In the case of a male figure or close male relative, who is responsible for the household's socio-financial security, committing a sexual offense, female relatives of the female survivor in several cases defend the offender or coerce the victim not to report the case to responsible authorities for prosecution (Aplin, 2017). In such cases, women who should be responsible for the protection of the victim would contemplate looming poverty in the event of the male perpetrator being incarcerated for the crime (Masilo, 2018; Bakta, 2019; Owusu et al., 2016). A study by Gqgabi and Smit (2019) on father-daughter cases in the North-Western province of South Africa, found that a mother's denial regarding her partner's abuse may be compounded by her dependence upon her partner. She may be unnerved at the prospect of having to provide for her family, particularly if she has not had an opportunity to cultivate competencies in materially remunerative fields. Similarly, Valdovinos and Mechanic (2017) opined that in the Mexican culture, violence is tolerated as a way to solve problems and preserving family unity. Women are often forced to remain in abusive relationships due to their economic and social dependence. Although economic dependence perpetuates the subordination and abuse of females, intimate relationships complicate and invalidate sexual violence as a crime, leaving women vulnerable. The discussion on spousal or intimate partner rape follows.

2.3.1.4 Spousal/intimate partner rape

Spousal /intimate partner rape is defined as non-consensual sexual intercourse with one's spouse or intimate partner (Agarwal et al., 2022). Relatedly, the patriarchal-dominated African family does not believe in intimate heterosexual rape, especially in cases where the victim and the

offender are legally/customarily married as husband and wife. In support of patriarchal hegemony, Banda (2015) argues that in patrilineal societies, bride wealth is paid to the wife's family to gain genetical rights, entitlement to exclusive access to uxorial rights, and to compensate the wife's family of origin for transfer of labour to the husband's family. This entails that marital/intimate partner rape is non-existent in such a phenomenon. Uxorial rights are taken for granted, hence fuelling sexual violence. Although marital rape exists, women are usually not believed in the patriarchal system when they report being sexually assaulted by their intimate partner. Kolade-Faseyi (2018) argues that spousal rape though not defined as a crime in Nigeria, is highly debatable with different views held by different people. This could be a common phenomenon in most patriarchal systems. As such McGee et al. (2011) concur when they note that in many contexts rape is perceived to be perpetrated by a stranger rather than an intimate partner such as a husband or boyfriend in heterosexual relationships.

A contention that society maintains traditional gender relations by blaming the victim when women enter relationships with men (Hakimi et al., 2018; Russell & Hand, 2017) becomes contradictory. The same society traditionally expects individuals of the opposite sex to be in courtship before they can enter marriage as a requirement. When violated in that relationship, the belief is that the women would have invited sexual attention (Treffry-Goatley et al., 2018) and therefore were responsible for any oppressive incidents that occur in the relationship. Regardless of most nations, including those in the Global South, being signatories to human rights treaties such as the General Assembly Resolution 48/104, of 1993, marital rape is still underplayed in African countries. This is noted in a study on marital rape conducted in Ethiopia by Haile (2021). The spousal exemption to rape statutes is a grave injustice and adds to the trauma of marital rape.

These women can either survive by escaping from the matrimonial home or they may surrender to continuous abuse which may end in death due to lack of protection by the law. The cases of intimate murder are not only limited to those in marriage but have also been witnessed in non-married intimate heterosexual partners (Singh, & Myende, 2017; Gordon & Collins, 2013). Patriarchy anchors on the power dynamics and the insubordination of women in all aspects including claiming conjugal rights. The following discussion outlines power dynamics in social spaces.

2.3.2 Power dynamics in social spaces

Power dynamics involve the complex and intricate patterns that arise in social interactions and relationships. These include the use of personal resources, such as knowledge, skills, physical attributes and social interactions, to influence and control others (Lawrence & Buchanan, 2017, Tverskoi, et al., 2021).

In their Zimbabwean study on women's sexual autonomy in Pentecostalism, Muguti, and Sande (2019) found that one of the worst notions brought about by patriarchy is the reduction of women's bodies into sexual objects, primarily meant to satisfy sexual desires of men and promote the regrowth of society through child-rearing. When women's bodies are positioned as mere bodies or body parts that should be readily available to satisfy the sexual desires of others, victim blaming becomes rampant when justification of sexual violation is attributed to how much skin a female's dress has shown (Lonsway et al., 2017). In such a situation, society would only concentrate on the moral concern and dismiss the violation of the individual. Societal failure to provide justice is cascaded to the modern legal system which is discussed below.

2.3.2.1 Failure to provide justice: the modern legal system

In issues of sexual violence, power dynamics are at play. The Courts of law, which are supposed to restore power to and protect sexually violated women, are in some cases found wanting. The language used in passing judgements on the perpetrators often unintentionally shifts power to the offender. For instance, when judges use the words such as, “ruined this woman’s life”, or “destroyed this girl/child’s future” (McGlynn et al., 2012, p.5), without any other words of assurance, such words and phrases in most cases make the survivor feel as if they have become worthless. The offender would in turn feel some form of conquest even when they are convicted. If they managed to ‘destroy/ruin’ the survivor’s life, that would be a greater conquest than the survivors’ ability to have them convicted.

According to Love et al. (2018), survivors of violence face several challenges when interacting with the criminal justice system. They have limited control over legal proceedings and their role in investigations and prosecutions is marginal. The authors point out that often focus is on the defendant’s rights rather than those of the survivor. Past and recent research has shown that the adversarial structure of criminal prosecutions may be at odds with the survivors’ mental health and safety (McGlynn et al., 2012; Heydon & Powell, 2017). When an individual is a survivor of sexual violence and is revictimised, to provide justice, the law seeks community approval. Thus, witnesses to the case are sought, of which failure to obtain support, costs the survivor’s dignity and attainment of justice. This increases the chances of revictimisation (Lorenz et al., 2019). Research in many contexts has indicated that participating in a criminal prosecution subjects victims to public scrutiny and challenges their credibility (Carrington et al., 2018; Kunst et al., 2021).

In the same vein, McGlynn and Westmarland (2019) argue that the conventional criminal justice system fails to answer to the justice needs of the victim-survivors and describe this as ‘the justice gap’. Similarly, Murhula and Tolla’s (2021) study on the restorative justice system in South Africa found that survivors feel neglected by those who oversaw their cases. Even though many politicians, civil society, and researchers have called for ‘the justice gap’ to be bridged, it has remained because of the failure of society to understand the justice interests of victim-survivors of sexual violence. Furthermore, in this view, the criminal justice system is seen as another painful social space that needs recalibration to meet the justice and healing needs of the victim-survivors of sexual violence. Kent (2014, pp. 289-290) states that:

Feminist scholars have demonstrated that the institutional demands of criminal trials, including the strict rules of evidence, interviewing methods, and the adversarial nature of criminal proceedings, continue to circumscribe the avenues for women’s participation and the possibilities for them to tell their stories.

In the next section I discuss the nature of the African restorative justice that makes it difficult for survivors to attain resilience and recovery.

2.3.2.2 The African perspective of restorative justice

In comparison with the modern justice (Roman-Dutch legal) system that concentrates on individual accountability, the African perspective of restorative justice is enshrined in the concept of ubuntu. The focus is on the use of tradition-based practices that aim to restore social harmony within the community (Murambadoro et al., 2020; Murhula & Tolla, 2021). In this system, the practices involve rich symbolism and rituals, inclusion of the whole community, and dialogue that enables consensus to be reached. Relationships are given priority. Thus, the victim’s voice as well as the community's voice are considered thereby creating a space for encounter and dialogue. In

comparison with the modern justice system, the authors suggest that it is not always that the voice of the victim is prioritised in the African restorative justice system, it is the community needs that are considered first. In that sense, this social space could be oppressive and painful if community priorities are based on harmful patriarchal and religious practices. Taking, for instance, the religious practices of the white garment churches in Zimbabwe that claim to follow African traditions (Dudzai et al., 2023), marrying off a minor to the perpetrator could be considered normal by such a community. Such decisions by the community would suppress the voice of the survivor and the consequences are that she suffers in silence.

The notion of social spaces and how they impact on the resilience and recovery of victim-survivors was central to this study. The victims' interaction with the justice system as well as the other social spaces are questioned. While there has been considerable research on the victims' perceptions of the justice system in the Global North and South Africa, there has not been much research on the subject emanating from Zimbabwe. This draws attention to the need for this research study which sought to understand the victims' journeys of resilience and recovery. The discussion on the psychological well-being of survivors follows.

2.3.2.3 Psychological well-being of survivors

Sexual violence in all its forms adversely impacts the psychological well-being of survivors. Increased levels of depression are one of the results of acquaintance rape. As portrayed in Aryee's (2013) study with Ghanaian nationals and Liberian refugees, sexual abuse such as incest is attributed to the betrayal of trust that the survivor had in the abuser. The study indicated that Liberian and Ghanaian female survivors living in Ghana confirmed that survivors of acquaintance rape, whether incest or by a known perpetrator, resulted in high levels of depression. One of the

reasons is that victims failed to receive convincing answers to questions about the incidents and the perpetrators, resulting in further psychological pain. Naturally, individuals feel secure in the company of acquaintances and close family members, but when they are betrayed by the same people, a lot of unanswered questions arise. One's perception of the world is altered (Radell et al., 2021). If the survivor's self-esteem is battered, anger and self-blame overshadow the right to seek justice.

Intimate and legal social spaces should not only be spaces of safety, but also spaces of confidence-building and protection. When women fail to get the safety from the natural safety nets, it would then be difficult to achieve self-esteem, self-confidence and self-respect externally. The same argument is applicable to institutions of higher learning, specifically in sub-Saharan Africa. Having suffered from patriarchy and colonial administration that reinforced African patriarchy, higher education was seen as the primary means of empowerment and emancipation. However, when these institutions which are supposed to be social vehicles of empowerment become havens of sexual abuse (Mutinta, 2022; Anderson & Naidu, 2022; Phipps et al., 2018), the result is further emotional/psychological damage to the affected women (Khan et al., 2018; Brison, 2019; Stockman et al., 2023). The high prevalence of sexual violence in these institutions of higher learning could indicate a culture that normalises sexual violence, which is discussed in the next section.

2.3.2.4 Normalisation of sexual violence

According to Krzyżanowski (2020), normalisation is when norms and ideas of the social order that are strategically constructed in discourse are infused into the mainstream. This means that normalisation is when society begins to view and accept behaviour that was once regarded as a deviant part of life.

The normalisation of sexual violence in tertiary institutions means that women in these institutions and society, in general, have resigned themselves to violence as a reality in their lives, and that they must always take measures to prevent themselves from being victims (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). For instance, women avoid taking leadership positions and professions that are traditionally dominated by men and partaking in activities that could expose them to sexual violence and assault. These measures, in most cases, limit their potential to develop resilience.

This then negates the essence of tertiary institutions as spaces for the empowerment of young women. Research suggests that many women in higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa may have experienced sexual abuse or violence but view it as normal societal behaviour (Boonzaier, 2019). In a South African study, Gordon and Collins (2013) contend that many women in universities experience sexual violence but most of it goes unreported due to various factors. Among these factors are fear and mistrust of the justice system in dealing with the pervasive culture of sexual violence, and the construction of sexual violence as normal. Ngubane et al.'s, (2022) study revealed that incarcerated men in the Westville prison in KwaZulu-Natal construct forced sex as normal and even describe it as 'a custom and a tool to control women as well as conceal their insecurities'. Although sexual violence is used as a tool to break the spirits of opponents in war times (Cameroon, 2023), in peace times perpetrators use it as a tool to punish females who deviate from the perceived norms of patriarchy.

Research on sexual violence in Delhi, India, indicates that those women who choose to take independent routes and challenge established patriarchal society norms are vilified and may be sexually violated as a corrective measure (Varman et al., 2018; Phipps et al., 2017). In some studies, female students who behave in ways that deviate from their expected gender roles, for instance, being sexually aggressive or reckless (for instance, on sports trips), going to bars or clubs

alone, or getting drunk could be held responsible for their victimisation (Graham et al., 2017; Parks et al., 2021; Zakarriya, 2019). They are termed ‘bad girls’, ‘immoral’, ‘dirty’, and open for sexual advances (Oesterle, et al., 2018; Espelage et al., 2018) because they are believed to have deviated from femininity norms.

Rape is usually regarded as humiliating and society’s attitudes do not spare the victim from feeling responsible. In concurrence, Deane (2018) contends that in the Zuma rape case, the victim was blamed for provoking the perpetrator by wearing a ‘khangas’, an African fabric that can be worn as a skirt, head wrap, or any other purpose. In this court case, blame was attributed to the victim, leading to her stigmatisation by society. Society, in such contexts where culture takes precedence, tends to be egocentric and ignores the feelings of the victim. The justice system’s mistreatment of the victim exacerbates the trauma, although in some cases, a victim might receive positive support. Sometimes society, instead of assisting the victim to obtain justice, controls the actions of the victim (Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2014). This control entails society’s norms that place the victim in a dilemma of making a decision that prioritises ubuntu. Initial negative encounters with the law (Heydon & Powell, 2018), for example, when the victim is not believed and is blamed for inviting the violation or being made to explain the assault publicly, may be harmful to her psychological well-being. Often such encounters force the survivor to withdraw a court case or agree to a bribe or settlement that the perpetrator sees fit (Amwiine et al., 2021). Building resilience could be negatively affected in such circumstances. In the next section, I review the literature on how resilience can be developed after a sexually violent and traumatic experience. I unpack the term ‘resilience’ to put the various dimensions of how survivors bounce back to their original selves after sexual trauma.

2.4 Developing Resilience and Surviving Sexual Violence

Since the central focus of this study anchors on resilience and recovery, literature on how survivors pick themselves up is discussed. For a survivor to move on in life, there is the need to develop resilience. Resilience is derived from the Latin word ‘resilire’ which means to leap back (Stanciu, 2021; Resnick, 2017; Ledesma, 2014). The term ‘resilience’ is used to describe an individual who can maintain a relatively stable personality trait that enables the individual to overcome, steer through, and bounce back after facing adversity. Attallah, Bacigalup and Repetto (2019) related resilience to a system’s or person’s capacity to uphold its functioning, structure, form, or state of balance regardless of adverse external events. A second wave of thinking places resilience in a relational, inter-generational, and ecosystemic process stemming from changing resources and rights. This second wave represents resilience in an analogue of a machine going through rough and smooth processes that either make or break it (Vella & Pai, 2019). As such, it expresses the situations when a survivor engages with society in adjustment, coping, and making efforts to recover. Shifts in thinking, understanding, skills, spiritualities, and social relationships that lead to positive changes occur in the process (Zheng et al., 2020).

Rodriguez Blanco (2013, p.74) asserts that “Resiliency is a word adopted by social sciences to describe those people who have good life outcomes despite having been exposed to a range of risk factors.” Resilience can generally be defined as “the ability to adapt positively to adversity” (Haffejee & Theron, 2017, p. 1), and current understanding of the concept attributes the resilience process to the culture of individuals. Haffejee and Theron (2019, p.1) further elaborate that “Resilience broadly refers to a process of positive adaptation in the context of severe adversity”. This definition suggests that resilience is an interactive process that comprises two critical aspects: significant adversity and positive adaptation following the experience of adversity. DeGraw (2018,

p. 8) defines resilience as “a process of adapting to cope when dealing with challenges, adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress”. In addition, DeGraw (2018) argues that resilience is a complex process that is influenced by the nature of adversities and the environment in which the survivor lives. This suggests that survivors experience adversity and resilience differently due to the variability of their historical, social, economic and political spaces.

Aspects like benefit finding, thriving, and post-traumatic growth contribute to the achievement of resilience. As such, Ungar et al. (2019) argue that individuals are ecologically resilient if they are able to navigate towards and negotiate access to material resources, supportive relationships, desirable personal identity, experiences of power and control, adherence to cultural traditions, experiences of social justice and experiences of social cohesion with others. In cases of sexual violence, this suggests that one must successfully interact with all or some of the above environmental spaces to attain resilience and recovery. In the process of developing resilience, the survivor sometimes struggles with opposing feelings that come with the complexity of issues of intimacy. The next section discusses the concepts of vulnerability and resilience.

2.4.1 A dialectical relationship between vulnerability and resilience

Dialectical relationships is a concept drawn from Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) relational dialectics theory and describes internal and external tensions that manifest in relationships. As opined by these theorists, tensions are either contradictory or discursive struggles that occur within relationships. Vulnerability and resilience operate on a continuum. Humans, through interactions with their human and non-human environments, are likely to be broken. Thus, one needs to be vulnerable to develop resilience.

An individual in an intimate relationship can be vulnerable because she has a desire for intimacy and, at the same time, she has a desire to be independent. This results in opposing feelings because when intimacy is desired, one must compromise independence to accommodate the needs of the other person. Although the individual might feel vulnerable by losing her autonomy, considering the positive side of being in a relationship forces her to find strategies for survival in that relationship, leading to resilience.

In relationships, an individual must adopt dialectical thinking that assists her in finding the good side of a bad situation when circumstances are bad. For example, when a survivor is on her journey to recovery, viewing the trauma as a passage to a better life would strengthen her resilience. Such thinking reduces the harmful psychological effects of sexual violence. Gunnarsson (2018) argues that in dialectical relationships, most experiences in life are shaped by external factors. In addition, Gunnarsson (2018) contends that our subjective comprehension of situations is not framed by discourses of our own making and that our environment and experiences in life allow us to give meaning to situations. This suggests that the meanings we give to sex and sexual violence depend on the external forces that govern the situation. A one-night stand of sexual debut willingly done by two people might be negatively interpreted due to some negative communication between the two people involved and termed 'sexual violence.' This notion presents culture as a force that can bring about relational dialectics that may complicate or assist an individual in making sense of a situation. The culture of an individual influences the thinking patterns that an individual can adopt when solving life's issues. The discussion that follows outlines how culture influences growth-promoting decisions after sexual violation.

2.4.2 Contribution of culture toward dialectical thinking

Zheng et al. (2020) assert that the influence of culture-related thinking may be associated with the interpretations and perceptions of post-traumatic disorder symptoms and how individuals select and implement survival strategies. For example, the patriarchal description of ‘damaged goods’ of deflowered females (Tas-Cifci, 2020; Feather, 2019) might lead a sexually assaulted individual to engage in risky sexual behaviours (Noll, Guastaferrro, Beal, et al., 2019; Steil, Schneider, & Schwartzkopff, 2022) as a survival strategy which can also be detrimental to the health of the survivor. Internally, the survivor yearns for a new lease of life, but externally, societal pressures and expectations can inadvertently encourage her to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms such as abusing alcohol, depending on how her situation is perceived.

Zheng et al. (2020) concur with the notion that an individual’s subjective thinking is externally determined and contend that changes in historical and political environments influence a survivor’s view of her situation. Resilience is determined by how the changes impact on the individual’s thought process. This suggests that survivors of genocide sexual violence in countries like Rwanda could have developed a certain way of perceiving their predicament to protect themselves from psychological pain. Thus, survivors could feel vulnerable in a war-torn environment where one could not tell if the war and the abuses related to it would come to an end. Rather, they would make do with the situation to survive. Although it was a painful experience, they ignored the internal tension for the sake of existence. It is not clear if this type of resilience is long lasting since issues would have been pushed to the unconscious mind and could resurface when there are triggers. Maybe such dialectical tension would lead to the construct of ‘Intergenerational Transmission of Effects of Trauma’ (Kidron, et al., 2019) which suggests that trauma can be transmitted over decades or centuries of generations. If the belief is that trauma can be passed from

generation to generation, some survivors' resilience could be influenced by their historical, political, and social backgrounds (Raghavan, & Sandanapitchai, 2019; Fast, & Collin-Vezina, 2019).

A study of three cultural samples from Hong Kong, China, and the United States of America (Zheng et al., 2020) found that culture moderates the relationship between levels of ability to be resilient and the severity of post-traumatic disorder symptoms. Each sample indicated different levels of resilience that resulted from their cultural views of the self. The definition that a survivor gives to the self at different stages in their journey to resilience could be determined by their cultural beliefs. In other words, a survivor from the Global North would construe their 'self' in the view of separateness. Thus, the independent self-construal (Salvador et al., 2020; Cinar, 2020), while the Easterners from Mainland China would have an interdependent image of the self (Salvador, Kraus & Ackerman, 2020) that emphasises interconnectedness social context and relationships. A survivor in such a context would value the external locus of control in the way they would make life-changing decisions. Their psychological adjustment processes would be determined by the dictates of their culture embedded in the family and the community they live in. In respect of the Hong Kong survivors, Zheng et al. (2020) observed a bi-culture that inclines towards dialectical thinking, self-construal, and familism which stems from their historical and political background from colonialism. In such a culture, the vulnerability of living under colonialism and its oppressive culture could have made individuals build generational resilience. Turner et al. (2017) argue that some survivors have a higher capacity for dialectical thinking. Such survivors can holistically view situations and they can reconcile contradictions. In so doing they emphasise changes that occur in their life when processing and managing problems. They tend to display greater flexibility in their coping with traumatic experiences. As such, individuals who

have a greater capacity for dialectical thinking have a resilience capacity that may change depending on their cognition, emotions, and motivation to live positively (Boyras, Ferguson, & Zaken, et al., 2019). Earlier, I indicated that one has to be vulnerable in order to develop resilience. This suggests that an individual's culture can become either a hindrance or a vehicle to attaining resilience. In the next section, I discuss how vulnerability relates to resilience in cases of sexual violence.

2.4.3 Vulnerabilities and sexual violence

Where incest has been experienced, feelings of betrayal carry negative consequences and usually lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A survivor who possesses dialectical self-beliefs (Zhang, Noels, Lalonde et al., 2017) can reduce post-traumatic stress induced by incest. Individuals with dialectical self-belief embrace psychological contradictions that include conceptualising oneself differently across different roles and contexts (Boyras et al., 2019). Although the above scholars contend that a survivor's dialectical beliefs about behaviour help modify the individual's perceptions of their situation, it cannot be ascertained how an incest survivor would adjust when the abuse resulted in pregnancy. For example, they would have internalised the 'damaged goods' notion, and the child from incest would remind them of the abuse. Would dialectical thinking give them the ability to modify the negative self-concept to a positive one? It is believed that when a survivor adopts dialectical self-beliefs there would be some evidence of self-efficacy and optimism when they consciously or unconsciously assume certain roles. It is believed that they draw on the resilience resources of their culture that help them gain insight and understanding of their traumatic experiences (Zimmermann & Forstmeier, 2020). Constructing a more resilient self-concept is possible when the survivor develops varied ways of perceiving herself through dialectical thinking. Thus, a survivor could have the ability to process,

include, differentiate, and integrate both painful and good memories of an experience for positive growth. Incest, in some instances, could create controversy in cultures of the Global South where customs and beliefs may interfere with a survivor's dialectical thinking. The belief in totems makes it difficult to attain resilience when a child from incest whose clan is complicated, becomes a reminder of an unhealed wound. In the African culture, including most cultures of the world, blood relatives cannot sire children together. Birthing a child from incest would be a lifetime reminder of relationships that had gone wrong. Children usually adopt the paternal totem, hence a child from incest would be stigmatised knowing that she or he shares a totem and lineage with the mother. Such stigma would stick with the survivor and remind her of the violation. This dimension of the controversy of dialectical thinking ignites the motivation to understand the intersection between suffering and resilience, which is discussed in the next section.

2.4.4 Intersection between suffering and resilience

As alluded to before, vulnerability and resilience operate on a continuum. An individual must be disempowered to find the strength to bounce back. Resilience processes are shaped by human values, unequal social processes, and pathways of power (Zheng et al., 2020). Nel and Govender (2022) contend that humans may suffer loss of meaning, lack of purpose, and experience suffering but they need to pick themselves up and understand their lives to progress. Although some may come out unscathed, others may suffer, sometimes permanently from adversity (Hoegl & Hartmann, 2020). Atallah et al. (2021) argue that while people may show severe mental problems from the effects of sexual violence trauma, the situation could also promote the growth and development of new coping strategies and talents.

Survivors may be able to harness intergenerational spiritual and cultural resources that can manifest in their extraordinary determination to heal from the trauma. Spiritual resources seem to

increase the ability of survivors to endure. Spiritual influences represent an existential aspect of resilience. This can be best described with Bowlby's attachment theory (1982) which describes psychological processes that characterise attachment bonds. In spirituality, the belief in a super being by survivors could make them endure suffering in the belief of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel (Captari et al., 2019). Such survivors may consider the super being (divine being, the creator) being their pillar to lean on in times of anxiety, threat, and emotional distress. In turn, they would seek safety and comfort from the divine being in times of violation. In a situation where there is a betrayal of trust, with the perpetrator being a parent/guardian or an acquaintance, the last hope would be the creator who is a source of strength and power. Survivors believe that the divine being provides a secure base that facilitates growth and development. But sometimes, survivors need to develop agency and resistance in order to become strong again. In the next section, I examine the discourses of agency as well as resistance among survivors of sexual violence.

2.5 Discourses of agency and resistance amongst survivors

Research has shown that resistance is a multifaceted concept that women could use to fight oppression (Alcoff, 2018). Women could at most use their voices to speak against rape and sexual assault. This would help them challenge a gendered form of historical oppression that was key to the subordination of women. In addition, women could name and expose the many ways that are used to sexually violate them. Emphasis is on the survivors' testimonies of their experiences. This section explores how women could take a stand in fighting for their place in an environment of sexual violence.

As much as women and girls suffer sexual violence, they should not be construed as helpless victims. Research shows that women and girls usually exhibit some resilience as well as coping and survival strategies (Moletsane, 2018; Šiljak, 2020). Agency, as conceptualised by Haffeejee

and Theron (2019) denotes an active stance taken by survivors and refers to their capacity to act independently to shape their life circumstances. The researchers further relate agency to the power of individuals to rise above their fate and influence their social ecology at micro and macro levels. For this to be effective, Moletsane (2018) contends that there is a need for empowerment and support of women and girls so that they can assert their rights within their families (where unequal gender norms originate), organisations, and communities. It is in these places and spaces where socialisation begins that oppressive norms are inculcated, reinforced, and sustained that produce gendered violence. Agency becomes an enabler of resilience (Posch et al., 2021; Hafeejee & Theron, 2019). Wood (2019) contends that in patriarchal societies, where shame induction is taught from an early age, there is a culture of silence when a person is sexually violated. Feminists regard the courage to speak out as agency. It is viewed as active defiance and resistance to the patriarchal prescription of silence and shame (Foster & Minwall, 2018). Mitchell et al. (2018) concur that agency is more than an individual capacity but can be instrumental in bringing about social change. In some instances, survivors go against their traditions and culture to speak out and advocate for others, thus becoming agents rather than victims (Mitchell et al., 2018).

However, research indicates that there are contradictions and complexities around the issue of survivor agency. Foster and Minwall (2018) argue that agency comes with a price, and it would be difficult for those in the power structures to practice agency. To protect their prestige, money, and positions, they would rather maintain silence. Thus, speaking out entails courage. Foster and Minwall (2018) conducted a study on Yazidi women of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq who were captured by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They contend that survivors found it hard to speak out for fear of risking further torture perpetrated on their relatives who were still captured by ISIS. In such scenarios where fear reigns, it takes courage and strong internal personal resilience

capacity to exercise agency. Anitha et al. (2021) refer to Katz's (2004) disaggregated conceptual notion of agency as an act that consists of reworking, revoking, and resisting when recognising constraints posed by oppressive contexts and ideologies that shape experiences and possible responses to them. From this perspective, survivors must rework strategies to enable them to move on and avoid getting trapped in the victim mode that could inhibit growth. Being sexually violated impacts power, identity, and self-concept, hence revoking would mean claiming back their power, shedding the victim label, and preparing to move on. Sexual violence is positioned within power dynamics and requires some form of resistance which Anitha et al. (2021) refer to as an act of reworking. They further argue that resistance leads to a much more critical and oppositional consciousness of the hegemonic powers at work.

Thus, although resilience might offer spaces for healing, it leaves the oppressive structures unshaken, but it is argued that reworking and resistance can recalibrate or challenge them with different degrees of effectiveness. In institutions of higher learning, resistance could be shown through using social media, radio platforms, and campus dialogue. Moletsane and Theron's (2017) study at a South African university campus found that such platforms would enable survivors to build capacities to challenge the pervasive unequal gender norms that entrench and perpetuate sexual violence in and around university campuses. Niitsu et al. (2019) contend that although individual survivors possess innate attributes of resilience, depending on their genetic endowment, survivors require a social ecology that challenges traditions that devalue girls and women. Moletsane and Theron (2017) highlight that women should be considered knowers and co-producers of the knowledge to drive resilience enabling social-ecological change. However, research has shown that it is unfortunate that in their journey to resilience, the social ecologies in turn present barriers. Survivors, in the study by Foster and Minwall (2018) with Yazidi women,

found that there were strong feelings of the threat of betrayal after sharing their painful stories. Their pain was exacerbated by anxiety and fear of ISIS identifying them. This fear for their future safety and survival could inhibit resilience capacities. On the contrary, some survivors would be encouraged to fight back by recognising that even though they had lost everything, thus, dignity, self-confidence, and honour, they could reclaim power by sharing their traumatic stories of sexual violence and their journeys of resilience and recovery (Alcoff, 2018). Apart from possessing some capacity to develop resilience, survivors also need the help of their environments on their journeys to recovery. I discuss how support systems contribute to resilience building and healing in the following section.

2. 6 Impact of support systems to resilience and healing

There are complexities inherent in the notion of support systems. Cohen (2013) describes support systems as any service, intervention or organisation that aids victims in the form of advice, support, or treatment to reduce the impact of sexual violence trauma. These services take on broad forms such as justice, health and recovery related, and encompass provision of shelter, medical support, and therapeutic services. A multisectoral approach to service provision makes up the complete machinery of support to the victim/survivor. Belonging to a group where support systems can be accessed, is a human need.

Human beings thrive when they experience feelings of belonging (Dover, 2013; Strayhorn, 2018; Faw et al., 2021). Among Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need to belong is most important after basic needs of safety and security (Maslow, 1987; Onebunne, 2018). The sense of belonging, also known as the need to belong, refers to a human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by members of a group. It is described as a principle of African communalism entailing societal bonding and genuine relationships within a community (Seife, 2021). This bond stipulates that a

thing or an individual belongs as it/she identifies with the environmental realities (Onebunne, 2018). Furthermore, Seife (2021) contends that the concept of identity is embedded in a sense of belonging. He adds that an individual who belongs, attains an identity that is born of interconnectedness by kinship ties, having a sense of commonality, and being shaped by the natural setup. In sexual violence trauma, belonging means more than being a part of a group. Belonging to the survivor, means having the feeling of being understood by those surrounding her. In this sense, the survivor experiences others as being like her in a significant way. This means that having the same experiences, values, or basic attitude makes a survivor feel that she belongs to the group. In contrast, survivors of sexual violence trauma might fail or struggle to experience others as humans which entails a breakdown of unification/belonging.

There is growing consensus that when sexually violated, survivors could have been victims of romantic rejection, dissolution of friendships, ostracism, or estrangement from the family (Vladimir & Robertson, 2020; Chantler, & McCarry, 2020). These disconnections lead to myriad emotional, psychological, and interpersonal consequences that could impede healing or weaken resilience capacities. Support group participation has proven to be essential for both resilience and recovery from the trauma (Haines et al., 2018).

Research on Swedish women demonstrated that survivors of sexual assault tend to be more willing to disclose their experience to trusted women or those who had similar experiences (Ormon et al., 2016). This level of trust that is extended to those without professional qualifications, indicates the influence of those who are close to the survivors in the healing process as a support system. Deep and sincere connections outside of individual and group psychotherapy may supplement the help that is needed by survivors.

Graham et al. (2011), in a research project in North Carolina, United States of America (USA) on sexual violence survivors, found that participation in support groups increased coping strategies and decreased feelings of isolation, stigma, and shame. Similarly, the study by Machisa et al. (2018), in the province of Gauteng, South Africa, revealed that key indicators of the capacity of sexual violence survivors to overcome the trauma included: being socially connected, having stronger network ties and perceived supportive communities. They further assert that women who perceived that their communities were supportive, would easily find funds in an emergency and were more likely to be resilient. Thus, besides collegiality from friends and family, survivors also require financial support that could satisfy their health, shelter, food, and other basic needs.

In another dimension, Miller (2020) contends that the effects of sexual trauma do not only impact the individual but also their support network and community at large. Harm to the individuals is harm to the environment in which they live. This brings about the aspect of ‘Ubuntu’ in the African context that believes in collectivism (Tarkang et al., 2018; Abraham & Prabha, 2022). Thus, Africans believe in collective ownership of either achievements or failures. When an individual misbehaves or earns a bad label, it tarnishes the whole community.

Moral injury occurs mostly when the survivor feels a betrayal of rights and a denial of justice by someone who holds legitimate authority. When a victim gets no response or experiences indifference after reporting the crime, the silence would constitute a humiliating “second injury” (Shay, 2014). Such a situation prevents reparations, emboldens transgressors, and alienates victims through the sense of abandonment and alienation from the community. In such a scenario, victimhood would be reinforced and impede recovery. Having their voices heard, would enhance survivor resilience.

The family and community that supports a child when adversity strikes, such as sexual violence, embraces them by giving a listening ear, seeking justice for her, providing health care, and building hope for the future. Thus, the family becomes her social resource to build resilience (Hunter, 2009). Building upon this view, Tillman et al. (2010) opine that disclosure of sexual violence to informal (family and friends) support systems and experiencing positive reactions may give women access to emotional support in their everyday lives. Further disclosing to formal (police and counsellors) support systems may give survivors access to resources. Thus, the survivor's emotional resource can be viewed as how the individual expresses emotions of grief, and how long it takes the survivor to grieve. Healing depends on the survivor's perception of the trauma suffered and how rational her thoughts are.

The intention of seeking social support systems is to confront difficult situations and emotions as well as develop social bonds so that the impact of the traumatic experience can be minimised in a supportive social environment. Cementing the role of support systems, Sinko et al. (2020) contend that in support group participation, survivors tend to face their experiences of fear, anxiety, loneliness, guilt, worthlessness, and anger head-on. In turn, they can rebuild moments of self-care, self-love, connection, hope, peace, and freedom in an environment where they feel they are not alone. Support groups make the survivors break the silence and understand that they are not alone in their suffering. Since the disclosure of sexual violence victimisation is a relational process (Punchuk (2018), it involves negotiation, exploration, and meaning making. In many instances, survivors are terrified to talk about their traumatic sexual experiences for fear of being ignored by their immediate family, the community, and the justice system (Heydon & Powell, 2018). Studies have shown that the family may pretend that all is fine and ignore that the victim is silent about the pain and emotional trauma (Heydon & Powell, 2018; Slavič, 2020). In such cases, belonging

to a support group can be very valuable. Cavis (2015, p.15) cites four beneficial impacts of being in a support group that was observed in genocide-rape survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide:

- 1) “being with” - being emotionally present with other members of the group who had similar experiences during the genocide, regardless of age; 2) “caring connecting” - relating empathetically with care and comfort, such as sharing problems with friends who have gone through similar experiences; 3) “incorporation” - becoming part of a group and staying in the association; and 4) “sharing the same problem” - everyone in these women’s groups had lived through similar experiences.

Research in various contexts reveals that spirituality is another means by which some survivors develop resilience and a healthy life after their trauma (Brooks et al., 2019; Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019; Ozcan et al., 2021; Cavaliere, 2021). Rzeszutek et al. (2017) conducted a study in Poland with patients in an Infectious Diseases Hospital and found that survivors would resolve to return to religion for spiritual support, implying that they would give credit for their survival to God. However, research has shown that in the case of certain survivors, places of worship were a source of their traumatic experience (Punchuk, 2018). Furthermore, Tobin’s (2019) study on sexual abuse by the clergy indicates that approximately 64% to 78% of reports of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Pennsylvania were perpetrated by the clergy. That will likely diminish faith and spirituality as a source of support and resilience. In the same vein, Punchuk (2018) contends that the survivor may struggle to reconcile her belief in God’s love with her belief that the same God endorses suffering.

Considering the power dynamics that exist between the clergy and the parishioners, a victim would be silenced not only by the other believers but also by the law. Landa et al.’s (2019) Zimbabwean

study on the sexual violence perpetrated by the clergy highlighted the use of deceptive language to gain female parishioners' trust. They suggest that victims of sexual violence are assured of cleansing from evil spells, ancestral curses, or enhancing fertility thereby being lured into a sexual abuse situation.

In contrast, religious institutions are also viewed as spaces of support and resilience building (Saud et al., 2021; Roggenbaum et al., 2023) Historically, West (2004) argues that the church has always been a site of Black feminist activism and a source of comfort for violated Black women. In other words, the church, temple, synagogue, or mosque, therefore, can act as both formal and informal therapy centres. Thus, some religious leaders are professional counsellors who assist survivors in their journeys to recovery. The environment of worship and spirituality and having a higher, powerful Deity could build strength in survivors (Pertek, 2022; Walker-Williams & Fouché, 2018; Vahedi, et al., 2021).

In as much as some survivors would acknowledge God's hand in their healing, Cook and Guertin (2010) argue that not all survivors looked up to divine spirituality and God as the healer of their trauma. In the same vein, Panchuk, (2018) mentions the notion of the 'shattered spiritual self' and the question is often posed as to "Where was God?" In such a situation, personal suffering makes the survivor respond to God with anger, hatred, and distrust (Aditya et al., 2022). Similarly, in Fallon's (2018) study of sexual violence during the genocide in Rwanda, findings revealed that survivors had lost their faith in God and stopped attending church, voicing their anger and dissatisfaction at God's betrayal. Survivors believed that they were forsaken by the God who should be all-seeing, all-hearing, and the powerful protector of all. (Cook & Guertin, 2010). Pressley and Spinazzola (2015) also maintained that some survivors in their research experienced lower existential well-being and difficulty with trust/belief in a benevolent God or a caring

community. In several dominant religions globally, God is portrayed as male (Cassese, & Holman, 2017; Westenberg, 2017). Being defiled by a male, intensifies negative feelings toward all males including a God, hence impacting the spirituality of survivors and the potential of religion in the healing process.

Some research has shown that not all survivors of sexual violence can have an informal supportive relationship, such as family, partner, or support groups (Brattfjell, & Flam, 2019). In such instances, Levenson et al. (2017) contend that the survivors must access formal therapy from health facilities. However, professional therapy can be used as a first strategy before opening to close partners or relatives, or it can be used parallel to other informal methods. In most sub-Saharan countries, professional counselling is still limited and, in some cases, might be costly for survivors to access, hence the need to strengthen informal resilience development channels. The next session discusses integrated care models that have been adopted in various contexts to assist survivors on their journeys of resilience and recovery.

2.7 Integrated care models for survivors of sexual violence

As mentioned earlier, this study explores sexual violence survivors' journeys of resilience and recovery. This section, therefore, briefly locates this study within literature and research on models of care and support that enable victims and survivors to build resilience and finally recover. Sexual violence victims and survivors require holistic individual care that provides an opportunity to regain their human dignity (Koss et al., 2020). Such services ensure that they develop resilience and recover from the trauma suffered. These services include but are not limited to medical, legal, and psychosocial services (Sawrikar & Katz, 2017). In most communities, internationally and locally, models of delivering post-sexual violence care exist. In most nations, including Zimbabwe, many victims of sexual violence are unserved, underserved, and ill-served (Koss et al., 2017).

Victims of sexual assault and rape may not be provided with enough resources or social services to meet their needs, especially the most vulnerable populations of the world. Thus, they are underserved, in terms of resources. There might not be any programmes to that effect in their communities regardless of the high prevalence of the problem. In some instances, victims and survivors might not be attended to or the essential services might not have been created for them. In such situations the victims and survivors are unserved. The other situation might be that regardless of the availability of services, victims and survivors may be ill-served. Thus, they are not represented well and are neglected or unfairly treated. The subsequent discussion elaborates upon global models of care and support.

2.7.1 Global models of care and support

As indicated earlier, holistic individual care after experiencing sexual violence provides victims with the opportunity to restore and maintain their dignity. Accessing these essential services becomes a priority in sexual violence issues. Services needed include medical, legal, psychosocial, and socio-economic assistance.

Broban et al. (2020) document the services provided by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Operational Centre Brussels (OCB) to serve victims of sexual violence in a wide range of countries and contexts. This organisation has been known for the provision of health services around the world through setting up sexual violence clinics. The MSF model involves the care for trauma, general health, and mental health of the victim. In these clinics, the victim is not required to narrate the sexual violence event on admission. The consultations provide an opportunity for confidential disclosure which is followed by internal referral to the sexual violence services. Four service contexts considered by MSF are as follows:

- (a) Urban stable zone: in this context, the sexual violence clinic is set in a stable area where there is no active conflict, and the services are directed towards the local population.
- (b) Conflict zone: this context is where conflict is prevalent, and the national army or militia is involved.
- (c) Post-conflict zone: a clinic is set when conflict is over and there is no infrastructure, social and legal framework for service provision.
- (d) Migratory zone: in this context, the sexual violence clinic is set in an area where people are on migratory routes or places of high population mobility. The services are directed towards a migratory population, for instance, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, or economic migrants.

There are three structures for access to sexual violence care provided by MSF. These include sexual violence clinics located within a Mother-to-Child Health Unit (MCH), a standalone sexual violence clinic, and a sexual violence unit that is integrated within a clinic for the care of victims of all types of violence. In the next section, I outline the care models adopted in the United States of America.

2.7.2 Care Models in the United States of America

Koss et al. (2020) maintain that services for victims of sexual violence include forensic examinations, trained criminal justice responders, shelter, trauma care, and community coordination. They suggest that before an act was enacted, services were concentrated on the provision of shelter and crisis services. In 1994 the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was enacted and focused on law enforcement efforts. This act required all funded programmes to use a Coordinated and Community Response (CCR) model that would emphasise the prosecution of

perpetrators (Koss et al., 2020). This means that more emphasis would be on the criminalisation of sexual violence and punishment of perpetrators than the provision of shelter, medical, and psychosocial services. Thus, the model would be criminal justice system rather than victim-centred. In other words, services indicated in VAWA would benefit a few who formally report sexual crimes, leaving many unserved. Under the banner of humanitarian services, the United States of America has exported its model of care to the Global South and Africa. The next section focuses on how care models have been implemented and evaluated in the Global South and Africa.

2.7.3 Models of Care in the Global South and Africa

The care models for sexual violence victims have been exported to low- and middle-income countries (Koss et al., 2020). Trials of the models in Afghanistan indicated that cultural and religious barriers meant that methods were supposed to be tailored to the environments (Koss et al., 2020). In low and middle-income countries, one stop centre models were adopted (Mugisho et al., 2022; Bress et al., 2018). This is an interprofessional system-based centre that provides survivor-centred health services alongside a combination of social, legal, police, and in some instances, shelter services to survivors of sexual violence (Olson et al., 2020). The model was first launched in Malaysia in 1994 and then replicated throughout Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific Regions (Olson et al., 2020). It was then cascaded to African countries where it was implemented with donor support. The one-stop centre model brings services that are scattered in different locations to one place. This was meant to increase accessibility, acceptability, quality, and multi-sectoral coordination of care. The model would, in turn, reduce survivor re-victimisation when seeking care. Thus, where visiting centres that are scattered, victims being made to narrate the assault at each centre would result in re-activation of the trauma and discourage victims from reporting or seeking help.

The majority of these one-stop centres are hospital-based, and others are standalone centres that provide basic health services on-site, and they refer victims for specialised emergency services. The Thuthuzela centres model in South Africa is strongly linked to the judiciary system, like the US model that emphasises the judiciary system. As indicated earlier, this study concerns itself with the journeys of resilience and recovery of Zimbabwe's female students who experienced sexual violence trauma. In the section that follows, I briefly examine the victim care models used in Zimbabwe.

2.7.4 Victim Care Models in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is one of the low-income countries that had to adopt cost-effective models of care. As noted earlier, the country has a history of sexual violation that dates to times of conflict and no-conflict. One of the models is the victim-friendly court system which is skewed towards the US justice model (Koss et al., 2020) and includes provision of other essential services needed by the victim. As documented by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI, 2015), the victim-friendly court system in Zimbabwe was initiated by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), an organ of the Roman Catholic church. The first phase was the invitation of a team from Wynberg Courts of Cape Town, South Africa to help set up the victim friendly system in 1995. A combination of the victim-friendly police, victim-friendly courts, and the Family Support Clinic/Trust developed multi-sectoral victim-friendly services in Harare and Bulawayo. In a multisectoral victim-friendly system, Muridzo and Chikadzi (2020) contend that victims are assured access to medical, social, psychological, and legal services. Apart from the victim friendly court system that provides legal services, each district hospital has a one-stop centre where all needed services can be accessed by the victims (Chiweshe et al., 2021). For these victim service packages to function, there is a need for policy that creates legislation that binds governments to

implement them. Next, I examine policies that exist for servicing the needs of sexual violence victims and survivors.

2.8 Policy to address sexual violence and support survivors

As mentioned earlier, sexual violence victims can be underserved, unserved, and ill-served. Therefore, nations need to make convictions to ensure services are provided to all victims and survivors regardless of their colour or creed. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 by 193 member states of the United Nations (UN), were meant to transform the world over a period of 15 years (Babu & Kusuma, 2017). Among these goals are SDGs 3 and 5 which advocate for the elimination of all forms of harmful practices and violence against women and girls, and Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, respectively. This section focuses on SDGs 5 and 16 especially the targeted sections 5.2, 5.3, 16.1, and 16.2 that directly address violence against women and girls. Ratification of such agreements by member states entails crafting of policy that puts in place legislation that protects the victims and punishes the perpetrators. Next, I discuss policies that address sexual violence and support the victims.

2.8.1 Policy to address sexual violence and support victims

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is concerned with equality and empowerment of women and girls. SDG 16 advocates for the promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions for sustainable development. The focus of this study was to explore the journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma; therefore, equality and empowerment of women and girls as well as building sustainable institutions can be achieved when survivors build resilience and finally recover from the experience of psychological trauma.

Women and girls who experience sexual violence need to have access to quality services that include medical and psychological support, housing, police, and legal services (García-Moreno &

Amin, 2016; Babu & Kusuma, 2017; Manandhar et al., 2018; Sardinha et al., 2022). This calls for advocacy and political will to ensure that the health sector which is pivotal in the provision of the most needed service to sexually violated women plays its role in serving the victims. The 2016 approval by the WHO Executive Board of the action plan on the implementation of the SDGs, paved the way for upscaling of public health to achieve the set goals (García-Moreno & Amin, 2016). The action plan meant that member states would ensure that health leaders and policymakers publicly challenge the social acceptability of violence against women and girls (Roa et al., 2019; García-Moreno & Amin, 2016). Following the 2013 WHO clinical policy guidelines, governments responded to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women by organising services and training personnel to do the care work. The national guidelines should be accompanied by the provision of accessible, affordable, quality, and comprehensive health services for victims and survivors. These services include psychological first aid, care for injuries, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, or any other health problems that a victim faces (García-Moreno & Amin, 2016).

For women who have been raped, emergency contraception, safe abortion backed by the law, prophylaxis for sexually transmitted infections and Human Immune Virus (HIV), hepatitis B vaccinations, and mental health care are mandatory according to the action plan. Thus, health workers' training curriculum follows this protocol. Prevention of sexual violence calls for a multi-sectoral programme that entails the inclusion of all sectors concerned in the implementation of the SDGs.

In Africa, the Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC) region of which Zimbabwe is a member, the Declaration on Gender-Based Violence (1997) and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children (1998) ignited the efforts by

governments to address gender-based violence (Vollmer & Vollmer, 2022). This resulted in countries within the SADC region crafting policies that addressed and supported victims and survivors of sexual violence. The focus of the current study is on narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence told by female students in selected tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. The next section outlines the policy framework on issues of sexual violence in Zimbabwe.

2.8.2 Policy to address sexual violence and support victims in Zimbabwe

Being a signatory to various regional and international instruments relevant to gender-based violence, Zimbabwe has the obligation to enact and reform national laws, policies, and administrative processes to fulfil the mandate of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The legislative framework on policy to protect and support sexual violence victims and survivors is enshrined within the constitution of Zimbabwe (Constitution Amendment No. 20, Act 2013; The Criminal Code; & the Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5, p.16]. Apart from this legislative framework, is the Protocol on the Multi Sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse and Violence. This protocol is the National Action Plan on rape and abuse, and it is run through the Victim Friendly Court System to prevent gender-based violence. Although frameworks to protect and support victims and survivors of sexual violence exist in Zimbabwe, there are contradictions in the sections of the Criminal Code that may result in victims and survivors being under-served. For example, Section 68(a) of the Criminal Code falls short of protecting victims and survivors of marital rape and males who suffer sexual violence. Section 65 (1) of the Criminal Code attributes the label of perpetrator only to men and females are labelled victims and survivors. In real life, both sexes can be either of the two.

2.9. Narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma

Few studies were identified and were indicative of the prevalence, disclosure, underreporting, restorative justice and protective strategies to cope with sexual violence trauma. Narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence experienced before and during tertiary education seemed to be lacking in the reviewed literature.

In the international domain, a study was carried out to understand the nature of healing from gender-based violence through survivors' narratives as well as internal and contextual influences of trauma recovery. The study was carried out in the United States of America using Clinical Ethnographic Narrative Interview (CENI). According to Sinko and Saint Arnault (2020), contextual and internal factors influenced women's healing processes. Contextual factors included societal values and expectations, social responses to gender-based violence and the normalisation of violence, whereas the internal factors were inclusive of feelings of shame, self-blame, fear of judgement and self-doubt. There was a difference between women who were attempting to "go on with normal life" or "survive" and women who made personal decisions to create a new life for themselves separate from their pasts. A recommendation was made to replicate these strategies on healing processes by re-evaluating existing trauma recovery measures to ensure that outcome is being captured through a holistic, survivor-centred lens.

The need for survivor-centred lens might imply the need to understand the meaning of survivors' journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma from the survivors' perspective, an issue which is central to my study.

There are dissimilarities between Sinko and Saint Arnault's (2020) study and the current study. Contextually, the settings of the two researches are absolutely varied, with the American one being financially stabilised through a university healthcare system with research opportunities. Participants were accessed through the university health care database, indicating ability to access better health care support. Although female participants were selected, they were not particularly higher education students within the 18–25-year age range that the current study sampled. We also differ methodologically. The comparison is the use of sample saturation and grounded theory analysis of data in the American study. The American study made use of the Clinical Ethnographic Narrative Interview (CENI), a semi-structured interview. It also utilised the ATLAS.ti qualitative software for data management. Sinko and Saint Arnault (2020) may give my study a feel of how survivors build resilience after experiencing sexual violence trauma in the global domain. However, the environment in which Sinko and Saint Arnault's (2020) study was undertaken is individualistic and does not address the contribution of religious and collectivist cultural practices to resilience building and recovery on the journeys of resilience and recovery, which is central in the current study.

Clark (2024) did a comparative study on three countries from the global North and the Global South, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia and Uganda to explore the socio-ecological synergies between resilience and recovery from conflict-related sexual violence. The study results showed that there are synergies between resilience and post traumatic growth, which in turn, are highly relevant to how researchers think about and study growth. Alignment of Clark's (2024) study with mine are the concepts of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma and the variables of connectivity and interactions with one's environment which promote posttraumatic growth.

However, there are several dissimilarities between the two studies which the current study sought to address. While Clark 's (2024) study was a large comparative study done in three countries, the current study was done with a small sample of higher education female students in a single country. Clark's (2024) study involved conflict-related sexual violence while participants in the current study were violated in peace time. Methodologically, the current study is a narrative inquiry that is viewed through the lens of the feminist standpoint theory and the relational cultural theory, while Clark's (2024) study was a case study and the framework was developed from the findings. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the data generation of Clark's (2024) study, while the current study was purely qualitative.

In the regional context, Walker-Williams, and Fouché, (2018) conducted a study in the Vaal Triangle area of South Africa which was part of a pilot study for a larger project to explore emerging resilience processes and post traumatic growth outcomes in women survivors of child sexual abuse. The survivors' resilience and posttraumatic growth would be analysed after they attended a Survivor to Thrive (S2T) programme. Eight volunteers aged between 18 and 36 years who had experienced interfamilial abuse in their childhood were recruited. At the end of the programme, only five women participants aged between 20 to 36 completed the programme. A quasi-experimental, one group, pre-test, post-test, time-delay design and qualitative methods with visual participatory techniques and transcriptions were employed to collect data. Results indicated that resilience processes worked well in a group where survivors felt safe among fellow survivors. They freely shared their experiences of childhood sexual abuse and developed persistent processes of resisting the negative aftermath of the child sexual abuse. This was made possible using both intrinsic and extrinsic resources as strength. For instance, changing destructive to constructive rumination by being self-aware and engaging in cognitive reframing, utilising adaptive coping

strengths, fostering of the purpose of the trauma by engaging in religious activities and accessing social support in the safe holding environment of the homogenous group context.

Although the study was funded and group participatory in nature, the current study benefits in the resilience processes that were adopted by the survivors and their feelings of safety in sharing sensitive stories within a homogenous group. My study attempted to find out if the Vaal Triangle area study would have variations in terms of the experiences of journeys of resilience and recovery, methodology and theoretical frameworks with my study. The survivors in the Vaal Triangle area study were free to voice their incest experiences within a group setting unlike in the current study where survivors preferred individual interviews and privacy in voicing more than one form of sexual violence. None of the participants were comfortable to have their identity known to other participants. Methodologically, the current study solicited information from survivors through narrative inquiry while the Vaal Triangle study used a quasi-experimental methodology. Traditional theoretical frameworks such as the Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), psychodynamic therapy and psychoeducation were employed in the Vaal Triangle study while the current study interpreted the meaning making of sexual violence trauma experiences through the feminist standpoint and relational-cultural theories. The survivors in the current study were eleven black females from disadvantaged backgrounds and participated to the end of the study. Although silent about the economic backgrounds of the participants, the Vaal study ended with only three black and two white participants. I believed that my study would perhaps be informed by the former research in that the majority in the Vaal study were black women who were able to voice their sensitive experiences within a group.

While Gukurume and Shoko (2023) looked at Zimbabwe university campuses as sexualised spaces marked by high sexual risk-taking behaviours and toxic masculinities basing on findings in two

institutions, I looked at narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students from several Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning. These aspects are not addressed by this previous study. However, building resilience, meaning making and support systems as enablers of resilience and recovery were pointers I looked out for in my study. Gukurume and Shoko (2023) used a qualitative ethnographic methodology and semi-structured interviews with both students and staff from only two universities while, mine generated texts through in-depth one-on-one narrative interviews with female students from several institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning, as documented by Gukurume and Shoko, there are a lack of policies and programmes which can support survivors of sexual violence trauma. Other studies undertaken in Zimbabwe like Abraham's (2021) Masters' dissertation on conflict-related sexual violence trauma during Gukurahundi, revealed that women required some closure in order to recover. Talking about their sexual trauma became part of their healing process. The current research, thus, would extend this knowledge base, through narrative interviews, and the lens of the two theories aforementioned to find out how female students constructed their journeys of resilience and recovery.

2.9.1. Constructions of journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma

Lee Ping and Sumari (2010) in Kuala Lumpur conducted a descriptive case study using a phenomenological lens to explore the experience of a woman survivor of child sexual abuse who took a decision to recover. The research utilised two observation sessions, two structured interviews and two self-reflection writing sessions to come up with four themes. The results of this study showed that the survivor constructed her journey of resilience and recovery as consisting of a lot of experiences of suffering. However, she found solace in God and her children as saviours who alleviated her pain. She also reached out to help others in order to feel better. In terms of

meaning making, this could fall into the aspects of the strength of support systems (Machisa et al. 2018), spirituality (Draucker & Martsof, 2010), altruism (Stidham et al., 2012) and social capital (Siisiainen,2003).

The major connection of this study to the current one is that the focus was on a journey of resilience and recovery although my research had eleven survivors who had experienced various forms of sexual violence, some both in childhood and in the tertiary institution. The current study sample had survivors who were single, once married, and some had children. Those who had children were raising them on their own. Although the two studies are diverse, I benefitted from Lee Ping and Sumari's (2010) use of a qualitative data analysis approach to research, especially categorising data into themes to bring out meaning from audio recorded and transcribed interview sessions. The previous study employed the descriptive case study backed by a phenomenological lens of viewing the traumatic experiences. The current study, however, utilised the narrative inquiry and viewed survivors' experiences through the lens of the feminist standpoint and relational cultural theories. Haffegge and Theron's (2018) South African study located in Gauteng sought to understand how expressions of agency are shaped by structural factors and how Black South African girls with child sexual violence histories navigated their resilience pathways. The researchers used participatory methods that included participatory diagramming, digital stories and participatory videos to elicit information from survivors. The results indicated that agency manifested as a process of resilience. These agentic expressions were activated, bound and later reciprocated and sustained by surrounding social structures within the survivors' environment.

Haffegge and Theron's (2018) study had relevance in terms of how survivors navigated their journeys of resilience and what sustained the resilience. In contrast to Haffegge and Theron's (2018) study, my research sample was drawn from Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning,

which was totally different from the care centres of the Gauteng study. The issue of meaning making and recovery did not seem to have been addressed in the previous study. The circumstances in which resilience was studied are different in that the Gauteng study drew its sample from care centres while the current study participants had experiences within and outside the learning institutions. As participants in the prior study were organised in groups, they might have been engaging in discussions and were able to share their experiences freely. Resilience could have been enhanced by feelings of belonging to a homogenous group. These ideas influenced me to find out if group work would work with female survivors who are not in a home or care centre. In the current study, although snowballing was utilised for further identification of survivors, it appeared to not be feasible to use participatory methods. Survivors preferred privacy and one-on-one interviews.

Zhou and Landa (2013) investigated Zimbabwean female authors' perspectives of coping and resilience strategies in the face of HIV and AIDS trauma. Using life narratives, the study found that successful resilience and coping with HIV and AIDS begins with the woman. As a way of coping, some women would resort to unorthodox means of survival in the face of stressors while others become resourceful and resolute, crafting empowering survival strategies to cope with their situation.

Although the two studies investigated resilience for different issues, the current study favoured the idea of survivors' will power to recover. The two studies concurred on various strategies that survivors employ in order to build resilience in the face of adversities. The point of departure was on the socio-economic status of the participants in the two studies. Survivors in the previous study were financially better positioned to navigate their journeys of resilience and coping unlike survivors in the current study who were mostly female students who were dependent on parents

and guardians. I wanted to better understand how women managed to build resilience and also managed to cope with life stressors. The current study would find some insights in the previous study because it looked at strategies of survival in the face of stressors.

2.10 Concluding Remarks

The chapter commenced with an overview of the prevalence and impact of sexual violence on resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma, which was followed by a discussion of the global perspectives and the Zimbabwe standpoint on issues of sexual violence. Thereafter, an outline of the landscape of literature and research on oppressive painful spaces in which female students find themselves, social constructions of experiences of sexual violence trauma, vulnerability to victimisation, survivor hood, agency resilience and recovery is provided. Next, the role of support systems in helping survivors build resilience and recover from sexual violence trauma was discussed. This was followed by a review of literature on an outline of the integrated models of care adopted to protect and support sexual violence victims and survivors, as well as the policy to address and support victims and survivors of sexual violence. International, regional and local studies were reviewed. There were limited studies on narratives of both resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions. In the following chapter, I turn my attention to the philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual underpinnings of my study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the philosophical, theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of my study. These frameworks have influenced my choices of research methodology, research questions, the approach to participants, data generation and the analysis of the data as well as the presentation of the findings. This chapter begins with an outline of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of critical theory, which underpins this study. Next, the notion of theoretical bricolage is described, followed by an explanation of the relational-cultural theory and the feminist standpoint theory. The suitability and limitations of these theories are outlined.

This study is located within the critical paradigm and underpinned by critical theory. The critical theoretical tradition developed at the Frankfurt School most notably by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin, Pollock, Lowenthal and Fromm who were reacting to the works of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Weber (Tarr, 2017). Critical theory challenges worldviews and the underlying power structures that create them (Ryan, 2018). In addition, Ryan (2018) contends that critical theory takes a realist perspective on ontology. According to Bachmann and Moio (2020), critical theory highlights the importance of explaining and understanding the existing social reality and unpacking norms and values from which existing societal problems arise. Tarr (2017) mentions that Horkheimer claims that men are producers of their own historical way of life in its totality. As such, human beings and their possibilities for self-fulfilment become the fundamental concern of critical theory as it questions why humans are prevented from such fulfilment. This raises fundamental questions about why humans remain trapped in oppressive systems, and what prevents them from achieving true freedom and emancipation. In Horkheimer's view, the

theoretical tradition is regarded as an element in the historical effort to create a world that satisfies the needs and powers of men. It works by identifying and overcoming all circumstances that limit human freedom. It also helps identify systems of exclusion that prevent human beings from achieving their fulfilment. As it values modified subjectivity, critical theory allowed for the consideration of preconceptions about philosophy and the subjects that were being examined. In giving meaning to the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma, I kept in mind the fact that the survivors and myself as a researcher were products of our own cultures, class, and other structures that influenced our perceptions of phenomena. Critical theory provides parameters for subjectivity in the co-production of knowledge.

I draw on a combination of relational-cultural theory and feminist standpoint theory to understand and analyse the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. These theories fall under the umbrella of critical theory that questions society's power structures that limit human beings from understanding how the world works. I aimed to employ the notion of theoretical bricolage to enable a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical approach to the inquiry, and enable a deeper understanding of human experience and social processes (Volschenk, 2019; Johnson, Andrew & Ker, 2021; Kincheloe et al., 2011, Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Furthermore, the fusion of relational-cultural theory, feminist standpoint theory and narrative inquiry perspectives is complementary in that all are attentive to dialogue to have participants' voices heard (Yang, 2011).

3.2 Theoretical Bricolage

To effectively understand the experiences of female student survivors of sexual violence in their various journeys of resilience and recovery, I believe that a single theoretical framework would be inadequate and inappropriate for this study. Therefore, I use an integrated theoretical and

conceptual lens to make sense of and explain the narratives of survivors of sexual violence (Kroll, 2021). From my chosen ontological and epistemological conceptions of reality, a multi-perspectival approach is appropriate. Bricolage, a concept initiated by Claude Levi-Strauss (1962) and later conceptualised as an eclectic approach to social inquiry by Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and Berry (2004a-b, 2006, 2011) became handy in understanding the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students in Zimbabwe's higher institutions of learning. Bricolage represents a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-method approach to inquiry. Hoffin (2019) contends that bricolage is a French term entailing an amateur repair work where the bricoleur patches together notably disparate items to create a serviceable 'fix'. In this study, theoretical bricolage is employed based on the notion of eclecticism, viewing the sexual violence narratives of resilience and recovery phenomena from multiple theoretical perspectives. Levi-Strauss (1962) contends that meaning making processes mirror a bricolage process and mythical knowers tie together their life histories with texts, discourses and social practices. He also maintained that bricolage enables flexibility, as well as fluid and open-ended meaning making. In meaning making, a bricoleur combines imagination utilising any knowledge tools at hand and available artefacts in their context. As such, in adopting a bricolage of theories, the study would use various theories to meet diverse knowledge production tasks (Rogers, 2012, Phillimore, Humphris, Klass, et al., 2016). The narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students is viewed in the narrative tradition through the lenses of the relational-cultural theory and the feminist standpoint theory. These theories are described in the following sections.

3.3 Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT)

The development of relational-cultural theory can be attributed to the efforts of a group of female psychologists working at the Stone Centre at Wellesley College which was pioneered by Jean Baker Miller (1976) and then collaboratively developed by Jean Baker Miller, Judith V. Jordan, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey (1977). The development of the theory was an attempt to understand relational interactions in the lives of women (Haskins & Appling, 2017). This understanding meant moving away from the traditional theories that disregarded historical and systemic injustices that were experienced by marginalised populations. Justin and Popwich (2022) contend that the importance of relationships, community and interdependence for personal growth is emphasised by the RCT. Similarly, Irvine et al., (2021) assert that RCT locates social relationships of human beings at the forefront of human psychology. It concentrates on the complexity of human relationships through the use of concepts such as connection and disconnection and recognises and explores the social implications of psychological theory (Richardson, Dobson, Lumber et al., 2020). According to the RCT lens, relationships cannot be isolated from the larger culture. This focus on culture gives insight into how larger culture and power differentials influence the quality of relationships of people, which in turn affect the quality and nature of these relationships. Rooted in feminism, Jordan (2018) maintains that RCT focuses on how culture valorises power and how the oppressive relationships institutionalised within a society have a direct impact on the interpersonal relationships between its members (Livne-Tarandach, et al., 2021).

Rector-Aranda (2019) contends that RCT positions people in growth-fostering relationships as actively creating power with one another. Although feminism aims to resist power dynamics that perpetuate oppression of underprivileged groups, Rector-Aranda (2019) argues that when power is not used over others to intimidate or control them, but with them, it empowers both actors to

grow. This could entail a symbiotic influence on both the oppressor and the oppressed. As the oppressed recognise their potential to change their situation, they resist and adopt agency for positive post-traumatic growth. In the process, the oppressor realises the resistance which might affect positive relational change. Von Scheve (2018) suggests that human relations consist of emotions that are inherently social and cultural. Also, these emotions are more or less systematic, entailing that they are governed by the dominant power hierarchies or stratifications within a society. Growth fostering relationships as indicated in RCT, occur where there is mutuality. Three aspects of mutual authenticity, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment have to be fulfilled where healthy relationships exist. An individual is expected to bring the authentic self to interactions with others.

Authenticity that ensures relational growth is usually shown when individuals interact with a sense of the genuine self – not pretending to be what they are not. Thus, fully representing themselves in an honest way in a relationship (Lertora, et al., 2020). Douglas and Gadsby (2022) argue that relational authenticity is not simply being honest in interactions. They maintain that authenticity is a sense of relational clarity – knowing what our roles are in a relationship and with others. It is an issue of knowing our boundaries and demonstrating to the other person that we are impacted by them. Where clarity is concerned, an individual can pronounce discomfort or displeasure over a behaviour, thought or feeling. Having the feeling that the other part has impacted us and vice versa, is what authenticity means in growth-fostering relationships. This meaning of authenticity supersedes that of objects which can be so because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives or powers (Ning, 2017).

When a part of a relationship shows authenticity that is void of empathy, the relationship might impede growth. Relationships are symbiotic, hence the need for individuals to hold on to one's

self – have the autonomy to be themselves and emotionally relate to the experience of the other’s reality (Dietz et al., 2017). Fostering healthy relationships and genuine connections is imperative to the growth and development of humans. According to Miller (1986) and Jordan (2023), if a relationship promotes growth, it should reflect five essential characteristics. These are (a) a sense of energy which they term, zest b) an increase in self-worth; (c) a better understanding of self, others, and interpersonal relationships (d) elevated levels of productivity; and (e) desire to engage in more meaningful connections (Lertora et al., 2020). The aspect of having a sense of zest would mean fulfilling Maslow’s basic needs of belonging, being loved, ensuring safety/security and being accepted. Having these needs fulfilled allows an individual to see possibilities and is motivated to build more meaningful relationships that promote positive growth. For possibilities to be realised, an individual would have connected in relationships where the other part sees and reflects the potential in you, and it becomes easier to realise your potential and pursue desired goals with confidence. As such, an individual’s self-worth is enhanced, which in turn promotes self-awareness that makes an individual understand him/herself better. An individual who understands him/herself better can develop growth-fostering relationships with others.

More meaningful connections can be possible when the basic needs are fulfilled. If individuals attain increased clarity, self-worth, zest, and creativity in their interactions, they tend to go deeper in their relationships. Their functionality as human beings improve, and they tend to break the barriers that culture creates. Mutually growth-fostering relationships create a nurturing and healing environment, for instance, where oppressive systems create inequalities. Dominant-subordinate systems around the world, characterised by political and cultural inequalities, have a significant impact on overall human functioning and flourishing (McCauley, 2013). The mechanisms used by dominant groups, for instance, those in the power echelons of society, to marginalise others involve

disconnection and disempowerment. In the context of sexual violence against women, most cultures of the world tend to shift the blame on the survivor's behaviour, dressing, when the violation occurs, and so on, while ignoring all other factors that point to the society itself. These result in condemned isolation and ongoing unjust relationships. Dietz et al., (2017) contend that people crave connection, but they are also afraid of it due to previous hurtful, frightening, and humiliating relationships. This fear makes individuals create strategies of disconnection to maintain an artificial equilibrium, suppressing pain, which may in turn inhibit positive growth. Martinez-Gonzalez et al. (2021) assert that humiliation is a highly destructive form of disconnection that results in isolation from social life. Issues of sexual violence bring about humiliation for the abused. Individuals may leave their social support system, (for example if the support systems cannot believe their story) and their vulnerability would increase. They might suffer helplessness, hopelessness, fear, pain, and grief which inhibits positive growth.

In RCT the goal of relationship building is to promote transformational relationships rather than creating transactional ones (Rector-Aranda, 2019). In transactional relationships, one person aims to gain personal or emotional benefit, which could in some instances, not augur well with the other person who could feel used. This could be equated to a parasitic relationship where a person does not reciprocate support given by the other in a relationship or the relationship would be negatively skewed and cause psychological pain to the other. Such relationships are more like business or contractual ones where individuals expect that the attention or affection they give will be reciprocated – there is an attitude of entitlement or resentment. The feeling of entitlement diminishes the flourishing of personal relationships. Transactional relationships are different from transformational relationships in that the latter facilitates the exchange of benefits of the relationship although the two are said to work on a continuum that promotes growth. Individuals

in transformational relationships enjoy being in relationships with other people. They feel good when they spend time together, being exposed to and learning new things. This makes them feel connected and they are not motivated by a lack of material resources, services or personal deficiencies. Their motivation is driven by curiosity, desire for growth or connection. They do not keep track of what has been exchanged or what has been reciprocated in the relationship. The co-dependency is a healthy one and their self-worth or well-being does not depend on someone else.

McCabe et al. (2018) maintain that in transformational relationships individuals work towards common goals and ensure autonomy to make independent decisions so that their relationship improves. Delgado (2019) claims that people can develop the capacity towards autonomy, and this is possible through a network of relationships and he refers to this as relational autonomy. This means that in transformational relationships there would be a translation of knowledge and skills that are relevant to the relationship. The focus would be on positive change and the ability to bring about awareness and acceptance of the relationship that results in positive outcomes. Being on a continuum, transactional and transformational relationships enable the individual to distinguish between growth-fostering connections and toxic or abusive relationships and become relationally competent. In Delgado's (2019) view, in relationships that translate to a transformational state, conditions of individual freedom are constituted by the relations generated by intersubjective recognition. Concerning decisions made in such relational contexts, there is a need to be able to determine whether decisions made are a result of oppression or manipulation by others. It is important to understand that while some relationships can be destructive toward personal autonomy, the challenge is to define which relationships promote autonomy and which are destructive.

McCauley (2013) suggests that the subordinated existence consists of learning how to simply survive within an oppressive relationship. The individuals who have been suppressed could lack the opportunities to develop skills that enable autonomy, so they might develop resistance to defy oppression. Resistance combined with transformation would then require sustained and strategic efforts to challenge the social norms and structures that degrade relational values (Jordan, & Schwartz, 2018). Some strategies that an individual may adopt include naming the problem and noticing who makes the rules (the dominant group), complaining, claiming strength, and developing communities of resilience and courage. When oppression is noticed, the subordinate group might suffer in silence, however, Formenti and West (2018) contend that pointing out the wrong attitude or behaviour to the oppressor serves as some form of resistance that leads to transformation where there is disconnection. In this way, an individual claims back their strength and become resilient. Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson (2018) argue that in issues of sexual violence, the survivor's self-blame surrenders power to the perpetrator, and when the afflicted gain the courage to disclose and seek help, they claim back their power. Although breaking the oppressive systems may prove to be difficult, individuals could move towards systems that promote relational values through engaging as a collective group.

3.4 Implications for sexual violence narratives of resilience and recovery

Violence against women and girls is embedded in societal inequalities and oppression of females that transcends culture. It can be conceptualised as a 'relational vulnerability' that reflects women and girls' subordinate status that is within the hierarchical gender relations and dependencies associated with it (Kabeer, 2014). Females tend to build relationships with their kind based on mutual support rather than common interests as does the opposite sex. They base their opposite-gender friendships on proximity, acceptance, effort, communication, common interests, affection,

and novelty. It would be important to understand what script would be appropriate for each respective relationship. It is also notable that feminine people communicate weakness and vulnerability and therefore seek friendship more in such times. They tend to feel closer to their friends whom they value for listening and communicating non-critically, communicating support, communicating feelings of enhanced self-esteem, communicating validation, offering comfort, and contributing to personal growth (Kang, Lessard, Heston et al., 2017).

As such relational cultural theory facilitates understanding of power dynamics that prevailed and still manifest in the relationships that survivors had before being violated, during violation and after suffering sexual violence trauma. These power dynamics could be the premise for lack of or having resilience and attaining recovery. As indicated by Di Bianca and Mahalik (2022), RCT helps unpack the crises linked to hegemonic masculine socialisation as shaped by interpersonal and socio-cultural disconnections that keep boys and men in rigid confines of what is expected of real men. In patriarchal societies, men dominate the power hierarchies and determine what is right and wrong for females to do. As such, societal norms tend to be detrimental to the well-being of females and they operate to maintain oppression and violence. The primary cause of human distress is gendered relational disconnections with other people and intra-disconnections with oneself. In sexual violence issues, it is essential to understand that a survivor might disconnect from oneself. This happens when one pretends that all is well while inside, they feel pain, unfairness or inequality to fit in with others. In such a situation, they could be viewed as being disconnected from their true selves. This happens when disclosing sexual violence becomes taboo and they are cowed into silence to preserve family honour.

In sexual violence research, RCT allows deeper analysis of when and how individuals' psychological problems are reflective of larger socially destructive patterns (Dietz, Dotson-Blake, Enslman et al., 2017). Therefore, RCT enabled me to understand the causes of connections and disconnections that occurred in participants' relationships. Furthermore, the theory helped in examining the epiphanies and metaphors within the stories told. Thus, it allowed me to relate the survivors' stories indicating changes that occurred in their lives. Haiyasoso and Schuermann (2018) assert that owing to child sexual abuse, people can experience traumatic memories, a sense of isolation and severe distrust. Such feelings are usually a result of betrayal which occurs when acquaintances and close family members are the perpetrators. In addition, Gomez (2018) contends that within-group violence victimisation that happens in minority populations affects the survivor's well-being. Gomez (2018) refers to this as a cultural betrayal that brings about diverse outcomes that are detrimental to the survivor's psychological health. Similarly, Maslow declares that humans feel good when they belong to a group. They are secure within a group, so betrayal then occurs within the same comfort zone and results in isolation which can impede growth.

The way survivors deal with relational repair as well as how they engage in mutual growth and empowerment can be best understood within the lens of RCT. According to Gómez (2020), RCT facilitates attending to power in the research process as concerns the researcher-participant relationship. Integral to RCT is cultural competency which relates to power, privilege and discrimination. Understanding these concepts within the confines of the survivor's culture enhances the researcher's competency in eliciting the meaning embedded in their stories. Furthermore, RCT can facilitate informed case conceptualisation, for instance, homogeneity of the sample under study, gender, ethnicity and so on. Notably, Quinn and Grumbach (2015) proffer that RCT works well in unpacking the importance of relationships and the environment that

influences women. This assertion emphasises the aforementioned women's fundamental focus on the need to connect with others based on empathy, mutuality and a dynamic relational process. An equally significant aspect of RCT is that it incorporates the idea that it is in these close relationships that sexual violence occurs and their toxicity tends to harm the individual's mental and physical health.

Regardless of the common yearning for connection by many women, some can digress and focus their psychic energies in different ways. Understanding this dimension of the theory would facilitate considering the unique choices, preferences and experiences of each survivor. As a result, analysis of their stories considering each unique view, would reduce bias in the interpretation of the collected data.

3.5 Limitations of the Relational Cultural Theory

As much as the RCT assists the researcher in understanding survivors' relationships that could have affected their journey of resilience and recovery, the theory might not be adequate in unpacking the need for the survivor to connect. Lenz (2016) argues that RCT is unlikely a stand-alone theory, hence the researcher's choice to include the feminist standpoint theory. Given that RCT espouses a universal belief that the need to connect is primary to all women, this could mislead the interpretation of survivors' issues. For those females who have been nurtured in relationships and do not value connections, RCT is not the best theory through which to view their stories. Furthermore, it could be difficult to understand survivors who are entrenched in socio-pathic patterns of behaviour (Jones-Smith, 2019). Avoidance of authenticity and vulnerability might be too entrenched and the survivor not wanting to respond when probed on issues during interviews.

3.6 Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Epistemologically, it became central to women's studies. Feminist standpoint theory foregrounds analysis from women's or marginalised lives, as these lives are significant sites of knowledge production. Thus, the theory casts the lens on the intersection of everyday practices of exerting power and the production of knowledge (Gurung, 2020). The main proponents of the theory include Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Hilary Rose, Alison Jaggar, and Sandra Harding. Sandra Harding is considered the main force behind coining the term 'standpoint theory'. These feminist theorists advocated for women's lived experiences to be considered as the beginning of scientific knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory is guided by four theses, namely, strong objectivity, situated knowledge, epistemic advantage and power relations.

3.6.1 Strong objectivity

Gurung (2020) outlines the notion that bias has to be avoided. Observations, decisions, or reports are expected to be based on an unbiased analysis. Owing to this expectation, an accurate explanation of how things work in the world is necessary, hence the need for objectivity. Ideas in research that show objectivity have to be based on facts and are free from bias that includes personal opinions. Harding (2019), who penned the concept of strong objectivity, claims that starting research on women's lives would generate less partial and less distorted accounts of both women's and men's lives and the whole social order (Paradies, 2018).

The concept of strong objectivity proclaims that knowledge is produced and controlled by the dominant group whose interpretation of reality reflects their interests and values. To maintain power, the dominant group commits itself to concealing ways in which it dominates and exploits the rest of the population. Harding (2019) suggests that the strong objectivity thesis proffers that

due to this commitment, the dominant group's interpretation of reality is presented in a distorted way that ignores the suffering of the oppressed or subordinate group. Sometimes, they might re-describe the situation as enjoyment or they might justify it as a free choice, deserved or inevitable. The dominant group, within their comfort zone – the positions of power and privilege, separate and insulate themselves from the demises of the subordinate group. They are always comfortable within their distorted ideologies. In the context of sexual violence, the dominant group which is the patriarchal system, experiences the current organisation of society as satisfactory. They justify the isolation, discrimination or ostracism of sexually assaulted individuals. Since the dominant group encounters little in their day-to-day lives, this distorts their interpretation of the situations and they are satisfied with the status quo. They fail to see anything wrong with the prevailing interpretation of reality. In Harding's view, significant daily issues of the oppressed require explanation and demand further investigation outside the ideologies of the dominant group.

Lorenzi-Cioldi, (2017), Hidayat (2018) and Zhang (2018) concur that emotional pain, self-blame, and denial of their predicaments by the subordinate group are believed to be a result of the dominant group temporarily convincing the former to accept them. Contrarily, their pain and suffering push them to realise that something is amiss with the social order. Instead of feeling the pain negatively, it motivates them to find out what has gone wrong and criticise the interpretation of the reality presented by the dominant group. This leads them to develop their own new and less distorted understanding of the world. Strong objectivity implies that women, as the subordinate group, do not have any cause to misconstrue reality, unlike men who distort the interpretation of reality to protect their interests and maintain power. In their subordinate position, women are likely to develop a clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world.

In sexual violence research, women expose the reality of the violation and exploitation that they are forced to endure. As such, they succeed in challenging the distorted view that society has about sexual violence and its consequences. The view of survivors of sexual violence being weak, deserving of the abuse, or bringing it on themselves, can be challenged when women get the courage to speak out and produce their narratives. Strong objectivity in issues of intimate partner violence, would entail women coming forward to challenge the widespread ‘happy housewife’ ideology that perpetuates abuse of women in intimate relationships. Their lived experiences and knowledge would suffice in the interpretation of their reality. By reconstructing their image from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ women who suffer sexual violence can free themselves and step outside the boundaries set by the dominant group. They can set new goals, and interests and learn new skills that bring in a new reality that more accurately reflects a full range of potentials. Thus, strong objectivity in this study would mean considering the representation of reality from the standpoint of female student survivors of sexual violence as more accurate unbiased than the prevailing representations.

3.6.2 Situated knowledge

Ashton, and McKenna (2020) concur with Gurung (2020) that feminist epistemology is interested in socially situated knowledge. In addition, the authors contend that social groups that individuals belong to, usually shape their view of the world and determine how they communicate with their environment. Furthermore, they suggest that social relationships are also generated from the inequalities that exist in their environment. In this case, sexual violence survivors’ perception of their experiences and the meaning they give them, are determined by where they belong in society and their history. This could depend on whether they belong to the dominant or oppressed group. As suggested by Anderson (2017), survivors produce knowledge from their specific social

locations which are determined by the intersectionality of social identities, gender, class, ethnicity/race, age, social roles assigned to them, and relations they hold within their communities.

Developed by Donna Haraway (1988), the situated knowledge thesis is a metaphor for the vision that enables the achievement of objectivity. It also takes into consideration the diversity of subjects and the importance of choosing a particular point of view when viewing issues. Advancing Haraway's concept, Simandan (2019) avers that one's knowledge cannot be considered complete. It is situated because information about the world can reach an individual through a channel that has four gaps -1) possible worlds versus realised worlds, 2) realised worlds versus witnessed situations, 3) witnessed situations versus remembered situations and 4) remembered situations versus confessed situations.

In the first gap of possible worlds versus realised worlds, Proudfoot (2019) asserts that humans tend to attend to reality – the actual world at the expense of the unrealised world due to their limited minds. Thus, they concentrate on what they see while they ignore the unforeseen or dwell on what they consider the 'normal' while ignoring the 'abnormal'. Where power dynamics and privilege are concerned, a few are afforded opportunities to make greater choices and agency while the underprivileged and powerless are denied such. The amount of power that an individual has, determines their agency to remake the world according to their desires. As Haraway puts it, the prevailing interpretation of reality will reflect the interests and values of the ruling class. This implies that when female survivors of sexual violence are empowered to determine their agency, they can shape their lives in their desired way – which can be the unrealised world. In contrast, patriarchy will always consider women's reality as a deviation from the norm. The dominant group in the patriarchal system experiences the current organisation of society as satisfactory. As such, they consider their interpretation of reality justifies their system. Haraway attributes such belief to

the privilege the system affords them. In their privileged life, they encounter less opposition to their interpretation of reality. When abuse occurs, a survivor might fail to recognise the possibility of moving on and gets stuck in victimhood. Thus, Simandan (2019) claims that one would have failed to realise a multitude of possibilities that would have turned their present situation differently.

The second gap that Simandan (2019) notes are the realised worlds versus the witnessed situations. In this gap, it is believed that we perceive what is shaped by our positionality at any given moment. Thus, our geographical location, biases, interests, gender, age, and so on, determine how we give meaning to our situations. What we perceive of any situation we get into accounts for just a fraction of the whole story, thus expressed in Gestalt psychology, it will be regarded as the ‘figure’ that obscures the ‘ground’. The uneven power relations that exist in society shape the situations that manifest in people’s lives. The key question is: does poverty, social strata, political situations, or fate expose an individual to sexual violence? The way each survivor perceives their situation would be determined by one or more of these factors. Cunliffe and Scaratti (2017) contend that it is useful for researchers to understand this gap to address the historical, cultural, economic, social, and other embedded perspectives when interviewing participants in the field.

Simanadan (2019) presents the third gap in situated knowledge which he terms ‘witnessed versus remembered situations.’ In this gap, it is claimed that most of our daily knowledge is what we remember. As humans, we tend to modify or minimise what could have happened to us. It is human nature that we remember or forget what happened to us depending on how much the incident impacts us. Sometimes we remember an incident due to the circumstances in which it occurred. For example, incest can have a lasting negative impact more than stranger rape due to the aspect of betrayal of trust. Sexual violence perpetrated by a close relative has the possibility of

reactivating the abuse whenever the survivor tries to move on. Simandan (2019) asserts that people in the epiphanies of their lives, understand and recall their experiences depending on their unique location within gendered, raced, and classed axes of social power. They understand their experiences according to what they hear, see, do, taste and sense. The essence of this gap is that our memory system processes what we experience in such a complicated manner that we can only access a fraction of what we encode. In Simandan's view, we are strangers to ourselves. What we know is more than we can tell. Some information we encoded in our experiences could be distorted or lost along the way.

In unpacking the situated knowledge thesis, the final gap explained is the 'remembered versus the confessed situation'. Considering that humans are social beings, their knowledge is socially constructed and situated in and through webs of power. One can have memories of painful or exciting experiences, but these can be influenced by group memories (family, cultural, societal, political, and so on) which may interfere positively or negatively with our perceptions. Due to political motivations, social pressures, fear of punishment, social exclusion, shame, lack of confidence stigmatisation, and other factors, one can be forced to edit recollections from their personal experiences to be acceptable by the group. Furthermore, an individual's positionality may be distorted or lost due to the influence of mass media and sharing of what other people remember. This then complicates the conveyance of what we know. This gap resembles a scenario whereby a survivor might not be willing to share their story or may make up the story. All is attributed to the fear of isolation that sets the spiral of silence in motion. Survivors might feel they need to abide by withholding their painful experiences or telling their stories. Silence would be used to protect their 'integrity' in a society that does not tolerate 'deviations'.

Considering these gaps within the situated knowledge thesis, narratives of resilience and recovery could be understood by also considering the historical, social, and political spaces and the time that survivors experienced sexual violence.

3.6.3 Epistemic advantage

Feminist standpoint theory argues that the knowledge and theories of marginalised populations hold more epistemic authority than the knowledge and theories developed by dominant groups (Wu, 2022). Similarly, Ashtons (2019) contends that socially oppressed individuals have precise experiences whose frames of reference can be turned into a standpoint when critically reflected upon. These perspectives can become an epistemic privilege through which the nature of everyday social interactions can be defined. This privilege cannot be regarded as a given - something that can be guaranteed to be accessed by anyone who belongs to the oppressed or marginalised group. To buttress this point, Kassar (2020) claims that although the oppressed or marginalised groups have privileged access to epistemic advantages, for one to be able to actualise this epistemic privilege, it is necessary to have what is termed 'intellectual self-trust'. Dror (2022) affirms that the epistemic advantage involves the workings of social marginalisation that concerns the particular marginalised group. This could mean that it is not in all aspects or situations that one can have epistemic privilege regardless of being oppressed. In some instances, those who are marginalised could lack epistemic resources that their less marginalised counterparts have access to. These can be information, analytical tools, or formal educational training that can enable them to perceive situations they are in. In such situations, the marginalised might have no ability to conceptualise and articulate the source of their oppression hence blocking recognition of the reality of their situation.

Gurung (2020) argues that because women, as an oppressed group, endure many struggles and pain, they have complete and diverse knowledge on account of their lower status. They can better understand both their world and that of the patriarchal system that dominates their world – thus they have a dual vision. Due to their marginalised position and ability to have dual vision, they can develop epistemic virtues that include being open-minded, curious, and humble. As a result, Medina (2013) suggests that they have meta-attitudes and meta-lucidity which can allow them to see through dominant ways of thinking. Owing to denigrating effects of oppression, the epistemic privilege can be difficult to attain. The marginalised can be kept from actualising their epistemic privilege due to malicious manipulation by oppressive systems. As such, under the right circumstances such as having communal support, motivation, values, and intellectual self-trust can help the marginalised to attain and utilise their epistemic privilege.

Intellectual self-trust proves to be important in attaining epistemic privilege. A marginalised individual needs to trust her own cognitive capacities, beliefs, thoughts, and experiences to balance the oppressor's and oppressed perspectives (Vasanthakumar, 2018). In Leefmann's (2022) view, it is not enough that one is wise enough to hold her own beliefs as true. An individual can fail to believe the obvious and hence negatively affect her self-trust. Furthermore, Leefmann (2022) contends that an individual needs to trust the deliverances of her mind. This trust can be undermined more when one is mistreated or misunderstood by others. Our confidence and self-concept are lost since in life, human beings seem to need intersubjective validation of their beliefs.

In issues of sexual violence, survivors hold the epistemic privilege in that they know about the grave injustices that prevail and they are aware of others who are in the same predicament and need assistance like themselves. Therefore, they have experiential knowledge of what it feels like to be violated, are on intimate terms with oppression, and have an emotional understanding of the

injustices that go with sexual violence. They could be able to narrate how it feels, for instance, not to be believed, to be ostracised or rejected by their own family after the violation. Vasanthakumar (2018) further expresses the view that some injustices hide in plain sight. This entails that the systems that survivors could look up to for assistance, the community, family and friends could ignore the vice and behave in a ‘business as usual’ manner’ – which Vasanthakumar (2018) refers to as a perpetration of injustice. As such, being ignored deprives the survivor of the communal resources that would enhance the individual’s intellectual self-trust that is needed to utilise their epistemic privilege. The survivors’ epistemic privilege would be in that they have the information about the nature of the violations faced, mechanisms by which the vice is inflicted, the personalities involved and the gravity of injuries suffered. The survivors’ perspectives of what counts as assistance or the defeat of the vice is believed to be either the perpetrator reforms or is punished, they get their independence or autonomy to belong as it was before the violation.

Although Medina (2013) disputes that epistemic privilege is not a given and one needs to avail oneself of the advantages, Vasanthakumar (2018) believes that survivors could have limited knowledge of the oppression they suffer, the institutional hierarchy perpetuating the oppression or the individual identities of the perpetrators or other survivors. Furthermore, their limitation in intellectual self-trust due to mistreatment by those they trust could render them disoriented, unconscious, or failing to remember incidents as well as individuals who violated them. This would exacerbate disbelief in their testimonies of sexual trauma. Therefore, their epistemic competence is undermined. According to Kassar (2020), when one possesses intellectual self-trust, they cannot be epistemically, morally and ethically perfect beings. Intellectual self-trust consists of the affective and cognitive stance that one takes towards cognitive capacities, experiences, and thoughts which are manifested in actions. With the support of peers, parents, and other fellow

humans, a survivor can develop and maintain her intellectual self-trust. In the next section, I discuss the fourth thesis of the feminist standpoint theory – power relations.

3.6.4 Power Relations in Feminist Standpoint Theory

The fourth thesis of the feminist standpoint theory is the aspect of power relations. This thesis focuses on the intersection of everyday interactions whereby power is exercised in the production of knowledge. Shaw (2017) argues that gender power shapes the dynamic of every interaction that humans make. This view buttresses the fact that power in society can be seen as unequally and unjustly distributed, favouring men. As a result, this injustice leads to the discrimination and oppression of women by men. Predominantly in patriarchal societies, men use this power to control the lives of women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). Gurung (2020) echoes Shaw's assertion by advancing the function of power as an instrument of domination to harm others' choices. Gurung (2020) further elaborates that those who possess power in society mobilise a complex set of motivations in distorting the relevant evidence of the knowledge of the powerless. Both authors agree that major institutions in society have control over the world and they control how everyone should experience it. For example, when a girl loses her virginity, either intentionally or through sexual violence, in the male-dominated world, she would face many forms of discrimination ranging from being considered valueless to being labelled characterless. The dominating group (patriarchy) turns a blind eye to the perpetrator who violated the woman - a sign of power and control over women's lives. Power is regarded as the ability of an individual or a group to constrain the choices available to another individual or group. Harding (2004, as cited in Haraway, 2020) affirms that we can use the narratives of the less powerful to gain insight into how power operates. The accounts of the less powerful can also reveal the differences between claims of truth and the actual experiences of the affected. As indicated by Nightingale (2019) power relations happen at

household as well as community level and everyday struggles. These relations influence both rational and irrational choices on decisions individuals make about their lives. Therefore, a survivor might decide not to be vulnerable to revictimisation due to distorted thoughts of regarding herself as ‘damaged goods’ or spoiled and not of value. Such irrational thoughts could result in risky behaviours or lack of healing and remaining in victim mode.

Nightingale (2019) contends that gender norms and social relations shape the participation rules and practices of a group. Dominant groups of society make these norms and rules that mostly disadvantage the less powerful, who are mainly female. Gurung (2020) argues that although women are marginalised because of the treatment they receive from men and other institutions of power, not all women are oppressed. When a female recognises and challenges cultural values and power relations that contribute to her subordination or oppression, a standpoint arises. She can reject the values and power discrepancies. This could only be possible when she identifies which values and power dynamics account for her subordination. Considering the ‘dual consciousness’ discussed earlier, a survivor who has been discriminated against because she was sexually assaulted and lost her virginity could strengthen alternative abilities by defying the patriarchal belief that she is ‘damaged goods’ or spoiled. Knowledge of the negative tactics of the oppressor to pull her down and control her life would give the survivor the resilience to empower and stand up for herself. Thus, the survivor, in such a scenario would have resisted the power of patriarchy to effect social change.

In the Foucauldian view, elaboration of meaning involves conflict and power. Foucault views power as having a function of equal competing agendas in an open system, as hidden power, and as unspoken, hegemonic dominance of certain powerful groups (Lewis, 2018). These dimensions are seen as presenting repressive forms of power that can be expressed through direct control or

indirect language. This language shapes opportunities individuals can have to realise their rights for a better life. In cases of survivors of sexual violence, being labelled ‘damaged goods’ or ‘victim’ and so on, could impede progress or healing from the trauma. When a survivor is accepted like any other female in society, she tends to navigate her way through life and is likely to work towards healing from the trauma. Knowledge is considered to symbolise power.

The society we live in is stratified and has classes that are determined by power. Wallerstein and Duran (2017) describe the behaviours and dynamics of what they term ‘visible and behind-the-scenes’ players which they suggest can be only understood in relation to these players’ power and class positions in society. Furthermore, they describe the nature of societal power as having a hidden face in which some actors and issues are kept from open discussion. Powerful norms or organisations against community interests are set in favour of the dominant group (Van Dijk, 2017). Thus, the less powerful find it difficult to express their opinions on certain issues that favour their interests. Power relations can also be understood in situations where power can exclude grievances by preventing conflicts or community ideas from surfacing. This is termed ‘internalised oppression’. It can contribute to a culture of silence in which individuals may end up doubting if they have any healing practices to offer. In the Foucauldian view, power is seen as a web of discourses and practices inherent in institutions, communities and families (Sawicki, 2020). Power can be seen in people’s actions in multiple relationships which are seen as unstable, hence they are open to challenge them. Power is evident in people’s opportunities to fulfil their rights and can be shaped through direct control or indirect language. In cases of sexual violence, the labelling and stigmatisation when a survivor reveals the incident or falls pregnant as a result of an assault, can be the reason for dropping out of school or resisting any intimate relationships. In cultures where

family honour is a priority, sexual violence survivors can be ostracised and denied access to some institutions (Ford, 2017).

Knowledge symbolises power. Feminist standpoint theory focuses on the intersection of everyday practices of exercising power and the production of knowledge (Sweet, 2020). Owing to this, Foucault claims that discourse is contained or expressed in organisations and institutions as well as words. Thus, the elaboration of meaning involves a conflict of power. Meanings are locally contested within discursive fields of force. Within the lens of feminist standpoint theory, narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma would be understood within the confines of the power inherent in the relationships in which survivors experienced the trauma. Doing research with female student survivors of sexual violence at tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe required me to understand how they live, feel, and understand their situations. In undertaking this study, I generated participants' stories and learned from their narratives of resilience and recovery in a participatory co-construction of knowledge. I focused on participants' responses about their life journeys and their everyday struggles, organising for well-being in institutions of inequality, exclusion, and at some stage, economic poverty. While listening to participants' narratives, the thesis of power relations assisted in analysing narratives through an intersectional lens. I was therefore able to understand how practices of oppression operate as well as how practices of mutual support and negotiation could create systems of well-being and fair socio-cultural relations.

3.7 Implications of Feminist Standpoint Theory

Neitz (2021) maintains that feminist standpoint theory claims that all knowledge comes from interpretations that are based on human interests. Therefore, there is a need to prioritise thinking from the female student sexual violence survivors' life experiences before and after the trauma. Relevance of research can be established by exploring ways to do engaged research that

encompasses situated knowledge, dialogical sense-making, and shared reflexivity. Gurung (2020) suggests that research be undertaken with communities (in this study, survivors of sexual violence) to understand how they live, feel, and understand the environment and the agency of other-than-human beings. Thus, survivors of sexual violence experience environments that are influenced by culture, such as a patriarchal society, and the physical and spiritual environment that could promote or impede resilience and recovery. In addition, Neitz (2021) asserts that the feminist standpoint theory amplifies the power dynamics that exist in the research process. The researcher has to identify how she can work from the standpoint of the disadvantaged and produce knowledge that empowers them.

Using the feminist standpoint theory as a lens through which to understand narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma, enabled me to focus on how survivors responded to socio-natural (relationship between cultural and geographical contexts) and economic changes of everyday struggles and political organisation for well-being (Garcia et al., 2022). The theory made it possible to understand how survivors' narratives depicted how they manoeuvred their way through institutions of inequality, exclusion, and economic poverty.

The feminist standpoint theory claims that knowledge is situated. Therefore, situated knowledge can be broadly defined as knowledge embedded within a social, historical, cultural, and political time and place that reflects contextual features and lived experience. The aim of using standpoint theory in sexual violence research was to give voice to survivors and reveal the knowledge they have cultivated from living life on the margins of stigmatisation, labelling, and isolation. This means that in the interviews held with the survivors, the researcher paid attention to the survivors' contextualised experiences which were unique to each survivor and the researcher and the

participants developed the ability to co-create knowledge in uncertain and fluid situations that acknowledged the complexities of their lived experiences.

Furthermore, female survivors of sexual violence were recognised as experts and authorities on their own experiences as the starting point of the research. As Harding (1991) suggests, they offer a causal, critical account of the regularities of the natural and social worlds and their underlying causal tendencies. It is they who can be authors of their ‘true’ stories what caused each incident to happen and how they navigated through them. Harding (1995) asserts that women, as a marginalised group, are aware of more objective accounts of their reality. Their knowledge claims are seen as less partial and less distorted than those of the dominant groups, for instance, the patriarchal system. Dual consciousness of survivors entails their ability to know and understand the behaviours and ideologies of those in the dominant group as well as their own. This gives survivors an upper hand in understanding marginalisation that stems from the social order of a patriarchal society.

Haraway’s (1988) ideas of situated knowledge in research entail constant crossing of boundaries and surfacing intersectionality of context, people, relationships, interactions, and actions when making sense of the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. These ideas meant that as the researcher, I had to be simultaneously engaged, not controlling the process and having no answers. I would also have to be resistant to simplification, closure, and the temptation to draw boundaries around the survivors’ knowledge. In the view of situated knowledge, I had to be open to, and reflexive about invisible and visible boundaries with survivors. I would be observing the multiple positionings, temporal and contextual meanings, and relationships in the shared conversations that I had in the narrative interviews with survivors. In these conversations it was important for me to also observe and be sensitive to power dynamics in the conversations.

Being careful of who dominates the discussions, who imposes meanings and claim status was important in the research within the lens of the feminist standpoint theory. Although not homogenous, experiences of female student sexual violence survivors bring out core issues that they recognise and integrate into their self-identity. Survivors were located in different classes, cultures, and ethnic groups as well as different institutions of learning. Their stories would be different regardless of experiencing similar forms of sexual violence. As a researcher, I had to embrace their knowledge which was expansive and, in some instances, contradictory.

3.8 Limitations of the Feminist Standpoint Theory

As much as the feminist standpoint theory could assist in viewing each survivor's story within her frame of reference, it could not provide a noncircular basis for deciding which of their standpoints had epistemic privilege (Cormick, 2022). Thus, what would be perceived as truth by one survivor, could mean something different to another. In other words, a situation that could be presented as giving an epistemic privilege to a survivor could mean the opposite to another survivor. A single theoretical vocabulary and a single 'meta-narrative' could not account for the diversified sample of female sexual violence survivors drawn from different learning institutions, ethnic groups, cultures, and with varying identities (Pal, 2021).

Considering the Marxian theory of class, it is also doubtful to claim that any group's inequality is central to all the others. There is some form of intersectionality that is complex. Marginalisation or oppression takes different forms for different women according to their race, sexual orientation, situation, and identities. On the one hand, the way a survivor of sexual assault could be blamed by society for 'calling for it' could be a form of oppression (Frye, 2019). On the other hand, a female in a certain culture would not feel offended by suggestive comments from men on the street, while in another, it would be offensive and regarded as oppression of the opposite 'weaker sex'. It is

against this background that a combination of the relational cultural theory and feminist standpoint theory were adopted to offer a wider lens through which the narratives of sexual violence trauma could be interpreted.

3.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided insight into the theoretical frameworks adopted for this study. The critical theoretical approach was adopted to explain and understand the perceived social reality depicted in the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning. Theoretical bricolage was employed due to its ability to provide a wider range of lenses from which unique participants' narratives and discourses can be explained and understood. I argued that relational-cultural theory (RCT) and the feminist standpoint theory position the narratives of sexual violence survivors at the core of the research. The concepts of central paradox, connection, and disconnection in the trajectories of sexual violence survivors would be understood through the application of the RCT. The feminism standpoint theory would allow the survivors to own their stories and contribute to the world of knowledge that has been dominated by those who claimed expertise in giving meaning to phenomena. The four theses of situated knowledge; strong objectivity, epistemic privilege, and power relations were outlined and assisted in understanding the interactions that occurred in the life journeys of the survivors. These concepts formed the analytical framework to identify emerging themes of resilience and possibilities of recovery from sexual violence trauma within the narratives told.

In the next chapter, insight into the methodological approach which was employed in this study is presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NARRATIVE JOURNEY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach adopted in this study and justifies the methodological and research design choices. The chapter commences with an outline of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the critical research paradigm. This is followed by a discussion of the qualitative research and narrative inquiry approach. The suitability and limitations of the methodological approach is outlined. Next, the research context, sampling procedures and steps of data generation are discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical issues and trustworthiness.

4.2 Methodological issues

4.2.1 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is described in different ways by various researchers. It comprises elements such as a worldview, a belief about the nature of knowledge, a philosophical way of thinking, a researcher's worldview, and a framework that guides research and practice in a field (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Khatri, 2020; Botha & Taylor, 2022). Botha and Taylor (2022) elaborate that a research paradigm can be identified with five components. The five components include; (a) theoretical assumptions, (b) explicitly stated laws, (c) a standard way of applying the stated laws to a diversity of situations and environments, (d) instrumental techniques that allow a researcher to bring the laws of a paradigm to stand in the real world. This fourth one is meant to guide work within the paradigm of general metaphysical principles that are used. The fifth component

concerns the methodological prescriptions that guide the researcher on how to conduct the research within the paradigm.

Botha and Taylor (2022) contend that a paradigm comprises four components or elements, namely, ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. Ontology is about realism. Khatri (2020) contends that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values that are formed over time. This reality can only be discovered through interactions that make researchers acquire knowledge that brings to bear what participants' realities are. Consequently, the philosophy of studying the nature of knowledge and the process by which it is validated is termed epistemology, a term derived from the Greek word "episteme" meaning knowledge (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Kamal, 2019). Epistemology can lead to finding out how reality can be unveiled. It incorporates the validity, parameters, and methods of acquiring knowledge. These aspects of epistemology help the researcher find ways to acquire knowledge and to communicate it to other human beings.

Furthermore, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) describe methodology as consisting of design, methods, approaches, and procedures that are used in a research study. For instance, how a researcher chooses to gather research data, the choice of participants, data generation instruments, and how data is analysed constitutes the methodology. This is a form of a logical system of conducting a research project that leads to gaining knowledge of the research problem. While searching for the participants' reality, a researcher takes into account the element of a paradigm termed 'axiology'. Khatri (2020) illustrates that the component of axiology in a paradigm considers the philosophical approach to ensuring that a researcher makes the right decisions when defining, evaluating and understanding right and wrong behaviour when dealing with participants during research. The way

a researcher reports the results of the research falls under the component of axiology, which outlines the ethical considerations in research.

This research study is located within the critical paradigm, underpinned by critical theory. As alluded to in Chapter Three, critical theory originated from the Frankfurt School with Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas and Theodor Adorno as the proponents of the theory. Ryan (2018) claims that critical theory accepts that knowledge is historically and culturally embedded and constructed based on issues of power. This characteristic of the paradigm aligns well with the phenomenon of sexual violence which this research study focused on. Patriarchy is dominated by power dynamics that dictate how females should live their lives. The perceptions embedded in their narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma would depict historical events as well as cultural values and norms that determine the potential for resilience or recovery. Though power dynamics could be considered a source of vulnerability to the ‘weaker’ group in society, Foucault argues that a society without power relations can only be an abstraction (Callaghan, 2017). He further states that the analysis of power relationships in any particular society, their historical formation, source of strength or weakness as well as conditions that are necessary to form some or abolish others is necessary. This suggests that Foucault is endorsing the necessity of power relations within any phenomenon. Thus, the existence of power relations could also be necessary for a survivor to manipulate her environment to find solutions to her predicament. As alluded in the previous chapter, although the oppressed have the epistemic privilege or double vision of both the oppressor’s and her world view, she might not be able to utilise this epistemic privilege if she cannot recognise the vile within the power dynamics. Such is also indicated in the assumption that discourse is believed to be controlled within and by rhetorical and political interests. The strength of critical theory and the critical paradigm anchors upon the emphasis on

the distinction between the real and subjective, distorted, conceptual and ideological order of existence. Furthermore, it offers knowledge about socially constituted structures or mechanisms on which social action and political change are built.

In the critical paradigm, language is understood to be central to the formation of subjectivity, including both conscious and unconscious awareness of their experiences, in this case, of sexual trauma. Furthermore, certain groups of people in society are believed to be privileged over others. For instance, a male in the patriarchal system is not blamed for sexually assaulting a girl or woman, while an aggrieved female may accept and carry the label for life. This is considered a form of oppression that is forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable. Where sexual violence occurs within a patriarchal system, women and girls who are at times not empowered, feel they deserve the treatment they get from men. Being labelled, stigmatised, rejected in intimate relationships or isolated because of their predicament would be taken as normal. They would usually internalise it and fail to progress because they would have accepted their social status. The critical paradigm aims to address and change this status quo. Consequently, it is believed, within the critical paradigm that oppression has many faces, and concern is given to a single form of oppression at the expense of others. This can be counterproductive since there is intersectionality of gender, class, race, ethnicity and others within each form of oppression (Kekeya, 2019).

According to Botha and Taylor (2022), methodology in the critical paradigm is dialogical and dialectical. This emphasises the co-production of knowledge by the researcher and the participant. Information is obtained in a transactional manner. To reveal injustice, the research located within the critical paradigm probes and makes a deeper analysis of information obtained to distinguish between false consciousness and liberatory consciousness.

The reason for my methodological choice of the critical paradigm is that it challenges oppression and beliefs that restrict human freedom and thus seeks to bring social change and freedom (Idris, Za, & Sulaiman, 2018). In doing critical research, I presume that social reality is constituted by past events produced and reproduced by the participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In addition, like other critical researchers, I recognise that people's ability to change their situations, whether economic or social can be constrained by varying forms of social, cultural, and political domination. Owing to that, their stories take different shapes, hence determining their reality. Furthermore, the use of critical research would expose any taken-for-granted beliefs, values, norms, and social structures by highlighting the problems and the structures that cause them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). When carrying out the research, self-conscious criticism is encouraged, thereby developing emancipatory consciousness as a researcher and imparting such in the social members in general. The assumption that people's reality evolves in a process of change through human relationships, and is impacted by tensions, conflicts, disagreements, and disparities over time in society, makes the critical paradigm most suitable to explore survivors' narratives of resilience and recovery (Kekeya, 2019). The use of the critical paradigm helps uncover the underlying unfair structures in the social institutions of the participants. While participants are taken as co-producers of knowledge in the study, indirectly, the insights into their issues would help push for reform of policies and laws to be enacted. These policies and laws would promote equality, justice, fairness, equal distribution of resources and empowerment in the lives of the disadvantaged.

4.2.2 A qualitative approach

This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach. Various authors describe qualitative research in different ways. According to Haven and Van Grootel (2019), qualitative research

involves the use of language as its data. This data can either be written or oral. In some cases, a researcher can utilise photos, videos, or any other type of behavioural recordings as data. Similarly, Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger (2020) contend that qualitative research involves the study of the nature of phenomena, their quality, different manifestations, and the context in which they can be perceived. Both definitions suggest examining an issue without focusing much on the numbers. Data is generated using language while observing the gestures of the interviewees and their environment. Haven and Van Grootel (2019) further explain that in qualitative research, data is generated using interviews, focus groups, or observations. In addition, Aspers and Corte (2019) assert that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings. The researchers would be attempting to make sense of and interpret the meaning that people have of various phenomena. This suggests that subjectivity dominates the interpretation of the data in qualitative research.

Given the nature of the current study, research on phenomena would not require only the use of numerals if any sense should be made of the different phenomena that individuals find themselves in (Queirós et al., 2017). A deep understanding of the given problem is required. From its epistemological perspective, qualitative research obtains knowledge through the in-depth description of the phenomena. It is believed that perspectives of any phenomena are obtained from the individuals involved. The individuals become the producers of the said phenomena (Lanka et al., 2020). Due to these reasons, some research questions designed to elicit information from participants can best be obtained through qualitative research. This methodology makes it possible to discover reasons for observed patterns, especially invisible or surprising ones. Examining issues in detail and depth allows the researcher to understand the concepts, thoughts and experiences of the participants. Rich descriptions of complex phenomena are provided and tracked. Experiences and interpretations of events by participants that have differing stakes and roles are illuminated.

These then give voice to the views that are rarely heard. When using qualitative methods, interviews are not restricted to specific questions and they can be guided and redirected by the researcher. Overall, qualitative research allows for discussion so that both the researcher and the participants become co-producers of data.

4.2.2.1 Limitations of qualitative research

Like any other research method, qualitative research has its limitations (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2019). Some methods that include observations, and in-depth and structured interviews could be time-consuming and delay the presentation of results. For instance, verification of data generated through in-depth interviews could take longer to extract and compare information from each interview recorded with the same participant. Observation may be affected by researcher bias since research is not value-free. The customs, values, norms, and beliefs of the researcher could influence the interpretation of observations made. In the case of focus groups, participants could be difficult to gather. For instance, where a sensitive issue is under study, finding a support group might prove difficult. Qualitative research usually requires the researcher does some fieldwork. This could pose challenges in the documentation of the data generated. Observations made in the field could also depend on the observer's impartiality and such might not be assured. Although there are limitations in using qualitative methodology, it is best suited to the study of female students' experiences of sexual violence trauma. Being grounded in qualitative research, this study is rooted in narrative inquiry, which is discussed next.

4.2.3 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a method of thinking about and studying experience. Individuals often feel the need to tell stories of their lives. Haydon and van der Riet, (2017) contend that individuals can use narratives to explore their experiences and improve their situations. Storytelling seems to be a

natural reaction to alleviate inner pain. In this study examining sexual violence trauma, narrative inquiry would allow a deep understanding of how the survivors perceive their experiences of trauma. These experiences would include their relationships and interactions with others before and after the violation and how they perceive themselves (Oudshoorn et al., 2021; Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2020). According to Ford (2020), stories humanise our experiences for others and humans have an innate need to narrate. In other words, people, as they experience and understand their lives, do it in the form of stories. The events that they narrate are connected in a manner that has a structure with a beginning, middle, and end point. In the story, the person's present, past, and future are represented. Individuals do not live in a vacuum. The society, where the family hails from, which is also the custodian of culture, beliefs, norms, and values, determines the interactions that bear the person's lived experiences. The individual's stories are embedded in the other stories intersecting with their lived experiences.

Veldheer, Wright and Foulds (2019) claim that narrative inquiry has the potential to encourage participants to share historical and retrospective perspectives of how they come to understand their situation. Thus, the stories that individuals tell about their lives represent their meaning-making of lived experiences. In the same vein, Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2020) contends that critical narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to understand perceptions of the sources of oppression, suffering, conflicts and failures. As stories are told, some memories are triggered by past experiences that caused joy or pain. These epiphanies within the participants' stories allow the researcher to insightfully theorise about them. Rich and detailed information about how individuals understand their lives can be deduced from the analysis of how participants present their stories or experiences (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). When collecting data through narrative inquiry, the researcher does not aim for objective truth. The focus would be on constructed accounts of the individual's

experiences. As alluded to before, qualitative research is subjective. Participants subjectively experience, view and understand life events (Haydon et al., 2017). Therefore, these experiences may not be factual records of what happened. Haydon et al. (2017) highlight the concept of temporality in a story. Thus, when a narrative is told, the experience is remembered and some subtle changes are often made in the telling of the story to accommodate new experiences. As such, the story cannot be factual since it is affected by the past, present and future perspectives of the same story.

Clandinin (2019) affirms the need for active collaboration with the participants throughout the narrative inquiry and suggests that doing narrative inquiry research ensures the co-production of the final story. Narratives co-constructed through narrative inquiry within the critical paradigm can unveil overt and hidden patterns of power, domination, and manipulation (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, (2020). To do so, the researcher continually confirms the participant's meaning through probing and clarifying issues brought up in the interviews. The process of reflecting on the personal, social, and political background of the participant influences the researcher's re-storying of the participant's account of experiences. Goldstein (2017) asserts that reflexivity makes the researcher engage in a critical and conscientious evaluation of themselves and the participants. Gavidia and Adu (2022) describe reflexivity as authenticity within oneself, the research, and the audience. This can substantially enhance the accuracy and ethical quality of the research by bringing awareness to influential aspects of the researcher's biography or positioning that might remain hidden. Reflexivity can also help establish the qualitative equivalents of internal and external validity and reliability. It is argued that reflexivity can create ethical problems, especially when it is used to claim objectivity while it fails to acknowledge the unavoidable gap that exists between interpretations by the observer and the real experiences of the observed (Goldstein, 2017).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) consider narrative inquiry as an invaluable methodology because it provides the exploration of the meaning that participants give to their experiences as they tell their stories. Similarly, Haydon et al., (2018) positively appraise narrative inquiry as a gentle relational methodology. They posit that narrative inquiry helps the researcher to unveil what participants regard as important in their situation. Narrative inquiry also amplifies the voices that may otherwise remain silent as it allows for a rich description of the experiences and exploration of meanings. Although stories have been comforting fictions that participants may tell themselves and might divert the researcher from more important concerns, Oudshoorn et al. (2021) recommend them as a way of enabling the participants to construct their life stories and realities in a way that makes sense to them. Considering that participants are co-authors in the research, their stories help deconstruct values, assumptions and beliefs to challenge taken-for-granted meanings that society has of their experiences. Nevertheless, despite the positive attributes of narrative inquiry, some challenges and criticisms have been raised about the use of narrative inquiry research. The limitations of narrative inquiry are discussed in the following section.

4.2.3.1 Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

Ntinda (2019) and Davis and Dwyer (2019) critique narrative inquiry and argue that studying narrative text is by its nature linguistically subjective. In its nature, qualitative research involves understanding people's lives whose interpretation cannot be done other than subjectively. How people experience their lives involves intersectionality of various aspects that include gender, race, ethnicity, and others and there cannot be an objective way of interpreting their perceptions (Atewologun, 2018, Thomas et al., 2021). In some instances, the argument is on the researcher's positionality in research. It is believed that for a researcher to represent the subject's life experience effectively and realistically, she or he should be heavily embedded in the topic with a broad

understanding of the subject's life (Corlette & Marvin, 2018). Narrative inquiry counters this limitation with its nature of making the participant a co-producer of the final story (Byrne, 2017, Clark et al., 2022). The use of a multi-phase process in analysing field texts would allow the researcher to confirm with the narrator and correct where misconceptions are noticed.

Narrative inquiry depends on what the participants remember. Our memory, Kruijne et al. (2021) argue, is selective and in narrative research, participants recall what they want to and some happenings might be deliberately or unconsciously forgotten. As such, Muylaert et al. (2014) point out that it is important to remember that the participant is narrating her history, what she experienced, what is real to her, and not necessarily the facts themselves. Foxall et al. (2021) assert that a narrative is regarded as an internal subjective account of a socially constructed experience. The authors further suggest that it is described as a reflective perception of the complex interplay between memory, life circumstances, context, and relationships that an individual experienced.

Mueller (2019) argues that since a researcher generates field texts from episodes during interviews, these yield little in the way of meaningful claims about a phenomenon of interest. As such, there is also an unspoken agreement between the author of the final script and the reader to stay true to both the fiction and truth within the re-storied narrative (Rouverol, 2021). In narrative inquiry, participants have more space and power to decide what and how to talk about the issue under study (Harding, 2017). This makes the situation challenging for both the researcher and the participant. The researcher has to select relevant texts from the story and the participant could be confused about what to tell or not (Aspers & Corte, 2019, Nowell et al., 2017). An ethical challenge in narrative inquiry concerning anonymity and confidentiality is that it may be difficult to ensure that the recorded cases do not become recognisable in the final narrative (Saunders et al., 2015, Ngozwana, 2022, Joseph, 2023). It is also possible that unique and specific case histories depicting

a constellation of attributes of individuals are likely to be identifiable by those who might know the participants.

Owing to the limitations that narrative inquiry poses, I positioned myself to view the narratives as representations and interpretations that cannot be judged as true or false. It showed that the participants were narrating their truth from a point of view of their experiences in a particular time, space, and socio-historic context (Constant, & Roberts, 2017). As such, episodes in their stories would represent some form of achievement towards resilience or healing. For instance, if in the initial interview, a participant indicated that an experience was unbearable and then the feeling towards the same experience positively changes in another interview session, I would understand this as an effect of time and space. I was interested in exploring participants' representations of experiences. Identification of particular individuals would be difficult in such situations. Since the nature of narrative interviews allows the participants as storytellers to narrate in detail, it was my mandate to record and transcribe all the information and code the texts into themes.

4.3 Researcher reflexive thoughts about research design

To enhance the accuracy and ethical quality of the research, there was a need to bring awareness to the influential aspects of my positioning in the research. This was done through the process of reflexivity whereby I had to engage in a critical and conscientious evaluation of myself about the participants as survivors of sexual violence (Goldstein, 2017). I recognised the mutual shaping, reciprocity, and bidirectionality that are involved when producing field texts for the research (Attia & Edge, 2017). Reflexivity entails that interactions that participants had with me were context-dependent and also context-renewing. Thus, when we held the interviews, participants would obtain new insights into the meaning of their stories. Probing into meanings conveyed in their stories would bring back memories that could have been shelved in the unconscious mind.

Reflexivity meant that I had to observe participants' gestures as we discussed their stories and reflected through interactions with supervisors.

There were challenges in accessing sexual violence survivors to volunteer to participate in the study. Defining the concept of sexual violence and promoting the participants' well-being during the research engagement was also a challenge. The selection of participants and information bias ought to be dealt with. All these issues meant that I had to make a suitable choice of research design that would enable eliciting information that would respond to the research questions. Allowing the participants to tell their own stories proved to be the best way to obtain unbiased views of their journeys of resilience and recovery.

Storying the experiences of female students' sexual violence trauma required certain expertise. Being a member of the Mashonaland West Protocol to Multisectoral Approach to Sexual Violence (a section of the Victim Friendly Court), I understood the complexities involved in issues of sexual violence in the Zimbabwean context. Zimbabwe in general is culturally a patriarchal society where sensitive matters such as sexual violence might remain with the individual until death. I had to develop skills for deep and sensitive exploration. Although I was not an expert in eliciting the stories, I tried to provide a platform where participants would voice their experiences. From their 'small' and 'big' stories, I would elicit discourses embedded in their narratives of sexual violence experiences. In my position as the researcher, I was the medium through which participants' stories were told, re-told, heard, and understood. Through a co-constructed process, I sought to create a dialogic space for participants to share their storied events across time.

Siegenthaler et al. (2019) concur with Kearny (2017) on the concept of selective memory in humans. Kearney (2017) elaborates on the notion of a 'double arrow' and argues that narratives can be constructed both within time and memory. This means that stories could be consciously

and reflexively re-presented and re-storied depending on the memory of the events and experiences individuals have gone through. Therefore, it is possible that participants' narrative accounts might not be their faithful representation of the past world, but a depiction of shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future. I concede that I had a bias that rape, a form of sexual violence, is largely an act of sexual deviancy, especially incest, a concept that I found difficult to understand and make sense of. I also acknowledge my norms and biases about what constitutes a story worth listening to. As I interviewed the participants, who were survivors of sexual violence, I wondered if my language would accurately reflect the participants' experiences. I needed to consider the boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction', as Byrne (2017) contends that facts of knowledge, for instance, truth, objectivity, and reason could also represent effects of power. Hence, I was committed to not disregard any words, phrases, or non-verbal utterances of participants (Sools & Schuhmann, 2014). I thus accorded the participants respect, dignity, and unconditional positive regard as I listened to their stories. I observed how participants behaved while conducting the interviews and noted every event or occurrence so that I did not miss any information that would be valid for the research.

Wong and Breheny (2018) argue that narrative inquiry allows participants to present the versions of themselves that shape how they would like to be seen. In addition, as I analysed their stories, I would have insight into the social world beyond their immediate stories. Genuine and deeper mutual understanding was the purpose of the narrative research. I became aware that translation of what participants knew about their experiences into telling their stories, brought out the silenced voices (Parpart, 2020). Parpart (2020) adds that in that instance, silence cannot be taken as a sign of disempowerment. It can be a powerful force to ensure protection, a useful tool, especially when

the voice is either silenced or inoperative. Silence is seen as another form of agency since it is sometimes a survival strategy in places where they feel insecure.

A voice is assumed to be the meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community. In qualitative research, one cannot avoid problems that come with the representation of others. Byrne (2017) argues that the author's voice can be intrusive. Thus, I had to find ways to make my voice less intrusive. Facca et al. (2020) claim a shift in research whereby research is undertaken with participants rather than on participants. This recognises their agency and the right to value their views on all matters that concern them. Spoken words elicited from participants through interviews and other forms are emphasised in data generation. Byrne (2017) asserts that researchers need to provide space for the inclusion of the participant's perspectives, voices, and interpretations in a non-hierarchical manner. Thus, I attempted to probe the personal, historical, political, and cultural spaces of the participants. I believed that, by using narrative inquiry, I would be the voice of the participants as they told their stories. However, Byrne (2017) argues that research writing would not represent a 'voice' as much as it would be illuminated in poetry. The excerpts of participants' stories lack the quality of a significant voice. The quality would have been lost within the masses of literature – what would have remained are the 'lone voices' not speaking to the reader (Byrne, 2017). In poetry, a voice is given the immediacy and impact that cannot be present in traditional representation of data.

Apart from extracting stories about their survival of sexual violence trauma, the participants also find their voices that would allow them ability to have some form of agency in their healing process. Regardless of the assertion by Byrne about voices, survivors' struggle for their voices began when they attempted to communicate the meaning of their situations to someone else about their experiences of sexual aggression. During the first interview, I acknowledged participants

volunteering to participate in the study as an achievement. As the listener, I had to take a respectfully curious position where open sharing was required, whereby I would not overly-structure or guide the conversation but allow the participants to tell their own stories in their unique way. Narrative inquiry in this sense, provided a tool for re-humanisation, a chance to create the space for all participants' voices to be heard which feminists would term 'the voice of the silent oppressed' (Ifechelobi, 2014; Parpart, 2020).

At the outset of my research study, I understood that the sensitivity of the issue of sexual violence could make it difficult to access or select participants. My study targeted a specific attribute in participants namely, recovering sexually abused females in selected academic institutions. This sensitive characteristic of participants would mean obtaining referrals to other participants through a volunteer participant from the guidance and counselling departments at selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe. However, gaining access to sexual violence survivors is very difficult. I learned that female sexual violence survivors at tertiary institutions have a network through which they connect for healing and empowerment activities, known as the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT). To acquire willing participants, I first liaised with the student counsellor as well as the peer counsellors from this organisation (FSNT).

Finally, after negotiations and continuous visits to the FSNT organisation, the student counsellor introduced me to the Female Student Network Trust (FSNT) coordinator. The Female Student Network Trust has a mandate to empower female students in tertiary institutions to challenge the multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion existing in these institutions. In these institutions, female students are educated about different forms of gendered psychological violence and how to effectively avoid it. I followed the ethical procedures implemented by the tertiary institutions to engage with female students. I explained the purpose of my study and engaged with the

organisation to select participants for my study. In addition, I satisfied the protocols for accessing contacts of possible participants to be recruited for my study.

4.4 Contextualising the research

If the scholarly self is irretrievably tied to the world, then self-situating is a fruitful source of data production.

(Neumann & Neumann, 2015, p. 1)

A research context can be geographical, historical, cultural, or topical. The contexts can provide lenses through which the research, methodological approaches, arguments presented, findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations can be viewed. In this section, I discuss the research context.

I documented the high global and local prevalence of cases of sexual violence especially sexual assault against girls and women and the devastating short- and long-term effects in chapters one and two. Resilience after experiencing sexual violence trauma was assumed to determine the ability to pursue an education by female student survivors in tertiary institutions. The journeys of resilience and recovery under study are enshrined within the period that participants of the study travel in their academic paths. Zimbabwe's education system was designed following the amendment of the 1979 Education Act. This Education Model requires an individual to spend eight years of primary school, four years in lower secondary school, and two years in upper secondary school, followed by four years in university. According to the Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS, 2021), among the 81.46% of students who transition from grade 7 to form 1, only 17.68% would be female against 79.78% males. The completion of Form 6 for females in the transition to tertiary education was 10.82% while the completion rate for upper

secondary was 13.32%. These statistics depict a trend of resilience among female students as they strive for self-actualisation.

In this study, female students were drawn from seven out of the 13 state-funded institutions of higher learning and their affiliate institutions. In all Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning, there exists a student counselling department with the students' well-being as a key goal. These departments liaise with various non-governmental organisations that are interested in student support services. These departments and organisations assist with students' needs related to tuition fees, legal issues, counselling and any other issues. The institutions of higher learning that I drew participants from enrol students from all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. These institutions of higher learning enrol black Africans as the majority. Students reside either on campus-based residences or out of residence, with first-year students being given priority to occupy campus-based residences. The Female Students' Network Trust served as the conduit for accessing and recruiting participants.

4. 5 Sampling strategies

We cannot study everyone, everywhere doing everything. Sampling decisions are required not only about which people to interview or which events to observe but also about settings and processes.

Punch (2002:193)

As indicated before, this study aimed to explore the meanings attached to experiences of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma by female students in selected institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The meanings attached to their narratives of these experiences were

assumed to determine their resilience which led them to pursue higher levels of education and to some extent recover from the trauma.

This study targeted a specific attribute in participants, namely, surviving, recovering sexually abused females in tertiary institutions. Therefore, a combination of convenience sampling to select six tertiary institutions and snowball sampling to select 11 participants was suitable for this study. The next section discusses the selection of six tertiary institutions through the convenience sampling procedure.

Sampling is defined as a process, act, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, representative of part of a population to take part in a research investigation on the basis that they provide information considered relevant to the study problem (Oppong, 2013, Verma et al., 2017). The authors agree that it is not possible in most cases to generate data from all members of a target population in a research inquiry. For instance, in the current study, all survivors of sexual violence trauma. In qualitative research, the idea of sampling is applied to denote that only a sub-set of the population is selected for a given research inquiry. This is known as a sample. The next discussion focuses on the sampling of a focal institution of higher learning from which participants were drawn.

4.5.1 Accessing Institutions

In order to access the six institutions of higher learning, I had to first use convenience sampling to select a focal institution of higher learning. Thereafter, depending on the identification of participants, snowball sampling was used for the remaining five institutions of higher learning.

4.5.1.1 Convenience sampling

In order to select a focal institution of higher learning, I adopted the convenience sampling strategy. This resonates with Cohen et al.'s (2011, p. 155) contention that the researcher simply “chooses the sample from those to whom she has easy access”, thereby selecting a sample that does not seek to represent any group apart from itself. This could be due to geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate in the research (Andrade, 2021, Golzar et al., 2022). Below is the table indicating the six institutions and participants’ pseudo identities.

Table 1

Summary of sample of institutions and participants

Name of institution *	Name of participant * & status	Age	Programme
Chipembere University	Anne (Ndau, single, Christian)	20	Journalism
	Jay Jay (Ndau, single, Christian)	19	Mechatronics
	Patricia (Zezuru, ATR, single mother)	22	Marketing
	Lilly (Karanga, single, ATR)	22	Entrepreneurship & Management of Business
	Ivy (Zezuru, single, no particular religion)	20	ICT
Gondo University	Sweetie (Karanga, no particular religion, single, aborted)	22	Development studies
Horokoro Poly Technical College	Cee (Karanga, divorced single mother, Christian)	25	Purchasing
Chihera University	Emma (Karanga, single, White garment church)	25	Social work
Shumba University	Terry (Ndebele, single, no particular religion)	25	Journalism
Ngongoni Teachers’ College	Talia bae (Karanga, single, converted to Christianity in tertiary institution)	20	Teacher training
Nzou University	Liz (Karanga, divorced single mother, Christian)	25	Gender Studies

Note: ***Names of institutions and participants are changed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality**

The purpose of the brief institution and participant profiles which follow, is two-fold, firstly, to highlight the contextual differences between institutions and secondly, to provide biographical information about the participant population as well as the diverse socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, the reader is also given a glimpse of the diverse programmes that participants undertook in the various institutions, which indicates the level of empowerment each participant aspired to. Considering that I adopted the narrative approach and a critical paradigm lens, I believe that such issues of context are, indeed, very important in the co-construction and narrative analysis. The information in these profiles is based on the biographical data provided by the participants. I only conveniently selected the first focal institution of higher learning, Chipembere* University and from this institution, I was referred to the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) where snowballing for more participants would begin. The other five institutions from which participants were enrolled, would be determined by the snowballing for participants.

I obtained access to Chipembere* University through the Guidance and Counselling Department in the town where I reside, which was easily accessible and fit well with the inclusion criterion for the study. Since this Department offers counselling to support groups for different issues faced by students in the tertiary institution, it became my focal institution for later participant recruitment. I ascertained whether this Guidance and Counselling Department adhered to its internal ethical processes of divulging the names of victims or survivors. The next section focuses on the selection of participants through snowballing.

4.5.2 Accessing participants

For the generation of data, I recruited female students from institutions of higher learning. This meant that I had to choose a suitable strategy that would make it possible to access such a hard-to-get sample for the study (Sadler et al., 2010). Snowball sampling was the best sampling procedure

to obtain participants for the study, given the sensitive nature of the topic under study (Parker et al., 2019).

4.5.2.1 Snowball sampling

This method is also known as the chain method of sampling since a participant refers the researcher to the next one until data saturation (Anieting & Mosugu, 2017). According to Parker et al. (2019), in snowball sampling the researcher starts with a small number of contacts also referred to as ‘seeds’. These contacts align well with the criteria related to the issue under study and are also potentially voluntary participants who in turn, recommend other potential participants. The sampling procedure depends on networking and sampling finalises when a data saturation point has been reached.

In the current study, snowballing began with the department in Chipembere* university, which was affiliated with the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT). This organisation was instrumental in snowballing to access the required number of volunteers/participants for the study.

The characteristics mentioned in Table 4.1 above did not determine the selection of the participants for the sample but represents the biographical details of the eleven female students who volunteered to participate in the study. I present brief biographical profiles of participants in Chapter Five that follows.

Next, I explain the process and techniques that I used to generate data. I then give the participants the opportunities to narrate their journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma.

4.6 Methods used to generate stories

To generate data on the stories of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma, I used narrative interviews and poetry. These two data generation methods were suitable to generate data

to address the research questions. Nine participants preferred doing the narrative interviews during the semester, while two participants who were on industrial assignment were able to have their interviews at any time since they were independent of parental or guardian control. Narrative interviews with open-ended questions were used and some follow-up questions were asked to generate data about participants' experiences of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma.

4.6.1 Narrative interviews

Even a great editor can't salvage a bad narrative interview. So, you're going to want to go in with a concrete plan. You're going to want to know the story inside and out, so that you know what's missing in every answer and can ask the right follow-ups.

Karen Given (Audio storyteller & Podcast)

Jovchelovitch and Martin, (2000) classify a narrative interview as a qualitative research method as unstructured and in-depth with specific features. Furthermore, the authors attest that this type of interview is motivated by a critique of the question-response schema of most interviews. This entails that the narrative interview elicits less imposed and more valid informant perspectives of the life experiences. In such an interview, the researcher's influence on the story telling is minimal. In addition, Muylaert et al. (2014) contend that a distinctive characteristic of a narrative interview is that it includes both verbal and non-verbal responses. The interviewer pays attention to the tone of voice, pauses, changes in intonation, silence that can be transformed into narrations not heard, expressions and any other gestures shown by the interviewee. Thus, the interviewer explores not only what is said, but also how it is expressed. The focus of the narrative interview is not only to

actively listen to the stories told by the participants but also to actively engage participants in the telling of their stories (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2008; Adhikari, 2021).

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), as well as Muylaert et al. (2014) provide the phases and rules for narrative interviewing. Table 4.2 below shows the steps followed in doing narrative interviews to elicit information from the interviewee.

4.6.1.1 Basic Phases of the Narrative Interview

Table 2

Basic phases of the Narrative Interview

Phase	Rules
Preparation	Exploring the field Formulating exmanent questions
1 Initiation	Formulating initial topic for narration Using visual aids
2 Main narration	No interruptions Only non-verbal encouragement to continue storytelling Wait for the coda
3 Questioning phase	Only 'What happened then?' No opinion and attitude questions No arguing on contradictions No why-questions
4 Concluding talk	Exmanent into immanent questions Stop recording Why-questions allowed Memory protocol immediately after interview

Note: Source: Jovchelovich & Bauer (2002)

4.6.1.2 The initiation phase

In this phase, the interviewer introduces the issue under study, explains the investigation to the interviewee as well as the procedure that the interview would follow. These include; recording, uninterrupted storytelling, questioning phase and other methods to be used.

4.6.1.3 The main narration

In this phase, narration of the life story begins and progresses uninterrupted until a clear coda entailing that the interviewee pauses and signals the end of the story is indicated. Only non-verbal signals of active listening such as paralinguistic support, gestures, encouragement to continue narrating and showing interest should be used.

4.6.1.4 Questioning phase

When the narration of the story comes to a ‘natural’ end, the interviewer opens the questioning phase. At this stage, probing on unclear issues raised in the narration can be undertaken. Three basic rules apply at this stage:

1. There should not be any ‘why’ questions. The interviewer only asks what happened (before/after). There should not be direct questions about the interviewee’s opinions, attitudes or causes since these invite justifications and rationalisations.
2. The interviewer has to ask only immanent questions. These are questions that are within the limits of possible experience or knowledge of the interviewee. The interviewer is supposed to use only the words of the interviewee. These questions refer both to events mentioned in the story and the issues under discussion (research topic). Thus, the interviewer translates the extrinsic questions into immanent questions at this phase.
3. It is ethical for the interviewer to avoid a climate of cross-examinations in the interview. There is no need to point to contradictions in the narrative.

In phases 1, 2, and 3, the interviewer records the narrations verbatim with the consent of the interviewee.

4.6.1.4 Phase 4: Concluding talk

This is also called ‘small talk’. It develops after the recorder is switched off. The interviewer may ask the ‘why’ questions at this point. This may be the entry point for the analysis that would be done later. This is when the interviewer reflects on her ability to gain the trust of the interviewee. Note taking can be done in this phase and talking in a relaxed mood after the formal interview.

Considering the above rules in narrative text generation, the field text generation required me to interact with the participants. I listened to oral stories which I audio-recorded and finally transcribed. As I listened to their stories, I also observed participants’ behaviours such as gestures that include frowns, smiles, lowering of voices, or high pitch in the voice. These were probed for clarity related to the emotions attached to the story. In some instances, I requested participants to write out parts of their stories which I needed more clarity on.

During the narrative interviews, I came to understand the participants’ lived experiences of sexual violence trauma as a complex relational matrix (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Salter et al., 2020). A survivor has to navigate relationships between themselves and others as well as their environment. Thus, their own life, the community, and the world make possible a new way of dealing with the relationships and creating new kinds of experiences that would determine either resilience or recovery from the trauma. Field text generation in narrative interviews can be iterative which means it may not follow a sequence due to its open-ended nature. Below are steps that I used in field text generation.

4.6.2 Text generation steps

I followed seven steps of text generation as cited in Creswell (2020) to gather details of the participants' stories.

1. Identify a problem or phenomenon to explore this meant that I had to identify an issue or concern and seek an understanding of the social experiences of the individuals concerned. This led to the identification of the topic, site, and participants for the study.
2. Select one or more participants to study: for this step, I used snowball sampling to select suitable participants for the study who could provide in-depth data about the issue under study.
3. Collect the story from the participant: in this step, I gathered field texts that outlined the participants' experiences.
4. Re-story or retell the individual's story: here I examined the raw field texts, identified elements of the stories in themes, sequencing or organising the story elements and presented a retold story that expressed the participant's experiences.
5. Collaborate with the participant/storyteller: this step was an important step that interacts with all other steps. I worked closely with the participants to accurately capture their experiences. Where I was not clear on the meaning, I probed and paraphrased to clarify the participant's sentiments.
6. Write a story about the participant's experiences: I transcribed the audio-recorded, participants' narratives which outlined their experiences. I constructed narratives from the stories and clustered common themes that emerged from the stories.
7. Validate the accuracy of the report: in this step, I ascertained the accuracy of the narrative accounts by collaborating with the participants. I used member checking, and triangulation

among data sources and searched for disconfirmation of evidence. I did all this to determine the credibility of the narrative accounts.

The following discussion outlines the seven steps in detail.

4.6.2.1 Identify a problem or phenomenon to explore

This step involved identifying and understanding the research phenomenon and mapping strategies for navigating the way through the study. It outlines the research questions, the sample, the sampling procedures that need to be adopted, and gaining access to sites and participants for the study. As mentioned earlier, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. What stories do female survivors at selected tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe narrate about their experiences of sexual violence?
2. How do sexually abused female students at selected tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journey of resilience and recovery?
3. Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence?

This study adopted a snowball sampling procedure in the selection of participants as mentioned in the previous discussion. The initial challenge in qualitative research, especially research on sensitive issues, lies in obtaining access to the site as well as the participants. There is a need to negotiate for permission from the gatekeepers as was evident in this study. I first had to obtain ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ). These two main gatekeepers required me to obtain other permissions from the selected tertiary institutions that provided the initial participant

identification. I also identified a counselling organisation that would assist if data generation resulted in the reactivation of sexual trauma in participants.

After obtaining ethical approval from UKZN, I sent letters to the selected tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe as well as the MRCZ so I could begin the recruitment of participants. The MRCZ granted permission to conduct this study. Thereafter, I submitted the letters of ethical approval for the research study to the selected tertiary institutions and requested meetings with female students. In the initial meeting, I explained the purpose of my study, the research questions and the data generation methods I would employ to elicit in-depth information that would respond to the research questions. I assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity as well as voluntary participation in the study. I elaborated on the risks and benefits of participating in the study. When the meeting ended, I left my contact details so that volunteer participants would contact me privately at their convenience. Subsequently, when no female students had contacted me, I returned to the counselling department which was the focal site for initial recruitment to discuss how I could access a sample of female students who had survived sexual violence. The counsellor then referred me to the Female Students Network Trust which assisted me in accessing participants using snowball sampling.

4.6.2.2 Select one or more participants to study

During this step, I identified female students as participants who could provide detailed information about their experiences of surviving sexual violence. Given the sensitive nature of the phenomenon or topic of this study, I sought the assistance of the Female Students Network Trust to assist with recruiting participants for this study. Snowball sampling was used to identify other survivor participants.

4.6.2.3 Collect the story from the participant

Sensitive issues that invade the privacy of individuals requires trust and rapport building. In Zimbabwean culture, talking about issues that concern sexual relationships is usually taboo, especially when sharing such information with a stranger. I had to negotiate my way through this challenge by explaining my topic in detail and the methods I would use to elicit information and generate data for the study. In my quest to gather the stories, I had to assist financially with the travel and subsistence expenses of the prospective participants from their various places of residence. In instances where some participants were on internship and in some cases, participants would be on holiday, I had to negotiate their travel to my place of residence for the interviews. To develop trust, a good rapport and relationship with participants, I had to find ways of creating a friendly, relaxing environment to make participants feel comfortable. Participants agreed for the narrative interviews to be conducted at my home. This worked very well and provided opportunities for participants to narrate their stories about their experiences of sexual violence and their journeys of resilience and recovery in a friendly relaxed environment.

I audio-recorded the narrative interviews (Appelt, 2006; Rutakumwa et al., 2020). It is a requirement in narrative interviews that the interviewer remains a listener, abstaining from interruptions, occasionally posing questions for clarification and encouraging the participant to continue to tell their story (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Through probing questions, nods and silence, most of the time, I became the co-producer of the narrative. My narrative interview question was broad and open: “I am interested in your experiences as a survivor of sexual violence. Please share with me the story of your journey of resilience, survival and recovery”. The key aim of the narrative interview was to promote a constant dialogue, to give participants “only non-verbal or paralinguistic encouragement to continue telling the story”, and to generate stories (Muylaert et

al., 2014, p.185). I also probed open-ended questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), to get clarification of some issues.

4.6.2.4 Re-story or retell the individual's story

This step involved examining the raw field texts, identifying key elements, organising and sequencing these elements, and then retelling a story that described the individual's experiences. I had to review the texts that contained the stories so that I could retell each participant's story. I transcribed each audio-recorded story from interviews that took 45-60 minutes per session. When examining the raw texts, I highlighted elements that indicated the setting, characters, problems, actions and resolutions. Re-storying the narratives helped me to understand the stories by sequencing them in a logical order. The process of organising the story elements led to the presentation of the narratives as told stories conveying the participants' experiences. Logically the stories indicated the time, place, plot and scene of the events that made up the stories. These aspects made it possible for me to identify an abstract of events and actions that dominated the stories told. Complicated action and its meaning as well as the resolved action identified were noted as I focused on the plot.

The narrative interviews helped locate the relationship between concepts and themes through the process of constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Nowell et al., 2017). Brinkman and Kvale (2015) contend that a narrative interview refers to a specific episode or course of action significant to the narrator, leading to a short story. In relating their experiences, participants, as survivors of sexual violence, could relate to both the traumatic experiences (victimhood) as well as the feeling of conquest (survivorship) in their journey through resilience and recovery (Sweet, 2019). The narratives could also concern the participants' life stories as seen through their perspective, known as the life history or biographical interview (Lim, 2011). In this

view, the concepts of temporality, sociality and place came into play (Lal, Suto & Ungar, 2012). Waring and Kensinger (2011) argue that our memory is selective and in narrative research participants showed that they recalled what they could and some happenings might have been deliberately or unconsciously forgotten. Muylaert et al. (2014) point out that it is important to remember that the participant is narrating her history, what she experienced, what is real to her, and not necessarily the facts themselves. I positioned myself to view the narratives as representations and interpretations, and these cannot be judged as true or false. It showed that the participants were narrating their truth from a point of view of their experiences in a particular time, space and socio-historic context (Schiff, 2012). I was interested in obtaining the participants' representations of experiences.

4.6.2.5 Collaborate with the participant/storyteller

Data generation and analysis in narrative inquiry do not take a linear mode. It is usually iterative; it goes back and forth. This collaboration stage happens from the onset of the study. As I negotiated my way to the participants, I had to find an entry point to the study process. Getting participants to agree to voluntarily participate in such a sensitive study needed some form of collaboration. I had to explain all the procedures I followed for the generation of field texts. After transcribing the audio-recorded narrative interviews, I engaged in member checking which allowed participants to clarify and verify the presentation of their stories which I had narrated. This process ensured that participants' stories were not distorted.

4.6.2.6 Write a story about the participant's experiences

This step is a major step in the narrative research process. It is central to the narrative inquiry report. I identified themes relating to the research questions of the study. Initially, as I read through the transcriptions for each participant's narrative interview, several categories emerged. I then read

and re-read through the narrative data, I looked for patterns of similarity and contrast, to refine and reduce the number of categories. Thereafter, I identified themes and sub-themes that addressed the three research questions.

4.6.2.7 Validate the accuracy of the report

This step involves validating the narrative account. Generating data from eleven participants, who were survivors of sexual violence trauma, ensured data source triangulation. This ensured multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon. Accuracy and credibility of participants' stories are ensured at this step of field text gathering. As mentioned earlier, gathering field texts and processing in narrative inquiry is not linear, it is iterative in nature. Throughout the process, I had to confirm with the participants as storytellers if what I had written about their accounts was correct. I would call and write emails to the participants for clarification on parts of their stories where I could not understand the meaning. Since the participants used code-switching, some of the metaphors they used needed clarification and through probing during the narrative interviews and follow-up interviews, these were clarified. Some participants also expressed their views through poetry. The next section explores how poetry can help express one's feelings.

4.6.3 Poetry

“Poetry is thoughts that breathe and words that burn.”

(Thomas Gray, 2014)

Riessman (2008) contends that narratives convey the unspeakable emotions of participants. The author further asserts that narratives also create and transmit emotional experiences in the researcher as well as the reader. As such, poetry becomes a tool to convey these feelings that survivors have about their experiences of sexual violence. Price (2023) describes poems as an

artful method that serves to capture the important aspects of the issue under study. Skukauskaite (2021) and Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick (2020) concur that poems assist the recursive reflexive process that is involved in mindful practice to deepen reflexivity. Price (2023) further contends that poetry can be employed in research as a data source for analysing the data or presenting the findings. The poetry method, asserts Brown et al. (2021), offers ways to encourage creativity and deepen engagement with qualitative data. The authors also contend that poetry can be used as a vehicle for human meaning-making and condenses human experience. Van Rooyen and d'Abdon (2020) describe poetry in research as a catalyst that provokes insightful responses, allowing for a more in-depth and holistic understanding of human experience.

Participants who were willing to express themselves in poetry were encouraged to give accounts of their journeys of resilience and recovery in poetic form. I encouraged the participants to express the stage they had reached in their journeys of recovery, depicting their status – whether ‘victim’ or ‘survivor.’

4.7 Analysis of data

In Chapter Three, I mentioned that my study adopts methodological and theoretical bricolage in its approach. As such, I had to consider using analytical tools that enabled me to interpret and make meaning of the narratives presented by the participants. Techniques from narrative analysis were employed. In the initial stages of analysis, I examined the structure, content, and context of each participant’s narrative. I paid close attention to the language used, the themes that emerged, and some of the symbols that participants used. It emerged that within the stories, certain themes recurred. For instance, the way some participants would be trapped in re-victimisation indicated the foot-in-the-door phenomenon. This means that by the time the participant realised that they were in danger, the worst had already happened. I also had to consider the participants’ cultural

and social contexts which determined how they understood and interpreted their experiences of sexual violence. In considering the narrative analysis of field texts gathered, I had to engage with the content to identify the themes and other emerging patterns within the narratives. I coded themes that showed some relationships within the narratives. In this initial analysis, I used the five steps of analysing narratives discussed in the previous section. I considered the research questions that the study sought to respond to, gathered the interview audio, transcribed them verbatim and coded themes from the field texts, further analysed the narratives, and interpreted them.

4.7.1 The analysis of data

In this study, I adopted an iterative, dynamic, non-linear process of narrative analysis. This builds on previous models to enhance participants' experiences in terms of context and content (Bright & Du Preez, 2023). To allow for analysis, data were transcribed into text from Shona to English. The analysis was done manually which is viewed as laborious and time consuming (Khan, 2014). I used manual coding to engage with the data and better understand the meaning of the participants' experiences.

The data analysis followed Crossley's (2000) six-step process to which I added a few modifications. This process minimises the distinction between the interpretation and writing-up. This is essential for allowing iterative, multi-level readings to develop throughout drafting the research report (Brighton et al., 2023). The simplified steps are summarised below:

1. Code narrative blocks, group and read by live event: In this stage audio-recorded data is transcribed, read about five to six times so that the researcher becomes familiar with the data. This initial stage was important as it provided a foundation for the analysis that would follow. The analysis was iterative in that it began in the field as I interacted with the participants.

2. Create a nested story structure: During the interviews common narratives develop. When reading through the transcripts, pay attention to the narrative tone so that you create and nest code according to the narrative analysis framework. At this stage, I organised the data according to the research questions for the study. Familiarisation with the data enabled me to produce codes that addressed the research questions.

3. Delving into the story structure: I read through the data and re-listened to the audio recordings to look for imagery and metaphors that would lead to a story structure.

4. Compare across story structure: When coding, I noted possible themes evident from the readings and manually coded them. At this stage I checked for similarities and differences that emerged from the data. As I broke down the narratives into smaller pieces, I made sure I did not lose sight of the overall stories recorded.

5. Construct tables: To create categories that speak to the literature and the research questions or that stand out in the transcripts, I constructed tables or story-map grids. In doing so, I also focused on imagery and themes. The tables provided a 'rough map' of each transcript, which was then translated into a meaningful narrative.

6. Tell the core narrative: At this stage, I constructed the core narrative on the journeys of resilience and recovery. I created meanings and understandings that emerged from the research data. Continuous refining and defining of the identified themes and sub-themes to further improve the analysis was done. Thereafter, a cohesive narrative of the data started to develop from the themes. Using rich and convincing instances that communicated with the themes from the data, the research, as well as the literature for the study, transformed the analysis into an understandable script. The analysis report of the narratives of the journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual

violence trauma by female students in tertiary institutions went beyond a simple explanation of themes. It depicted an analysis that was wholly supported with scientific evidence that related to the research questions presented in Chapter One.

4.8 Ethical Issues

How comfortable a read can research that has violence at its core become, before the distance created by language becomes an ethical—and analytical—challenge in its own right?

(Bringedal Houge, 2023, p. 1)

Research on sexual violence falls under research on sensitive issues. Ferris et al. (2021) concur with Fahie (2014) that sensitive research is that which poses a substantial threat that is problematic for the researcher, the participant, and the generation and dissemination of research data. The basic ethical principles of non-maleficence, beneficence and respect and dignity for participants are fundamental (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017; Willis, 2018). Edelman (2018) concurs with Duma et al. (2009) that non-maleficence in sexual violence and other sensitive mental health studies means safeguarding the disclosure process and ensuring participant safety during the research. Information disclosed by sexual violence survivors could trigger the memories of the abuse, hence there was a need for counselling services to be in place. I kept all the information shared in the narrative interview between myself and the participants confidential. However, in the case of one participant, the presence of suicide ideation noted during interviews compelled me to refer her to the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) director for intervention and support. Seven participants requested support for their issues. These were referred to agencies and university structures, resulting in shared confidentiality. Shared confidentiality is also referred to as

conditional shared confidentiality. This is an ethical justification for the exchange of information in a team or network. In some instances, shared confidentiality can occur when required by law, the court or if the benefits to the client outweigh public and individual interests in keeping the information confidential. Such information in these cases can be shared without the participant's consent. However, in this study, I obtained the participants' consent before referring them for assistance from the appropriate organisations that were bound by ethical responsibilities of care, for instance, those that have counselling services as part of their mandate.

I described the research process and associated risks during the recruitment of the participants as well as the benefits of participating in the research (Alase, 2017). Participation was voluntary. I developed an informed consent letter in both English and Shona for the participants to sign before the research commenced. This form acknowledged that the participants' rights would be protected during data generation (Alase, 2017; Rashid et al., 2019). In sexual violence research, anonymity of participants is crucial. The participant's identity was protected even from other participants in the same study. I used pseudonyms chosen by the participants to protect participants from stigmatisation and victimisation. Alase (2017) emphasises that careful consideration of data generation methods should be made to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity are maintained at all times. In narrative research, field texts are analysed to develop an understanding of the meanings that participants give to themselves, their surroundings, their lives and their lived experiences through their stories (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I began the interpretation of the meanings of the recorded narratives through analysis of plotlines, thematic sources and social as well as cultural referents. From the onset of the field text gathering process, I analysed meanings and interpreted the field texts concurrently through to the research text. Appelt (2006) adds the concepts of interpretation and ownership, reflexivity and objectivity to be considered, particularly

in the field text generation phase of narrative research. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe the concepts of analysis as implying objectivity while interpretation implies subjectivity. After recording the narrative interview, I would listen to the audio of the recorded narratives with the participants or discuss the notes I had written during the recording so that we could check if my understanding of the content was correct. This gave the participants co-ownership of the narratives.

I kept in mind that research into the lives of other people is not a right but a privilege (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006; 2007; Fahie, 2014). Throughout the research, I had to observe the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence.

A challenge is that in any study ethical issues and dilemmas may arise during any stage in the research. Mittelstadt (2019) argues that the issue of ethics cannot be seen as a set of general principles that can be applied across a range of contexts. Ethics is situated, local and specific to particular contexts, and mediated in socio-political contexts. With two institutional requirements for ethical clearance: The University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee and the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ) for health-related research, I found myself in a dilemma that I had to deal with. I had to make minor amendments to my consent forms to fit into the host country's template. I also had to avoid the mention of names of institutions to protect the participants. Instead, I had to replace the names of institutions with 'a selected academic institution in Zimbabwe'. In my research journey, I had to consult with both my supervisors, one who is an educational psychologist and the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe for advice and guidance whenever I required it. I was also vigilant and reflexive about ethical issues as I progressed with my field text gathering.

This study focused on participants' narratives of resilience and recovery. This suggests that it was indirectly a healing process for the participants as they talked about their emotions. During the narrative interviews, participants would express wishful thinking, emotional venting, positive reinterpretation of their predicaments, problem avoidance and self-criticism (Huynh & Lee, 2022). These actions that occur during the storytelling contribute to some form of relief from emotional and psychological pain emanating from the memories of sexual violence trauma they experienced.

As a prerequisite for the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethical clearance for fieldwork, I had to seek permission from the tertiary institutions for my study as well as obtain counselling services from a counselling organisation. As suggested by McCartan, Merdian, Perkins et al. (2018), researchers have a duty of care towards research participants. Since telling painful stories can reactivate sexual trauma, it was my duty to have professionals who would provide free counselling when the need arose. I first visited the tertiary institutions to discuss my intention to carry out my research study. The counsellor in the department was polite and welcoming and she referred me to the Dean of the Faculty of Student Affairs. In our discussion, the Dean informed me of the procedures to follow so that I could have access to the students since my study focused on a sensitive issue. The dean further referred me to the office of the Deputy Registrar who was uncomfortable with my area of study. Nevertheless, after discussions with the Registrar, he requested his administrator to write a letter permitting me to do my research. I then approached a counselling organisation named Family AIDS Counselling and Testing (FACT) which worked with victims of sexual violence. I discussed my study with the regional manager who showed a willingness to provide free counsellors whenever needed. The two institutions provided written permission which I submitted to the UKZN Research Ethics Committee to process my ethical

clearance. After submitting corrections to the proposal, ethical clearance was obtained three months after defending the proposal.

After I received ethical clearance from the UKZN Research Ethics Committee, I applied for ethical clearance from the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ), a department that addresses all health-related research. Consent forms were restructured to fit the local requirements and interview questions were translated to a local vernacular to enable participants to have a choice of the language in which they could freely express themselves. I clarified several issues about how I would conduct the research, especially on the ethics of sensitive issues that surround sexual violence. Minor changes were required on the topic where I indicated that the study would take place at selected tertiary institutions to avoid stigmatisation and protect the identity of the selected tertiary institutions and participants. It was also highlighted that students were not solely from Mashonaland West Province since the tertiary institutions drew students from all over the country. However, these minor changes did not affect the course of this research study since the participants would still be in the same age group as proposed, from a patriarchal culture, were female tertiary institution students who experienced sexual violence and despite this trauma, were striving to obtain a higher qualification.

I obtained ethical clearance from the MRCZ after three months. Thereafter, I went back to the focal tertiary institution to negotiate recruiting participants. In a meeting with the Dean for Students' Affairs And The Student Counsellors, I presented my ethical clearance approval from both the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ). The Dean granted me entry into the counselling department where I participated in various activities as an intern and worked with the student counsellor. My journey began when I had to have talk shows with various hostel residents where I would introduce myself, my

profession, area of study as well as discuss issues about sexual violence. After two talk shows in different hostels that combined both male and female students, I had to hold a workshop for peer counsellors within the institution on sexual violence to equip them with basic counselling skills. After these meetings with students, messages began to filter into my mobile inbox for referrals and volunteers for the research. The student counsellor then referred me to an organisation that assists survivors of sexual violence called the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) so that I would be connected to survivors who had received counselling and are healing.

I visited the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) offices situated in Harare, 115km from my workplace. I presented the female coordinator with my letters of consent. I explained the purpose and objectives of my research study, the data-generating procedure, and how the findings would be disseminated. She highlighted the mandate of her organisation and how she connected with survivors of sexual violence from all academic institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. She also had survivors from the institution I intended to draw participants from on her database. Ethical guidelines of the organisation were discussed, and she was willing to connect me with the survivors.

4.9 Trustworthiness

The current study on narratives of sexual violence was qualitative in nature and adopted the narrative inquiry approach. This research approach cannot be evaluated according to the positivist notion of validity but should rather be judged according to the alternative criterion of trustworthiness. Elo et al. (2014) describe trustworthiness as the goodness of research. The attribute of trustworthiness occurs when the reader of the research report judges it to be so. It is assessed on the pragmatic underpinnings of the research and standards of the discipline. Forero et al. (2018) outline four characteristics that determine trustworthiness in qualitative research. These

include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. In qualitative research, rigour is based on the researcher's open attitude and sensitivity to the participants' re-storied narratives. By engaging with gatekeepers before, during and after the data generation and providing them with supporting material such as background information about the study, consent forms and the interview protocol, credibility was ensured. This was further enhanced by meeting the potential participants and familiarising them before data generation. I also ensured credibility by identifying suitable sites for data generation.

I conducted and transcribed the narrative interviews verbatim. I involved the participants in the research process of data generation, interpretation and analysis which is usually iterative in narrative inquiry. After each narrative interview session, I discussed the audio with the participants to clarify the accuracy of the meaning I gave to the narrated stories. Participants were from diverse backgrounds and their ages ranged from 19-25 years. This phenomenon ensured a broad and deep pool of experiences facilitating rigour and credibility. After several interview sessions, I had debriefing sessions with the student counsellor at the tertiary institution.

In order to ensure that the findings of the study are repeatable, I prepared detailed drafts of the study protocol throughout the study. I also documented all changes and revisions to the research protocol and kept a traceable record of when and how changes were implemented to ensure dependability of the findings. The changes made can be traced back to the proposal process where some records of revisions recommended by the UKZN Ethics Committee were made. Some revisions were recommended by the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe, which were also implemented. Thus, the confirmability of the study was ensured. During data generation, I engaged with the texts and reflected on the meanings that I interpreted. I made a note in my journal of issues that I needed to discuss with the participants to clarify the meaning of the experiences expressed

in the texts. For participants who lived a distance away, I used online facilities to communicate while I met with local participants face-to-face. I met local participants at places that were convenient for them to discuss the texts. Triangulation techniques that included text sources, and methodological and theoretical techniques employed also contributed to ensuring confirmability and credibility. The theoretical bricolage proved effective in providing techniques that gave different perspectives to the interpretation of the data. Researcher bias was also reduced through this procedure of reaching some form of consensus with the storytellers.

The sampling procedures that were employed made it possible to ensure the transferability of the findings of the study. I had to employ snowball sampling to access potential participants of the study. Having participants from diverse ethnic, institutional, historical, social, and economic backgrounds was critical for comparative analysis of narratives across different groups. Data saturation was ensured through the identification of thematic codes of texts, the majority of which were identified during the initial interviews. These were followed by a decreasing frequency of codes identified in the follow-up interviews.

4.10 Concluding remarks.

The chapter presented the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations that underpinned the study. The critical paradigm, in which the research study is located in, was discussed. Also, the qualitative research methodological approach and narrative inquiry research design, which were adopted to examine the narratives of resilience and recovery of female student survivors of sexual violence, were explained. The strengths and limitations of the methodological approach were outlined. The rationale for the triangulation or theoretical bricolage of the techniques of the narrative inquiry method and the feminism standpoint and relational cultural theory frameworks to give meaning to the narratives were outlined. The institutional and

participant sampling, data generating and analysis methods were clarified. Triangulation concerning credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the findings of the study were discussed. Ethical principles of maleficence, beneficence, respect and dignity for participants, and ethical considerations of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and withdrawal of participants were discussed. Chapter Five which follows presents and analyses the data generated to address research question one: What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence?

CHAPTER FIVE

SURVIVING THE STORM: UNCOVERING THE CLUSTERS OF MEANING

“Language and speech do not mirror experience: They create experience and in the process of creation constantly transform and defer that which is being described. The meanings of a subject’s statements are, therefore, always in motion.”

(Denzin, 1997, p.5)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the road map for the study and focused on the methodology and how I elicited the stories that survivors told about their sexual violence trauma, their resiliency and recovery through co-constructed narratives. In these narratives, I identified clusters of meaning that came out of each epiphany of the survivor’s life. The previous chapter was a precursor for the two empirical chapters that follow. These chapters bring together the clusters of meanings that emerged from the analytic frame. In my narrative journey, I was guided by the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological insights elucidated in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I present and analyse data that addresses research question one: What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence? and focus on survivors’ narratives related to their experiences of sexual violence. In the following Chapter Six, I present and analyse data that addresses research question two: How do sexually abused female students in Zimbabwe’s selected institutions of higher learning construct their journeys of resilience and recovery? and research question three: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors’ resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma? The discussion of findings in Chapter Six focuses on survivors’ narratives related to their resilience and recovery.

The presentation of findings stage of narrative research involves a contextual analysis, that is, making sense of the co-constructed narratives and delving into the deeper meanings in the data. In this process, I sought to identify similarities, contradictions and comparisons across the data sets. The theoretical frameworks adopted in Chapter three, namely, Miller, Jordan, Stiver and Surrey's relational cultural theory enabled the illumination of connections and disconnections, sense of community, interdependence for personal growth, and the institutionalisation of oppressive relationships within the society (Gurung, 2020). Smith, Collins, Hartsock, Haraway, Rose, Jagga and Harding's feminist standpoint theory that foregrounds four theses: strong objectivity, situated knowledge, epistemic advantage and power (Gurung, 2020) served as filters to analyse and make sense of the data in chapters five and six.

In this chapter, I present biographical profiles to introduce the participants. I then present data and analyse themes to make sense of the stories that female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence in relation to the ecologies of trauma. I explore the following clusters of meaning: oppressive social spaces as limiting ecologies, human rights violations in the African context, the complexity of stigma in African culture, vulnerability shrouded in secrecy and privacy, dealing with law enforcement agents, normalisation of sexual violence, and lack of political will. I highlight contradictions in participants' narratives.

5.2 Biographical profiles of participants

The purpose of the participants' brief profiles is to provide biographical information about the participants and their diverse socio-cultural contexts. The information on the participants' profiles is based on the interviews held with each participant. Pseudonyms for the institutions were chosen by the researcher while pseudonyms for participants were chosen by the participants themselves. I present brief biographical profiles of participants in the discussion that follows.

Jay Jay is a Ndau girl who was 19 years old at the time of data generation. Ndau is a Shona dialect that is spoken in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. She lost both parents at the tender age of 6 and moved from one relative to the other. She was separated from her brother when she was 6 years old and has never seen him since then. She experienced stranger rape in lower secondary school level (form 4). She managed to enrol for mechatronics at a Zimbabwean university due to a HigherLife Foundation scholarship. She expressed difficulty establishing stable relationships with the opposite sex and also could not sustain friendships with other girls. She believed that she lacked social skills.

Terry is Ndebele by tribe. She was 25 years old at the time of data generation and was pursuing a career in journalism. Her parents separated before she was born. Her mother abandoned her at birth and she was raised by her maternal grandmother. When she was three years old, her mother took her away from her grandmother. She narrates that her life was characterised by a lack of her mother's love but shares that her stepfather was understanding and treated her like his own. She shared that she experienced sexual violence from the age of 16. She suffered incest from a half-brother and did not get support from her mother. Her life journey is characterised by half-sisters whom she feels do not have genuine affection for her. She also experienced gang rape in the community she lived in and sexual harassment at a tertiary institution perpetrated by a lecturer. She feels negative about opposite-sex relationships.

Sweetie is a Karanga and speaks a Shona dialect spoken in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. She lost her Ndebele mother at the age of 5 and was forcefully taken away from her maternal family by her paternal aunts. Since then, she narrates being denied visiting her mother's relatives. She had to forcefully visit them while in a tertiary institution to visit her mother's burial site to obtain closure. She was enrolled in Development Studies at a university in Zimbabwe. She was 22 years

old at the time of data generation. She narrates experiencing date rape in her first year of university and had a painful unconventional abortion during which she almost lost her life. The boyfriend did not support her financially or emotionally during this time. She expressed bitterness and fear of failing to conceive due to the complications of the abortion.

Annie is a Ndaou girl who was 21 years old at the time of the study. She lost her virginity to date rape and the boy dumped her after the incident. She was afraid she would lose her mother's trust. She was pursuing journalism at a university. She narrates experiencing sexual harassment by the Head of the Department but she is proud of managing to stand her ground with confidence.

Ivy is a Zezuru, a Shona tribe of Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe. She was 20 years old at the time of the study and was pursuing a career in ICT at a university. She narrates that she comes from a dysfunctional family where her parents were always fighting because of her father's infidelity. She described her experiences of sexual exploitation by boys in the neighbourhood at the age of 5. At the age of 15, she experienced child sexual abuse by a prophet who was assisting her mother with healing prayers. She was cowered into silence on the pretext of protecting her mother from being cursed by the prophet. When she fell pregnant, the prophet hid her in another town then forced her to abort and returned her home citing that she had disappeared and the prophet had prayed to make the spirits that had taken her bring her back to the parents.

Cee is a 25-year-old Karanga lady with one child from a failed relationship. She was from a polygamist family and lost both parents. She remained with her stepmother until she dropped out of school and sought work as a maid to raise funds to pursue her education. Her story depicts incidents of attempted incest by a brother-in-law, child sexual abuse and sexual harassment by assumed well-wishers and also at the tertiary institution by lecturers. After her failed marriage, she

enrolled in a purchasing course while working for her tuition and upkeep of her daughter. She vows not to let any men block her ambitions.

Lily is a 22-year-old marketing student at a university. She is a Karanga from a close family. She narrates being deprived of experiencing a childhood of mixing with other children in the community. They were compelled to stay within the walls of their homestead. She narrates being sexually abused by a maid under the pretext of playing games at the age of 5. She then experienced sexual harassment of a 'thigh for marks' at university. She nearly gave up after being deliberately failed three times by her lecturer and nearly lost her enrolment with the university. She fought her way back and got her justice.

Patricia, a 22-year-old Zezuru twin pursuing marketing at a university, has a boy child from a date rape at university and was raped by a stranger when she was in high school. She says her mother did not like her from birth and preferred her twin sister. She was closer to her father and was more intelligent than her twin sister. The family had expected higher outcomes for her secondary education but she was traumatised by the stranger rape that occurred on her way from school. She could not tell anyone since she was judged for any behaviour the family thought was peculiar. In the tertiary institution, she failed several times and at times failed to write the examinations due to the presence of her baby's father. She could not move on and she hoped for a rebound.

Emma, a 25-year-old Karanga lady doing social work with a local university experienced incest perpetrated by her maternal uncles as early as 10 years old. She narrates her trajectory of a father, a white garment church devotee who had a tradition of marrying off girl children as they reached 15 years. She remembers her mother being sent off to her maternal home together with her children because her father had other wives. She had defied the tradition and lost favour with her father. She also narrates the pain of disbelief of the incest by both her mother and grandmother. At a

tertiary institution, she suffered date rape by a boyfriend who accused her of infecting him with HIV. She narrates how emotionally hurt she felt knowing that her boyfriend had affairs with women of the night but forced himself on her. The revictimisation made her feel as though she could not manage opposite-sex relationships. She would also feel hurt when she met her uncles and their families at family gatherings where they were happy with their wives and children while she had unresolved incest memories that haunted her.

Liz was a 25-year-old Karanga lady who was orphaned as a teenager and grew up under the custody of a paternal aunt who was in a polygamous marriage. When she completed her Form 6 she had to work for her university tuition and met her baby's father who date raped her and she was forced into early marriage when she was 17 years old. She was emotionally abused by her mother-in-law who taunted her for being an orphan. Her baby's father left for South Africa and never fended for the family. She had to seek work for the child and her upkeep and suffered marital rape when her husband returned. He infected her with sexually transmitted infections and she also conceived her second child. She had to struggle alone to obtain tuition for enrolment into a university for gender studies. She narrates going through the orientation process with her child on her back. She was sexually harassed by male lecturers in tertiary institutions but she resisted by engaging in activism to stand for other female students who could not defend themselves.

Talia Bae, a 20-year-old Karanga lady doing teacher education at the time of the study, suffered incest as early as 13 years old. She was exposed to pornography by an uncle (maternal aunt's husband) and then sexually assaulted. She experienced revictimisation at a tertiary institution which was perpetrated by a security guard who was somehow related to one of the management staff of the institution. She narrates about facing humiliation when she tried to seek justice at the police station and the judiciary. Although some family members tried to discourage her by their

taunts, she relates support from her parents. Some of the workers and fellow students would also humiliate her but she never gave up. The perpetrator was assisted to escape justice. His disappearance from the town and lack of knowledge of his whereabouts instilled fear in her. She was always afraid that one day he would return and confront her since she lived alone at an industrial attachment.

The biographical profiles of the 11 participants draw attention to their diverse lives and experiences of sexual violence. In the next sub-section, I give an overview of the two theories which were adopted for this study in order to keep the reader in perspective.

5.3 Theoretical Framework for analysis

The research utilised two theories within the critical theory paradigm in order to analyse the variables within the research topic as a single theory would not fully address the variables. The relational cultural theory (RCT) that was pioneered by Jean Baker Miller (1976) and then collaboratively developed by Jean Baker Miller, Judith Jordan, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey (1977) was adopted to analyse relational interactions in the journeys of resilience and recovery narrated by female student survivors of sexual violence. In order to understand the stories narrated by female student sexual violence survivors the following key points in RCT guided the interpretation of their narratives:

Growth fostering relationships: Growth occurs in and in pursuit of connection with other people across a person's life span. Each survivor's narrative indicates some experience of both positive and negative interactions that at one point in their life journeys, transformed them by making them manipulate their environments. These interactions occurred within the family, in the community and the various systems that mattered in their journeys of resilience and recovery.

Complexity of human relationships: Using the concepts of connection and disconnection. Safety experienced within immediate and extended family, friends and other community members at one point before suffering sexual trauma enabled connections that ensured psychological well-being. Each survivor narrated yearning for connection with family, friends and intimate partners, but developed strategies of keeping away from the connections in order to avoid pain. The nature of the relationships kept changing as they travelled their pre- and post-trauma journeys. Where sexual trauma was experienced, for instance, incest, and betrayal of trust resulted in disconnection from the family. The survivors could not trust themselves in keeping or forging new relationships due to lack of confidence in themselves. Their view of themselves, the world around them and their relationships were determined by the nature of the ever-transforming interactions. In some instances, some worked through the disconnections and developed relational resilience.

Influence of larger culture and power differentials: Sexual violence is perpetrated within a societal and cultural contexts. Resilience and recovery can be conceptualised within socio-cultural contexts of the individual (Dworkin & Weaver, 2021). The narratives indicate the influence that patriarchy impact on the survivors' journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. The survivors' ability to build resilience and recovery depended on their cultural backgrounds. Within the patriarchal system that all survivors belong to, masculine hegemonic gender stereotypes on how women should behave or live their lives determined their ability to build resilience and the rates of recovery. In this system, women occupy the subordinate position in all aspects. Their access to various resources that are essential to facilitate resilience and recovery are determined by the dominant group. All survivors indicated effects of some fear of failing to have a family of their own, be accepted as brides or manage to forge new relationships due to loss of virginity.

Systemic power differentials: Both at individual and societal levels, female student survivors of sexual violence trauma experienced some disruption of connection. Where survivors yearned to be heard, they experienced ridicule. Elderly family members who they expected to be their shield from harm, became vicarious accomplices by protecting the perpetrators or judging the victims. Survivors faced negative responses from the structures such as the justice system that should provide them with resources for post-traumatic support. The inability of the system to make perpetrators who had financial resources accountable for their actions, increased the vulnerability of the survivors, hence impeding resilience and delaying recovery.

Overarching structures that shape wider relational patterns: Within the scope of the relational cultural theory, resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma extends beyond personal and intimate relationships. All the facets that comprise the individual's ecosystem matter in the journey of resilience and recovery. Female student survivors of sexual violence did not only depend on their inner strength and the intimate relationships for resilience and recovery but also required the influence of social support systems and other aspects that form their ecosystem. Each facet indicated some contribution to their resilience and recovery.

How societal structures can better contribute to peaceful co-existence: Survivors' narratives indicated relationships in human life as a primary need. After experiencing sexual violence trauma and seeking help in different societal structures, survivors' pool of people in which they interacted became larger and increasingly diverse. Most sought strategies to co-exist with immediate family members or intimate partners who had wronged them. Mutual connections had to be strategized through the various societal structures in order to maintain peaceful co-existence.

The feminist standpoint theory (FST) mainly propounded by Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, Donna Haraway, Hilary Rose, Alison Jaggar, and Sandra Harding in the 1970s and 1980s, concentrates on women's or marginalised lives, the interaction of everyday practices of exercising power and the production of knowledge (van der Tuin, 2016). Its primary concern is to explore how sex or gender is related to inequity. FST aims to acknowledge the diversity of women by welcoming the views of other oppressed groups of women. For instance, in this study, the oppressed are the female student survivors of sexual violence. These survivors better understand their stories of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. The FST focuses on identifying cultural values and power dynamics that account for the subordination of girls and women. Another goal is to highlight the distinct knowledge cultivated by activities that are typically assigned to females. The FST assumes that:

Individuals perspectives are shaped by their social and political experiences: The ethnic groups from which the sexual violence survivors belonged manifest in the way participants tell their stories. This indicates how individuals' socialisation and experiences formulate their beliefs, values, morals and ethics which influenced their perceptions of their situations before and after the violation. The forms of sexual violence perpetrated on the female students could be similar, but each had her own unique way of presenting it. This was due to the way one would have experienced the violation and the ease or difficulty of accessing social support systems within their environments. As most survivors navigated their environments, the responses they got shaped the way they viewed the world.

Knowledge is socially situated: Societies that are stratified by gender, ethnicity, class, social status and political histories manifest in the way survivors tell their stories. The way they view their social and religious backgrounds and how they fuelled their victimisation is indicated. For

instance, the concepts of limiting ecologies such as dysfunctional families, poverty and some cultural practices within their families indicate how socially situated their narratives are. Narratives of resilience and recovery indicate that their social and political backgrounds determined how survivors described their journeys of resilience and recovery. The amalgamation of their experiences form a standpoint through which they understand the world. (van der Tuin, 2016). At each stage of their journeys of resilience and recovery, survivors' social situatedness enabled them to question the societal traditions and beliefs that insubordinate them.

Social disposition produces epistemic privilege: The survivors of sexual violence trauma are the marginalised whom society blames for the victimisation, for dressing or behaving undesirably. They are the ones who bear the isolation, stigmatisation and rejection as 'unmarriageable' after suffering sexual assault. This makes them privy to the knowledge of what it means to be sexually violated and they can understand their stories better.

Power is structured by power relations that generate unequal social locations: this aspect is indicated in the stereotypic societal expectations on female students, for instance where female students were labelled 'prostitutes' by the law enforcing agents for being university students. In this notion, female students could have challenged society by entering a traditionally male dominated arena, institution of higher learning, when most females are expected to occupy the kitchen and concentrate on managing the family (Subramanian, 2018).

The two theories were appropriate for this research in that the female student survivors of sexual violence trauma had all experienced how culture, societal classification and power differentials determine their journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. Both theories provided the lenses to better understand the narratives of journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma narrated by the female student survivors.

Body shaming and objectification- light skinned labelled as 'available' for men, label of 'prostitute' given to female university students, illegitimate child cursed by God, orphans not fit for marriage but just fun,	The complexity of stigma in African culture
Incest and any other forms of sexual violence concealed to protect family honour, not divulging sexual assault due to stigma, being judged negatively by family, friends, community, isolation, protecting life of a family member, fear of rejection by suitors, protection of social status	Vulnerability shrouded in secrecy and privacy
Lack of support from the legal system, siding with the perpetrator, being embarrassed at the police station, law enforcement agents taking bribes from perpetrators, low status making it difficult to get justice,	Dealing with law enforcement agents
Brother in-law continually molesting the minor in the name of culture, flirting with minors not harmful, objectification of the female body, societal label for fair-skinned females -prostitutes, non-achievers	Normalisation of sexual violence
Protection of white garment churches by the state, institutions of higher learning failing to implement sexual violence policies, sexual harassment not clearly pronounced as a form of sexual violence, marital rape not legally considered as a form of sexual violence,	Lack of political will

Question 1

In the section below, I discuss the analysis of narratives and how participants interpret and make meaning of their experiences of sexual violence trauma. The discussion that follows elaborates on the first cluster of meaning: Oppressive social spaces as limiting ecologies.

5.5 Oppressive social spaces as limiting ecologies

In Chapter Two, I highlighted various ecological spaces that female student survivors of sexual violence find themselves in, which either promote or undermine their psychological well-being. These spaces include residences, parks, playgrounds, churches, and schools. Social spaces that make up the survivors' ecologies include physical, virtual, private, or public environments in which individuals interact. The narratives of the eleven participants indicate that their social spaces influenced their life experiences either positively or negatively. Within these spaces, lurked various forms of social oppression and power dynamics which they had to navigate.

5.5.1 The family as an oppressive, limiting ecology

Data showed that the family environment can either promote growth-fostering relationships that contribute to healthy functioning and flourishing or promote disconnections that contribute to relational pain. Terry, Emma, Ivy, Jay Jay, Patricia and Cee's narratives are indicative of such dysfunctions in their family ecosystems, while Anne relates of a home filled with mutual participation towards healthy and empowering connections among family members.

I have gone through life alone. The good and the bad.... nobody was there to protect me. My mother has always chosen other kids over me. When I got raped by her son, she chose to protect him at my expense. I wish they could have let her kill me.

(Terry, interview)

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) assumes that humans are social/relational animals whose satisfaction is realisable within a social community (McCauley, 2013). The foregoing quote highlights Terry's experiences of disconnection within the family. Healthy interactions between family members ensure connections that enable an individual to feel secure within the home. This

disconnection that Terry experienced, brought about an experience of social pain caused by separation and rejection by her own biological mother. Terry's narrative indicates how insecure her childhood was, making the home unsafe. However, this does not mean she did not experience happy memories within the home. She shares, *"My stepfather was my best friend. We spent a lot of time together. He would always be there to support me with my ambitions"*. While the participants also shared their sad childhood memories, their lived experiences were quite different. Anne's experiences growing up in the family were different. She grew up in a functional family where members of the family interacted positively with each other, and children felt secure as she revealed:

Both our parents work as security guards. My brother, little sister, and I share household chores to reduce our parents' stress of fending for us. My mother was protective of me, and she stressed the preservation of virginity. Our parents always wished we could attain a university education.

Although Anne's home environment enabled healthy connection among family members, she shares another dimension of her limited experiences in socialisation that could have made her vulnerable to victimisation in university. Anne's mother *was uncomfortable with letting her have male friends visiting her at home. Anne preferred her boyfriend to visit her while at university where her mother would not be aware of her activities*. This indicates a closed system that does not allow any external influence on its members. Such limited exposure to the wider social environment may have made Anne vulnerable to victimisation. She was not privy to the oppressive relationships that are instituted within a society. Anne's narrative indicates that regardless of belonging to a family she described as having healthy relationships which, in the lenses of RCT,

are viewed as providing a growth-fostering environment, a closed family system deprives its members acquisition of social skills.

For Patricia, her childhood was not a happy one. She experienced disconnection since birth. She revealed: *my mother preferred my twin sister to me. But I had my father's love. Due to the lack of my mother's stimulation, I suffered chest pains that doctors thought I had tuberculosis. As I grew up, I was brighter than my twin sister, and my family expected me to score high in school regardless of my emotional pain.* She also narrates a home where brothers would *come home drunk and throw insults at girls in the home. The boys would fight among themselves.* It was an unhealthy environment. Since she was a high performer academically, her family demanded high achievement from her. However, she received minimal emotional and psychological support from them. She tried her best to fulfil their wishes. Such high expectations of the family from Patricia made it difficult for her to disclose the sexual assault she experienced on her way from school. Relationships among family members lacked mutuality that promotes positive growth.

Emma's childhood was filled with experiences of connections and disconnections. Her family environment resembled a dominant-subordinate system where her father would treat them like objects that can be manipulated, completely disregarding their feelings. She reveals:

We had no fixed abode – our father was polygamous and our mother being the first wife became unfavourable and we would hang out between our parents and grandmother's place. Our several cousins and we would crowd grandmother's place. We would suffer taunts from our grandmother who would call our mothers prostitutes who burdened her with the care of their children. Our maternal uncles would sexually abuse us, and our grandmother never wanted us to talk about it.

Her account of life at her maternal grandmother's place confirms the feminist standpoint theory (FST) assumption that patriarchy often facilitates sexual violence, and actively silences allegations, covers up misconduct and punishes victims for reporting (Amstrong et al., 2018).

During her childhood, Ivy narrates that she lacked relational competence. She recalls:

I remember growing up in a family where parents would always fight. I was a carefree character and I played with boys. At the playground, I would be sexually abused by the boys as early as grade 1. As a teenager, I fell prey to a prophet who was treating my ailing mother. He threatened me with my mother's life. My silence about the abuse would save my mother's life – no relative was willing to assist my mother in the healing process, I was her only support.

In the same vein, Talia did not have a supportive social system in terms of the extended family, although her parents were her pillar of strength. Talia narrates: *my sister and grand aunt supported the boyfriend who physically abused me after he realised I had been sexually assaulted at college. My father and mother supported me throughout the court hearings – they encouraged me to get justice. They were my source of strength.* For Jay Jay, life was not easy. She was moved from one relative's home to the next. She reveals:

After our parents' passing, I was separated from my brother and stayed with one of my paternal uncles and his family. My aunt viewed me as a disobedient child. She was not happy staying with me. I did not stay for long with this uncle. The next paternal uncle's wife I stayed with, viewed me as a weak character, who could not keep opposite-sex relationships. I stayed with them for a short period, then I enrolled in university where I sought campus residence since I got a Higher Life Foundation scholarship.

Although Cee had lost both parents to AIDS, she was left under the custody of her father's first wife, who could not afford to provide for her tuition and care. However, her marginalised status did not weaken her resilience, she narrated:

I had to take care of my mother when she had full-blown AIDS at the age of 13. I had to drop out of school to manage the care work because none of her relatives showed passion for doing the work. After my mother passed on, I had to find work to resume my education.

Liz's home situation was similar to Cee's. Although she narrates a happy and supportive environment in her childhood, life changed when she fell pregnant, as she explained – *my aunt disowned me, and I had to marry early into a family where my mother-in-law would taunt me for being an orphan. Sweetie's blissful childhood ended when her mother passed on when she was six years old. Custody battles landed her into a 'fierce paternal aunt's home' where she would be neglected when she fell sick.*

5.5.2 The context of poverty as a limiting ecology

The data revealed that the contexts in which most of the survivors of sexual violence grew up had poverty as a limiting ecology. Research has documented the link between poverty and sexual violence (Runarsdottir et al., 2019; Wahid Satar et al., 2021). Where there is poverty, mutuality does not exist due to power differentials (Feldman, 2018). Miller's (1988) description of mutually enhancing relationships suggests a situation where interactions can equally benefit each player in the relationship. Poverty creates class divisions. This corroborates Feldman's (2018) view that poverty is a problem of power privileged state and non-state owners who exert power to the disadvantage of the poor. The present study indicates that the lack of resources creates 'power

over' the victim or survivor of sexual violence, accompanied by domination and subordination. This is illustrated in Cee's narrative.

When I was at college, I had financial problems. I told my course lecturer about my issues, and he took advantage of my vulnerability and began to send sexually suggestive messages to my phone. At a certain point, I had to seek free accommodation from a pastor. I called him my brother because of our similar surnames. But he ended up making sexual advances towards me.

In the case of Anne, her poor background made her fall prey to sexual assault by her boyfriend who provided her with a laptop for her studies.

I would borrow his laptop so that I could do assignments, so he demanded that I visit his place where I would do my schoolwork. I got used to his company until he made sexual advances.

Both the RCT and FST concur on the contribution of the larger culture and power differentials on social problems that include poverty (Miller & Richards, 2000, Melo, 2019). Melo (2019) further classifies poverty as a feminised phenomenon whereby girls and women are restricted of their choices and opportunities in ways that male counterparts are not. Her lack of an essential gadget that would enable her to learn independently created a vertical relationship of dominant-subordinate relationship. This type of relationship made her lose the autonomy to make independent relational decisions.

In contrast to RCT's emphasis on the promotion of wider relational patterns that promote growth, in Emma's case, the extended family failed to perform the expected caring role owing to poverty. According to feminist standpoint theory, patriarchy perpetuates poverty in that ownership of

resources is attributed to males of the family. Emma's maternal uncles had rights to all resources and used them as they desired. Collins (1998, 2017) contends that sexual violence spreads through male-dominated, hierarchical organisations. In Emma's case, the patriarchal structure of the maternal home made it unsafe for girls in the family. She recalls:

When our White Garment polygamous fathers sent us and our mothers away, my cousins and I would be left at our grandmother's place where we would sleep in the lounge. Our maternal uncles would come during the night and rape us.

Victims of sexual violence in such contexts of poverty are usually denied the voice to seek justice for sexual abuse. Armstrong et al. (2018) attest to the entrenchment of sexual violence by institutions, and cultural beliefs and practices such as the family and social patriarchy. Allegations of sexual violence are silenced, denied and victims face punishment for divulging.

Emma recounted:

One of my cousins reported the abuse to our grandmother. She was beaten up and told to never talk about it. Our mothers were not supposed to know about it. There was this older uncle who would play judge... and dismiss the issue as a non-event.

Although living without access to basic needs can predispose an individual to risks of sexual violence, in turn, being a victim of sexual violence can jeopardise the victim or survivor's economic well-being. A survivor can become homeless, unemployed, have her education disrupted, have compromised general health and mental health, and experience many other daily stresses and struggles. Jay Jay's disclosure of sexual assault made her paternal uncle's wife resent her.

From the day I disclosed the sexual assault, I never had a home that I called mine. I stayed in my two uncles' homes for short periods. I stayed with some well-wishers who assisted me materially. Now I am a beneficiary of the Higher Life Foundation scholarship. The scholarship covers my tuition and accommodation. During holidays, I work as a maid to meet my other needs.

Although there are many predisposing factors to sexual victimisation, poverty was seen to increase vulnerability of female students sexual violence survivors to sexual exploitation (Reyal et al., 2024). As discussed in the literature review chapter, poverty has been documented as a risk factor for sexual victimisation (Runarsdottir et al., 2019). The majority women in most patriarchal societies lack financial independence and depend on men for their livelihoods (Enaifoghe et al., 2021, Childress, 2018; Fletschner & Kenney, 2011). Similarly, this has been a trend with most participants in the current study. In almost all the cases of the survivors, their livelihoods depended either on intimate partners or abusers within their families for shelter and other essential resources. Poverty took away their power to make important life decisions and made them vulnerable to sexual violence. Both FST and RCT regard power as the ability of an individual or group to constrain the choices available to another individual or group (Gurung, 2020, Jordan, 2008). Although, poverty takes away one's decision-making power it emerged that poverty became a strength for claiming back power. This was shown by six narrative collaborators. Following is an extract from Lilly:

I grew up in a middle-income family, sometimes we would be very poor. I want to be an entrepreneur; I will make a lot of money. I would not want my own children to live a life like mine.

Cee said:

I will change my life and work hard for myself and my child. I would not want to beg my ex-husband for our upkeep. For my tuition, I raise and sell chickens.

Patricia emotionally expressed that:

I want to be a politician for our rural home area. That way I will end all the oppression that women face. I will embark on financial projects that empower women so that no man will make them vulnerable.

Patricia's expression of reacting to limitations resulting from impoverished backgrounds indicate a sense of community interdependence. She was not restricting the emancipation from poverty to herself alone, but the wider society. A sign of ubuntu emerged from her narrative.

Apart from poverty, data analysis indicated that fractured families can be a limiting ecology that becomes a risk factor for sexual victimisation. In the next section I discuss how fractured families were seen to be fertile ground for sexual victimisation.

5.5.3 Fractured families as a limiting ecology

A family can be fractured when there is divorce, separation, or some form of dysfunction that creates a rift among its members. Jordan (2000) asserts that people are hardwired to desire connections. Psychological development is achieved through connections. All things being equal, an intact, functional family provides fertile ground for growth-fostering relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997, Mereish & Poteat, 2015). RCT asserts that growth occurs in and in pursuit of connection with other people across a person's life span (Jordan et al., 2008). As humans, we are hardwired for relationships. Thus, we thrive within supportive groups where our worth is recognised. Neurologically, it has been proved that mutual connections boost our psychological

well-being (Zhang et al., 2019). A sense of being securely attached to others (Bowlby, 1988), although not always attainable, has been linked to many benefits, including the ability to develop healthy relationships, increase confidence and efforts to strive toward personal goals, and manage adversity effectively (Li & Chan, 2012, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016, Pietromonaco et al., 2013). According to Stiver (1990) optimal conditions for healthy development is evident in functional families. These are families where there is two-way mutuality. Children are free to express their feelings and needs and feel their parents listen to them. Thus, authentic interactions with others are encouraged. Contrarily, dysfunctional families are fraught with disconnections. Such families impede growth-enhancing experiences in their children. Children feel more disconnected and isolated. Trust is eroded, the capacity to express empathy is impaired and they lack empowerment (Stiver, 1990).

The present study is indicative of fractured/dysfunctional families where continuous separation and disconnections create an insecure environment that feeds sexual violence and impedes resilience and recovery. Dysfunctional families are evidenced in Emma, Sweetie, Patricia, Ivy, and Terry's stories.

Emma – I grew up in a polygamous home where my mother was no longer the favourite wife. Girls would be married off early. My sisters ran away from their imposed husbands.

Sweetie – my parents had separated, and I used to stay with my mother in her maternal home. When my mother passed on, a custody battle landed me in the hands of a 'fierce' and abusive paternal aunt.

Patricia - my brothers used to come home drunk and fight with each other. There were few rooms at home, so all the girls shared a single room. When our brothers fought, they scolded us, and we would close ourselves in the room.

Ivy – my parents never had a happy marriage; they fought all the time.

Terry – my mother preferred her other children over me. My relationship with my half-sisters is non-existent. They are after my resources only. They do not have love for me because I am an illegitimate child.

The excerpts from survivors' stories above indicate a desire to forge connections, but due to fractured relationships within the family, they are trapped in what RCT refers to as the central paradox. The survivors yearn for connections while at the same time keeping an important part of the self out of the connection to protect themselves from psychological pain. Disclosing sexual violence was made more difficult in their contexts, leading to re-victimisation, for example, in Terry's case. In some instances, social institutions fail to protect victims of sexual violence, and this impedes resilience and recovery. These disconnections in the family structure deviate from the traditional African family that used to have a seamless culture of care and protection (Layefa et al., 2022). No child should feel like an orphan in the presence of the extended family. The home provided secure attachments that would promote psychological well-being to its members. The World Bank (2009) stressed that the extended family in African culture plays a fundamental role in supporting each member financially, emotionally, morally, and also by providing shelter, food, housing, and labour. Zimbabweans have traditionally always regarded close relatives as family. Uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents, all seamlessly played the care roles and keep members' relationships safe and healthy (Makiwane & Kaunda, 2020; Mafumbate, 2019). Participants' stories indicated that this seamless connection among family members of the survivors of sexual

violence was fractured and non-existent. This can be shown in Terry's response when asked about her relationship with her four half-sisters. She explains

The relationship is non-existent, it's non-existent, it's non-existent. The illegitimate child does not belong anywhere. They only text me when they want something from me.

In this relationship with her half-sisters mutuality is lacking, a sign of a fractured family that impedes growth-enhancing experiences.

In contrast to the South African situation, where families obtain government child care grants for needy families, there are no policies to that effect in Zimbabwe. Owing to poverty, families are not willing to share their meagre resources to care for orphans and vulnerable children.

Concerning incest that has been indicated by survivors such as Emma and Terry, Haralambos, and Holborn (2013) contend that in most cultures the family upholds and transmits cultural norms and values of the extended family and community by elders of the family. Furthermore, the family acts as a protective mechanism for its members against external influences that may cause harm and heighten vulnerability and risks (Mushunje, 2014). Contrary to this view, participants were made vulnerable to becoming victims of incest and sexual abuse.

It seems that traditional norms and values are being eroded in Zimbabwean social institutions, including the family. Next, I discuss how social institutions make sexual violence survivors vulnerable to violation.

5.5.4 Risks and vulnerabilities in social institutions

Social institutions in Miller's (2019) view entail complex social forms that reproduce themselves. These can be the government, family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems. Various complex risks and vulnerabilities in social institutions

were illuminated in the narratives of participants. The following excerpts from Jay Jay, Emma, Terry, and Talia are illustrative of this:

I remember the time we went to the police station; we were asked to narrate our story at the counter although my aunt asked for privacy. A certain man shouted, 'Why not say out that the girl has been raped so that we rape her again'. (Jay Jay)

The officers at the police station sided with the perpetrator. They said to me, 'You, female university students are prostitutes, you spend men's money and claim that you have been raped.' (Emma)

The university was protecting the lecturer at my expense because to them, he was a 'gem' - the only doctor they had in the department. (Terry)

I heard that the perpetrator had been released from jail and his whereabouts are not known. He was related to the Dean of the faculty, and they had the power to bribe the law. (Talia)

The focus of the FST is to identify cultural values and power dynamics that account for the subordination of girls and women (Wood, 2009). The above narratives reveal the oppression and power dynamics the survivors experienced in social institutions that were supposed to provide them with essential services. Power and organisational hierarchies form the foundation of modern society (Gibson et al., 2014). In this study, power differentials either constrained or enhanced the survivors' ability to make decisions. Social institutions entrench oppression and reinforce the vulnerability of victims. Labelling victims as 'prostitutes' is a form of gender violence in male dominated environments. Shielding perpetrators or assisting them to escape the law reveals how social institutions 'dismiss misconduct', as indicated by feminist standpoint theory. Power is used

to intimidate and control the ‘weaker’ member in the relationship – the survivor (Rector-Aranda, 2019). Contrary to the view that oppression entrenched by social institutions, weakens the violated, all the participants in the excerpts went against all odds and pursued justice regardless of impediments imposed by institutional hierarchies.

In RCT lens, an individuals’ life experiences are determined by relational interactions, historical and systemic injustices experienced by the marginalised (Gurung, 2020). People are believed to grow through and toward relationships throughout the lifespan and these complex relationships anchor on community and interdependence that fosters positive post traumatic growth (McCauley, 2013). Sexual violence survivors in their journeys of resilience and recovery, experience moments of connection and disconnection in their interactions with their environment. These complex interactions are determined by power differentials influenced by culture and the institutionalisation of oppressive relationships within the society.

In the next section, I analyse how the sexual abuse victims’ human rights were violated in the African context.

5.6 Human rights violations in the African context

According to child welfare policies and initiatives enshrined in the Children’s Act [Chapter 5:06], states are meant to protect or respond to child abuse, neglect, exploitation as well as any violence affecting children. Article 14 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1984) indicates that children can be part of religious groups under the guidance of their parents. In the case of Emma, it is evident that child rights were violated on the basis of religious tenets, rules and beliefs. Furthermore, the White Garment Churches disallow women from any kind of decision making, whether in the family or in the church. As their father married the girls off at a young age,

their mother had to comply. However, Emma recalls her mother eventually taking action by defecting from the church: *I was saved from my father's behaviour of marrying us off, because our mom was no longer a member of such a church. It was a matter of standing for the rights of a child.* Although Emma grew up in the White Garment religion, she came to the realisation that the institution was oppressive, and that patriarchy governed the rules and laws of the church.

The study provided further insights on the issue of child rights and that in the name of culture, children's rights were constantly violated. Emma tried to raise the issue of the abusive tradition that runs in the family; however, she was always silenced. Emma explains: *some would tell you that you can't gather elders to accuse them because you are too young. You are crazy, your mom or your father can't gather us for that so who do you think you are to do so?* Her uncles, who were the dominant group in this case, would threaten them using the rules of the Shona tradition. Children are not expected to challenge their elders, regardless of if the elders were in the wrong (Chigidi, 2009). In the White Garment Churches, the patriarch dominates. Women are treated as minors – they have no rights over issues of child care and development. Emma's father would make the rules, including early marriage for the daughters, which is in essence sexual abuse.

Ivy fell prey to a religious prophet from the white garment churches who sexually abused her in the name of spirituality. Violation of child and women's rights is rampant in these churches. Prophets and religious leaders wield power that is akin to that of the creator. Ivy indicates her fear of losing her sick mother as the prophet told her: *Your mom's life is in my hands so you need to be with me.* The way the prophet said it, *I actually believed it and I was scared so I had to live up to his demands.* After impregnating Ivy, the prophet uses his 'powers' to extort money from her

parents - taking advantage of Ivy's parents' vulnerability of spiritual beliefs; *Your child is wandering, if you want her back you need to pay me to wade away the evil spirits.*

Gross human rights violations are evident when tertiary institutions fail to protect female students from gender-based violence perpetrated by their lecturers, fellow students and other ancillary staff. When students seek services, they are rightly entitled to, the system makes it difficult for them to attain social justice. This confirms the feminist standpoint theory claims that dominant patriarchal groups hold power. According to RCT, the concept of power can be viewed in two lenses. 'Power over' the subordinate group entails domination whereby one is superior to the other, while 'power to' indicates empowering and enabling others (Suliman, 2019). In the narrative excerpts, power is seen to be used to dominate the survivors and is void of empowerment and enabling them to build resilience and recovery. An excerpt from Anne's narrative shows how her boyfriend wielded power over her;

Because he had slept with me, he began to sexually harass me during lectures. I used to go to the toilet to cry. I failed to concentrate during lessons.

The fact that Anne's boyfriend had succeeded in breaking her virginity, made him hold her at ransom by blackmailing her to stay in an abusive relationship. He used that fact to make her life in the learning institution miserable. This took away her right to sexual choices and would weaken her resilience. To her, she would keep her self-respect by staying in a relationship with the one who deflowered her. She would be vulnerable to further abuse because he made her helpless by believing his words.

Sweetie also experienced a similar situation when she fell pregnant without penetration. Following a heated argument about the issue, her boyfriend violently assaulted her, claiming he wanted to

confirm whether she was still a virgin despite her pregnancy, which had occurred without penetration.

I went to his place and he forced me to sleep with him in order to prove I was a virgin. After he broke my virginity he pushed me away and told me he was having other girlfriends. He brought up the issue of aborting the pregnancy and now because I was afraid of losing him, I gave in.

Power 'over' is evident in the cases of Cee, Lilly, and Patricia. Cee had to explain her financial constraints to the course lecturer who had complained about her missing some lectures. Upon knowing her situation he began to make sexual advances towards Cee. When she resisted his advances, *he began to fail her assignments or downgrade them*. Similarly, Lilly's course lecturer failed her three times because she had refused to give in to his demands. She explained

The lecturer said to me, 'I know if I say pay me, you won't get the money. One thing that you can afford is to give me love.'

Patricia's boyfriend also wielded power over her, violated her right to make a choice and her resilience was weakened.

When he is around me I lose my head. When he calls or sends me texts, I begin to get confused.

In such relationships where an individual wields power over a purportedly weaker part, there is no mutuality and it is void of a growth-enhancing atmosphere. In all these cases, the survivors' rights were violated in the name of either love or vulnerability due to poverty.

As indicated by both the feminist standpoint and relational cultural theories, hegemonic masculinity reigns in institutions of higher learning. Power dynamics between the lecturers and students are evident in all their narratives. According to Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020), sexual harassment is trivialised by organisations or results in hostility and retaliation against the victim. For the participants to be able to muster the courage to resist oppression and transform their situations, they could have developed sustained and strategic efforts. Jordan and Schwartz (2018) describe these efforts as: naming the problem, noticing who makes the rules, complaining, claiming strength, and developing communities of resilience and courage. All these efforts are evident in the survivors' narratives, indicating that they were able to realise their epistemic advantage, which they effectively utilised to gain autonomy over their psychological well-being. Cee, Lilly, Liz, Emma, Tali Bae, Anne and Terry's narratives indicate such efforts. Each of them either sought help from a counsellor or reported the sexual violence to institution authorities and the police.

The following section focuses on narratives of stigma in the African cultural context.

5.7 The complexity of stigma in the African culture

Ballantine (2022) describes stigma as a feature of social relationships where a particular attribute is labelled as socially significant. Ballantine (2022) further explains that an individual is subjected to status loss when stigmatised. These attributes include behaviour, medical status, physical condition, and any other that is considered significant by a certain group of people. In the Shona culture, for example, there are proverbs used to describe issues positively or negatively. A vernacular proverb that goes; 'mukadzi mutsvuku kutadza kuroya anoba' (If a light-skinned woman is not a witch, then she becomes a thief). Lilly from her teenage life narrates being labelled and stigmatised by neighbours and some relatives due to her light skin and beauty. She explains,

as I grew up since primary school, people used to say... she will not complete her education..... she will be impregnated, she will become a prostitute. These labels could have harmed her. Language can be used as a tool for perpetuating oppression as is shown in the Shona proverb mentioned earlier. Roche (2019) theorised the issue of language as a tool of oppression. In Roche's view, language oppression is a form of domination that is coherent with other forms of oppression related to race, nation, colour and ethnicity. In the current study, language is seen as giving power to people and can be manipulated through renaming, stereotyping a person and using demeaning or discriminatory language.

Those who wish to dominate others can use language as a weapon. In the case of Emma, her boyfriend used language to render her powerless and to abuse her. She recalled him making this comment: *"She has infected me with HIV..... she is a prostitute"; "How could you refuse to have sex with me when you are not a virgin."* The labels 'prostitute', and 'not a virgin' are stigmatising. When the abusive boyfriend threatened to turn up at her place of residence, Emma showed discomfort. *I went out of the room to meet him because I didn't want anyone to notice. She knew she would be subjected to further stigmatisation.* She was trying to avoid the humiliation and disrespect. She did not want her neighbours to hear any accusations and labelling. The 'prostitute' label was used to silence Emma and her cousins when they reported the incidents of incest perpetrated by their uncles. She explains, *granny would say, your mothers are prostitutes - your mothers prostituted, your fathers never paid lobola here.* Her grandmother reinforced the abuse by not acting and used cultural traditions (the issue of lobola) to justify her inaction. Further, she directed verbal abuse against Emma's mother by stigmatising her and labelling her a 'prostitute'.

Anne was coerced to continually have sex with her boyfriend. She recounted that he said: *you are forgetting who I am? I am the first man who slept with you... you are the first girl I slept with who*

was a virgin. As people who have once had sex, we should kiss etc. There was some form of persuasions as well as coercion in his utterances. Terry elaborated on her stigmatisation and narrated: *Being an illegitimate child, the church kept saying that I suffer from the curse of an illegitimate child.* On social media, she would be labelled, *a home wrecker.... husband snatcher....* Liz's case also reflects some form of stigmatisation by her mother-in-law, who questioned Liz's husband in Liz's presence: *why did you marry an orphan, such people are just for your pleasure and fun not for marriage.* Being repeatedly reminded of her background would weaken Liz's resilience. Thoughts of belonging to a family were shattered.

This indicates a battering of Liz's self-esteem. In African cultures, the philosophy and values of Ubuntu are upheld. It encapsulates humanity to others, the importance of communal existence and a sense of care and belonging. The core values are compassion, respect and dignity. One would wonder where the concept of Ubuntu had gone. The mother-in-law in her capacity as an adult was the person young people would look up to for learning what it is to be African. In Talia Bae's case, being ridiculed by both her colleagues and staff members at the institution surrounding the sexual violence she experienced was more than she could handle. She narrates: *everyone had his opinion about my issue... Ah these prostitutes, they had sex and she was not paid for the service, these girls who are light in complexion usually behave this way.* In her story, the stigmatisation of light-skinned women emerges as it did in Lilly's case. Some studies on sexual violence among African populations, for instance, Jewkes et al. (2022), indicate that internal stigma dominates among the survivors. Although in the current study, survivors suffered stigma, blame is mostly attributed to fate, evil spells, and other external factors like oppressive cultural and religious practices. Concealment of sexual violations by families and the survivors themselves indicate the silence and

secrecy that shrouds the lives of the survivors. Issues of vulnerability of survivors due to keeping their violations secret is discussed in the next section.

5.8 Vulnerability shrouded in secrecy and privacy

In many contexts, families and individuals prefer to conceal the issue for various reasons (Ullman et al., 2020, Tener, 2018). It is taboo for parents in the Shona culture to talk openly about sexual health with their children (Dune & Mupedzahama, 2017). In some instances when sexual assault is experienced by a child, the family prefers to relocate the victim to avoid stigmatisation of both the victim and the family by members of the community. Therefore, children find it difficult to divulge any form of sexual violation unless empowered to do so. In this section, I present findings that illustrate how the isolation of victims and keeping the violation secret makes survivors vulnerable.

The uncle would sexually abuse me every day after watching pornographic movies while other kids went to their houses. I couldn't share my case until I tried to commit suicide.

(Talía Bae)

Talía Bae's silence meant the uncle could continue to abuse her in the absence of her parents and aunt. She survived her attempted suicide. Her silence made it impossible for her to shield herself from the abuse. In Patricia's case, she chose to take the shortest way home, a quiet and swampy path because she had used up her transport money at break time. Due to fractured relationships in the family, she preferred to keep it to herself, hence making her vulnerable to sexual assault. After being sexually assaulted, she chose to keep silent. She never divulged the assault to anyone at home. Patricia could not stand being labelled 'the raped'. Emotionally she was restless as she narrates,

*Because of my status at home, I thought of getting rid of all evidence and keep it my secret.
I could not tell my teacher because I was shy.*

Secrecy and privacy in issues of sexual violence can also be attributed to disconnection in relationships. When family members become psychologically distant from each other, lack of mutuality brews mistrust. Victims of sexual violence feel insecure among family members they do not trust (Ullman et al., 2020). They would rather prefer to keep the violation secret in order to avoid stigmatisation which could increase the cracks in the family. This was another reason that some participants would not divulge the abuse. They were committed to keeping the family intact. As such, most affected individuals' psyches are plagued with incongruencies. Similarly, in Ivy's case, it was both difficult and scary to divulge the sexual assault by the prophet because of her family's commitment to the White Garment Church.

Divulging sexual abuse makes female victims vulnerable to rejection by future suitors. Further, their status in various social spaces, including the church, extended family, peer groups, and other social institutions where patriarchy reigns, is at stake. These observations resonate with the feminist standpoint theory assumption that hegemonic masculinity makes the dominant group reinforce women's lower status.

Terry felt that *talking doesn't help. It has never helped. It just leaves me open and vulnerable.* She preferred to be silent about the abuse even with her mother. However, her mother protected the perpetrator. Both RCT and FST recognise the overarching influence of patriarchy on how women should behave. The cultural aspect of RCT brings into focus the influence of the larger culture and power differentials on the quality and nature of relationships. The FST views patriarchy as promoting domination over the subordinate group and perpetuating the oppression. This is evident in Terry's mother's behaviour which resonates with Tonsing and Tonsing's (2019) assertion that

in many contexts, elderly women in the family reinforce patriarchal ideas and ways of thinking, rather than challenge them. The idea that males are the head of the family and the family name and status in society has to be shielded, prevails.

In the next sub-section, I discuss how survivors navigated the law and law enforcement agents in their quest to seek justice.

5.9 Dealing with law enforcement agents: the complexities

Reporting sexual violence becomes difficult when the survivor cannot access support from the social system that is supposed to protect her. In this section, I discuss participants' narratives that illustrate the complexity of their encounters with the law-enforcing agents. Jay Jay remembers being embarrassed when she and her guardians visited the police station to report the assault. She explains:

When we reached the station, we were made to tell our story in public, but my aunt argued that we needed to discuss the issues in private and the policeman insisted on hearing it in the presence of all people saying it did not matter.

Most survivors usually dread reporting their violations when they think of the humiliation that they might face at the hands of law enforcement agents (Lorenz et al., 2019; Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022).

Terry had to lose one year of tuition due to unfavourable experiences with law enforcement agents. Her case was trivialised and investigations delayed. Terry had to drop out of university. She recalls: *his (the perpetrator) lawyer fired my friend who was working for them - for being friends with me. He (the perpetrator) was well connected.* Those who have resources and power cheat the system and escape punishment. It is the victims who lose. In Emma's case, she recalls the police protecting

her abusive boyfriend. They even urged Emma to withdraw the charge against him. She recalls the interaction: *The officers said to me, so you infected him, do you know how many years the sentence is when you deliberately infect someone?*” She was threatened with the possibility of a jail sentence for infecting the perpetrator.

In some instances, perpetrators use the power of their financial status to silence their victims (Altman, 2022; Lorenz et al., 2019). In Terry’s case, she recalls being persuaded by the perpetrator’s lawyers to withdraw the case, *I don’t know what the legal term is...is it settlement.... but basically, we are not admitting guilt but want to settle the issue by an offer of like \$4000 out of court.*

Talia was discouraged by a man she perceived to be a secret intelligence officer from pursuing her case with the law enforcement agents. She explained: *the final last time! So, there is this person, a CIO (Central Intelligence Officer), I can’t tell who was there, just walking up and down. He came to us to say, come so that we talk. I will pay her so that we close the case, I will give USD2000 and the cattle that she demands so that the case is closed.*

The study revealed that across the participants there existed a web of law enforcement agents who sought to protect perpetrators of sexual abuse. It seemed as though the perpetrators were above the law. In many instances, there was no evidence of support for the welfare of the victims.

These survivors’ narratives confirm that sexual violence is a product of power differentials and a site of the reproduction of multiple inequalities and re-victimisation (Gravelin et al., 2017) as purported in both RCT and FST theories. The reaction of the law enforcement agents towards survivors confirms the views of Harding (2019) regarding the need for strong objectivity. Harding (2019) argues that to understand women’s social realities, one must start from experiences of those

who have been traditionally marginalised and excluded from the production of knowledge. This is one of the strengths of the present study. Listening to the dominant group's interpretation of reality will lead to a distorted representation of knowledge. In this study, the analysis of female victims' experiences and interactions with powerful law enforcement agencies illuminate the complex oppressions that they have to endure in their quest for justice. Drawing from FST, Harding's (1995) claim that women as a marginalised group can offer more objective accounts of their own reality of the world around them, sexual violence survivors have an upper hand in understanding and resolving their marginalisation stemming from the social order of patriarchy. When they realise what epistemic privilege they hold, they can become empowered and stand up for themselves to obtain justice from their violations.

In the next section, I discuss narratives that bring out the normalisation of sexual violence.

5.10 Normalisation of sexual violence

Every society has its norms and values that are considered normal (Zhang et al., 2023; Mercur et al., 2019). When a behaviour that is not acceptable among people becomes the norm, the concept of social normalisation comes into play. Sexual violence entails sexually deviant behaviours that people adopt to gratify their sexual desires. When a society no longer reacts when such behaviour occurs regardless of the harm that accompanies it, it means sexual violence would have been normalised. Social normalisation of deviance means that people within society have become so accustomed to deviant behaviour that they no longer consider it deviant. According to Foucault (1990), normalisation justifies the perpetrator's behaviour while it minimises the consequences to the victim. Such action then disempowers the survivor's self-disclosure.

Normalisation can occur through labelling which is primarily impacted by violence normalisation. Jay Jay had difficulty labelling her experience as rape. In her narrative she recounts, “*when it happened (not naming the form of violence), I thought of committing suicide because I thought that was the end of the world.*” In Cee’s case, she could not articulate what was happening to her when her brother-in-law attempted to rape her several times,

Every time I visited, I had problems with my brother-in-law ... he would get into the house whether I was cleaning or whatever to the extent that he stripped in front of me. He would send weird messages, obscene messages. I know in our culture sisters and brothers-in-laws joke and flirt, but it was beyond what I expected.

In Cee’s scenario, sexual violence serves to overtly reveal how masculinity plays out. Play and humour allow boys and men to render sexual harassment normal (Miller, 2008).

In the name of culture, Cee normalises her brother-in-law’s behaviour by referring to cultural practices that the Shona group recognises as permissible (Chiramu – sexual dalliance). As such, an individual at Cee’s age at the time would be violated and think it is normal for brother-in-laws to engage in such behaviours. At the time, Cee had no label for the behaviour, indicating that *it was not ‘bad enough’ to harm her*. Her half-sister’s response when she expressed naivety about her husband’s gifts to Cee, indicates the normalisation of sexual violence by the family. Normalisation of sexual violence by minimising the seriousness of behaviour that could lead to abuse towards the minor indicates how society’s action or inaction can perpetuate sexual violence. Objectification of women’s bodies is another form of normalisation of sexual violence (Oller Figueres, 2022; Cusmano, 2018). The FST regards patriarchy as a system that socialises young people to normalise and encourage male power and aggression within heterosexual relationships.

This socialisation results in women and girls becoming justifiable objects of sexual exploitation (Hlavka, 2014; Sande & Chirongoma, 2021). Harding (2004) challenges this notion of ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’ by showing how such ideas like objectification of women’s bodies are shot through with power relations that benefit hegemonic structures. The normalisation and naturalisation of violence and of power relations in patriarchal culture manifests in non-consent, intimidation and inequality that affects women and girls.

Lilly and Cee experienced being objectified because they were light skinned. As indicated earlier, Cee’s lecturers who made sexual advances had this to say: *Izvo zvitsvuku zvaunotiunzira (this light skin you bring before me)*. Cee was being accused of using her light skin as a strategy to deliberately attract the attention of her lecturers. However, in some instances, some victims might play a part in promoting their victimisation. Mawere and Seroto (2022) present the existence of contra-power sexual harassment which entails harassment of those with greater organisational power by those with less power. This type of sexual harassment is purported as occurring in spite of an unbalanced power between those involved (DeSouza, 2011). Mawere and Seroto’s (2022) study revealed that female students would seduce male lecturers by the way they dressed, offering whatever the lecturer wanted in exchange for the marking of overdue assignments, visiting the male lecturers’ offices at odd hours and proposing love to male lecturers. Such behaviours would promote sexual victimisation, which in the public’s eyes would be blamed on the lecturer.

In this study, similar contra-power sexual harassment is shown in Terry’s narrative where men become the victims. Terry admits that she had been *using married men to feel loved, to show them that she is equally beautiful when compared to their wives*. Traditionally, this becomes a rare feminine behaviour that can be regarded as deviant from the norm.

At another level, society can perpetuate sexual victimisation by objectifying a female body. As Lilly grew up in her neighbourhood, she experienced unwelcome taunts; *she won't complete school... she will become a prostitute...* Such utterances were directed at her because of her light skin and beautiful figure. Sande and Chirongoma (2021) drew attention to the normalisation of the objectification of women's bodies in the Shona culture. The authors attribute the perpetuation of rape culture to this kind of normalisation.

In the African context, marriage is held in high esteem. It is a contradiction that this view is susceptible to becoming a source of abuse. In most cases, it is used as a tool to control women. In Liz's case, she was forced into marriage, regardless of her age or readiness. In the Shona culture, the perception is that falling pregnant should lead to marriage (Manion, 2011; Nsalamba & Simpande, 2019; Samati, 2014; Wanyama & Simatwa, 2011). The belief is that failure to marry brings shame on the family (Kurevakwesu, 2023). It is in marriage that every woman can obtain a totem that links her to a paternal family. Patricia, Anne, and Sweetie had to concede to continuous intimacy with their boyfriends in the hope of a commitment of marriage. Patricia recalls: *he insisted that he would have sex with me without protection and his popular statement was I want to lay my children in their mother's womb, and he would take care of me and the baby.*

Anne remembers visiting her boyfriend's home: *When I reached there, they welcomed me warmly saying, this is our daughter-in-law.* In this statement, she indicates feeling accepted in the family and looking forward to marriage. Such value systems would lure any girl into intimacy regardless of other ambitions she may have had.

Sweetie was lured into losing her virginity because she believed that eventually the relationship would lead to marriage. She narrates: *honestly, I could not imagine the world without him. I wanted him to be there for me even more.* In respect of all the participants in the study, there was

some form of tolerance of sexual aggression which was minimised by the survivors. Hope of sealing a marriage was the key reason. In all these cases, marriage is regarded as a way to maintain social mores (Kartika, 2019). There have been studies that have shown that failure by the perpetrator to fulfil the marriage promise could in some cases result in naming the act ‘sexual assault’ (De Zutter et al., 2018; O’Neal, 2014).

Excerpts from other participants, except Terry, are indicative of the FST assumption that in patriarchal social structures violence against the most vulnerable is not only permitted but also encouraged and normalised as a way of maintaining the status quo, the subordination of women. To further clarify the power dynamics in a patriarchal structure, Shaw (2017) argues that gender power shapes the dynamic of every interaction that humans make and perpetuates inequalities and injustices. As a result, this injustice leads to the discrimination and oppression of women by men. Predominantly in patriarchal societies, men use this power to control the lives of women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). In the current study context, it is rare to encounter contra-power violation that Terry exhibited. This then becomes some form of agency to prevent long inhibited psychological pain and feelings of being a ‘perpetual victim’ of men’s power over her. It becomes a form of revenge, although directed, sometimes to innocent individuals.

In the next sub-section, I discuss lack of political will as highlighted in participants’ stories of sexual violence trauma.

5.11 Lack of political will

In most African nations, it seems, there is a lack of political will when it comes to the protection of women from sexual violence. The narratives of the 11 participants show a pattern of violation

that happens within the home, school, and community. However, evidence of political will to address the problem of sexual violence is limited.

Zimbabwe has signed several human rights conventions including the convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2014) states that, “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.” The ‘free and full’ consent can only be made by adults, not children. As indicated in the instrument, a child is ‘every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.’ The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990 Article 2 clearly defines a child as someone below the age of 18.

In Emma’s case, children being married at 15 years old is a violation of children’s rights that are extracted from the human rights instrument that Zimbabwe has ratified. To date, the Johane Marange sect continues with the traditional abusive laws and rules while the State institutions turn a blind eye. A further complexity is that most law enforcement agents are members of the White Garment Church.

Emma explains: I'm here to talk about imprisonment. I spent 23 years in the first prison which is bigger than Whawha or Chikurubi and the prison guards in that jail were well-trained to oppress, silence, or rape the prison inmates. This prison is called White Garment Johane Marange Apostolic church! In this prison they (the church system) spread hurt, insult, abuse, and feminisation of poverty, then they call it preaching.

In Zimbabwe, this sect is believed to constitute approximately 1.2 million members which is quite a large segment of the population. The ZIMSTATS 2019 survey indicates that 33% of women aged 20-49 years reported being married off before reaching the age of 18 years. The adults who

arrange these child marriages are rarely prosecuted because the Marange sect is politically connected (Foya & Ncube, 2022). Regardless of the many deaths of teenage expectant mothers at their churches, the government has not taken any action to stop child marriages within the sect. In July 2021, the media was awash with the news of a 15-year-old who died giving birth at one of the church's shrines. However, investigations concluded that it was a natural death. Cases of child marriage-related deaths at the churches' shrines rarely reach the media.

Most of the births and infant mortality cases are not reported. Foya and Ncube (2022) in their Bulawayo research on child marriages in this particular sect indicate that 75% of maternal deaths were associated with the Marange sect. Emma's narrative indicates how she managed to use her epistemic advantage to free herself from the bondage in an attempt to find closure from the wounds of incest she suffered for several years. In FST terms, Emma had a chance to actualise her epistemic privilege. She had what is termed 'intellectual self-trust' (Kassar, 2020) that enabled her to access epistemic resources such as an education, information and analytical tools (Dror, 2022) that enabled her to perceive the situation she was in and act accordingly to emancipate herself from mental oppression under the guise of religion.

Besides lack of political will to curtail child marriages and sexual exploitation, data from Anne, Lilly, Jay Jay, Liz and Patricia, indicate their struggles to raise tuition fees. The right to an education is also part of the agreements in the Rights Conventions that the Zimbabwe Government ratified. In this section, I take the reader through a brief history of the phases of education financing that the country has gone through. These are the four phases that include;

5.12 Phases of Zimbabwe Education funding

Table 4

Phases of Zimbabwe Education Funding

Phase	Duration
First phase or period	1957-1979 (Colonial period)
Second phase	1980-1990 (1 st decade of Independence)
Third phase	1990 – 2000 (2 nd decade of independence)
Fourth phase	2000 – to date

Source: **Chihombori (2013)**

The Education financing system of Zimbabwe since the Rhodesian time adopted a cost-sharing model, whereby the state subsidises the education of the population in tertiary education. During the colonial period, grants and loans were obtained on a racial basis at 75% loan and 25% grant. In the second period, students benefited from 50% loans and 50% grants, of which the loans were payable at 5% interest per annum over 3-5 years. During this period, most students would easily go through tertiary education without many impediments. The third phase saw the loans and grants provisions revised twice, first students could benefit from 75% loan and 25% grant. In 1998, further revisions were made to 80% loans and 20% grant. This revision was attributed to poor loan recovery mechanisms that the government had put in place at the time. A Means-Test loan mechanism was established. This is whereby loans would be accessed through a local bank the CBZ (Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe) based on the gross income of the parent or guardian of the student.

The fourth period fell within 2000-2022 whereby student financing was privatised. This meant access to loans was bank guaranteed (Chihombori, 2013). The scheme failed because most banks declined to participate and some of the packages suggested were rejected by the consumer (students and their parents/guardians). The year 2002 saw the abolishment of student financing, and other ancillary services such as provision of food and accommodation in tertiary institutions. Rapid decline of the economy saw the complete abolishment of student loan schemes in 2006.

In view of the biographical sketches of the participants, Liz and Jay Jay lost their parents when they were still young. As Liz relates;

I lost both parents and my aunt who was a second wife in a polygamous marriage paid my fees up to upper secondary school. She disowned me when I fell pregnant. I had to find a temporary teaching post in order to raise university fees.

Jay Jay had to say;

Some of my teachers and some well-wishers paid my fees. I had no one I could call my own. No one among my father's family wanted to take full responsibility.

In Patricia's case, her father's income could not suffice to finance all the essentials for tertiary tuition. Anne's parents were security guards whose incomes put together could not finance the tuition of two adolescents' tertiary education and essential gadgets they needed.

Abolishment of loans and grants for student financing would make female students vulnerable to risks of sexual victimisation and other forms of abuse which indicates lack of political will by the state to prevent such consequences. Providing loans and grants to learners increases participation in tertiary education (Muchimba & Liestiawati, 2024). The thesis of power enshrined in the feminist standpoint theory contends that major institutions in society have control over the world

and they control how everyone should experience it (Gurung, 2020). In this case, female students who are in the subordinate group, already marginalised by patriarchy, are pushed into poverty when they try to change their situations through attainment of a tertiary education. Along their journeys to realise their epistemic privilege, the state fails to protect them by providing the needed resources. Abusers in turn, take advantage of the situation to make them vulnerable and give in to abuse. For instance, the way Anne fell prey to abuse by her boyfriend. It is the mandate of the policy makers to regroup and assess the situation of the poor and create affordable schemes for them. Failure to do so entails lack of political will by the state, which consequently fuels perpetuation of sexual violence against female students.

5.13 Concluding remarks

Chapter Five presented and analysed data in relation to research question one: What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence? In this chapter, I captured and expanded the narrative moments of survivors' experiences of sexual violence.

Chapter Five introduced the participants outlining their biographical profiles. The analysis and interpretation of the narratives identified key themes that elucidated the first research question. The themes discussed included: limiting ecologies and risk factors, human rights violation in the African context, the complexities of stigma in the African context, vulnerability, and abuse shrouded in secrecy and privacy, dealing with law enforcement agents, normalisation of sexual violence and lack of political will. These themes have been linked to literature reviewed in Chapter Two and theorised using the two theoretical frameworks adopted for the study.

The next chapter analyses and discusses the findings in relation to research questions 2 and 3: How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct

their journeys of resilience and recovery? and why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma? The analysis illuminated stories of agency, resiliency and recovery that emerged out of oppressive social spaces.

CHAPTER SIX

MEANING MAKING: JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

When storytelling becomes overt and is given expression in words, the resulting stories are one of the most effective ways of making one's own interpretation of events and ideas available to others.

(Bamidele, 2016, p. 40)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the analysis of results and discussed findings related to the stories of experiences of sexual violence trauma as narrated by female students at selected institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. In this chapter, I present the analysis and findings related to journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma, which addressed research question 2: How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery? and research question 3: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma?

To begin, I analysed the following themes related to the second research question: adopting multiple identities, agency: taking control and responsibility, oppression, resistance and empowerment, sexual entitlement and sustaining ecologies and spatial environments. Following this, I analyse themes linked to the third research question which include network of friends, emotional, psychological and social support, recovery - reconnecting to self and others. I conclude this chapter by critically reflecting on and analysing the meaning attached to experiences that participants narrated about their journeys of resilience and recovery.

6.2 Outline of themes that emerged from data analysis of the second research question

Table 5

Five clusters of meaning from analysis of research question 2

Research question	Terms/phrases identified	Cluster of meanings
<p>Question 2.</p> <p>How do sexually abused female students in Zimbabwe's selected institutions of higher learning construct their journeys of resilience and recovery?</p>	<p>Normal - decent girl, obedient, bold, orphan, trusted, Victims – vulnerable, abandoned, neglected, hurt, damaged, deflowered, destroyed, weak, laughing stock, anxious, self-blame, low self-esteem/confidence, negative self-concept Survivor – positive view of self, conqueror, activism, agency, networking, emotional balance, resilient, adaptation to situations, coping skills, positive attitude</p> <p>Taking control and responsibility for sexual decisions to feel safe and capable of change, dating married men to avoid attachment, making sexual choices, transactional sex to satisfy one's ego, stopping sexual harassment, rejecting thigh for grades, seeking audience with institution authorities, visiting a counsellor, fighting for justice in the courts of law, Hegemonic masculinity shown in power dynamics in intimate relationship, multiple subordinate identities, threats of aggression for rejecting abusive relationship, taking courage to see senior law enforcement agents, being condemned by society, online activism denouncing religious and cultural practices that are oppressive, getting help from human rights lawyers, impetus to complete studies Being forced to have sex, getting infected with HIV, dating taken as a basis to demand sexual favours, society condoning marital rape, sustaining intimate relationship by giving in to unwarranted sexual demands, losing virginity warranting sexual entitlement by any male, Victim/survivor ecosystem – web of norms, practices, environments, material and institutional structures, an ecology of a reasonable stable character and boundaries, supporting reasonably stable and robust activities and possibilities (functional system – units knit together and elastic, can self-repair), sexual violation - disruption of ecosystem by sexual violence, disconnection from self and others,</p>	<p>Adopting multiple identities</p> <p>Agency: Taking control and responsibility</p> <p>Oppression, resistance, and empowerment</p> <p>Sexual entitlement</p> <p>Sustaining ecologies and spatial environments</p>

Reconnection- for the sake of keeping family intact, with paternal family after falling pregnant facilitated by achievement of an academic qualification, tears as strength, children as a source of strength, sense of belonging, having a family to fall back to, ability to pursue studies

The following section analyses and interprets multiple identities adopted by participants as survivors of sexual violence on their journeys of resilience and recovery.

6.2.1 Adopting multiple identities

In table 6.1 above, I presented the five clusters of meaning that emerged from analysis of narratives that addressed the second research question. In this section, I analyse the multiple identities that participants in their diverse forms of gender, ethnicity, family context, individual status, and sexual violence history adopted on their journeys of resilience and recovery. In some instances, these multiple identities were reminiscent of split personalities. Thus, an individual is likely to adopt different persona in order to shield oneself from pain. The identities in turn shaped the participants' perceptions of their experiences and determined how they defined themselves before and after sexual violence trauma. The intersectionality of these identities determines how journeys of resilience and recovery were constructed. As such, these multiple identities influenced how they understood fate in the construction of their sexual violence experiences. Humans are said to be subject to vicissitudes of fate (Mancini, 2019). When people are faced with life-threatening events or events that violate their personhood, they either break or find ways of surviving. Henson et al. (2020) contend that humans cognitively engage in times of adversity to find an explanation for the situation and to understand the fundamental issues raised by the event in their lives. As such, various cognitive coping mechanisms are engaged with, which the researchers refer to as

‘cognitive processing’. As individuals who believe in spirituality, human beings search for a sense of peace, purpose, and connection to others after experiencing traumatic events (Leo et al., 2021). Often, spirituality encourages people to search for meaning (Schimmoeller & Rothhaar, 2021). In certain cases, sexual violence experiences are attributed to fate (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). In the following sub-section, I introduce and discuss the victim identity.

6.2.1.1 Victim identity

On their journeys of resilience and recovery, participants defined themselves as ‘normal’ girls, who were obedient, naïve of the world around them, trusted by their families and community. Anne, Talia Bae and Cee describe their lives as normal before sexual violence trauma. Anne described herself as being *an obedient, trusted daughter..... I preserved my virginity and made my mom proud*. This ‘normal girl’ identity shifted to a ‘*damaged good*’ identity of someone who could not interact freely with the family and neighbours. A common phenomenon among most of the participants were narratives that highlighted a shift in identity to the ‘victim’ persona.

After experiencing sexual violence trauma, their identities shifted to the identity of a ‘victim’, a term that depicts deviance from the norm and being powerless (Wemmers, 2017). Mandl and Planitzer (2022) describe victims as individuals who have suffered harm that includes physical, psychological injury, emotional suffering or economic loss which is directly caused by a criminal offence. In this description, sexual violence becomes the criminal offence that inflicted the harm on the female students. As indicated before, sexual victimisation can cause poverty and loss of all other benefits that an individual once enjoyed within the social spaces. For instance, in Cee’s case, *her brother in-law was angry because she had reported his sexual advances to her paternal aunt, who in turn reprimanded the brother-in-law. No one ever assisted her financially*. She could have lost all financial support because she had made those who had the resources angry. Thus, change

of identity from 'normal' according to societal expectations (patriarchal system specifications of an ideal girl) results in identity confusion and a split personality (having several opposing personalities).

The 'victim' identity is devoid of growth as indicated in RCT that power, (in this case patriarchy) used to intimidate and control individuals does not promote growth fostering relationships. In the cases of Anne, Cee, Patricia and Talia Bae where they could no longer freely interact with family members because they suspected they had *lost virginity or had engaged in sexual activities* and had become '*bad girls*' is indicative of such power over someone. Talia's grandmother and her sister felt they would *force her to remain in a relationship with an abusive boyfriend who was financially powerful against Talia's will*. She was a victim of a power imbalance. Her grandmother, sister and boyfriend became the dominant group due to their positions in the family and the power wielded by their positions, while the boyfriend's financial standing gave him a powerful position to have control over Talia.

The change in identity meant loss of freedom and they would always be expected to behave in different ways from before they were sexually assaulted. They had become *different persons* in patriarchal standards. In the victim status, the once confident females' self-worth diminishes and undermines meaningful connections with family and friends. In Patricia's case, after she had been stranger raped and hid the issue from her family, she kept her victim identity. She explained that when she accompanied her sister to the baby clinic for the immunisation of her niece, she decided to take a HIV test. When her sister discovered this, she said, *those who take HIV tests are usually promiscuous* pushing Patricia to stay identifying as a victim and never felt free to share her psychological pain with any family member. Both RCT and FST advance that the mechanisms used by dominant groups, for instance, those in the power echelons of society, to marginalise others

involve disconnection and disempowerment. Patricia expected her sister to understand her as a fellow woman, but due to societal expectations dictated by patriarchy, she judged her and further pushed her into having a victim identity, which disempowered her. Liz, Terry and Emma's narratives indicate the victim identities whereby they suffered injury, hardships, loss, being treated badly and taken advantage of. Liz explained that she lost financial support from her paternal aunt and was badly treated by her ex-husband and mother-in-law. When her ex-husband would return home after abandoning her and the children:

He would not financially support me and the children. When he would return, he would physically assault me and have sex with me while I was unconscious, infect me with HIV. One day he said, I want to damage this face that makes you think you are beautiful.

Terry's victimhood seemed to have begun at an early age and perpetuated through to her adolescence. *Abandonment at infancy* meant being a victim of child neglect while being labelled *an illegitimate child, a home wrecker, the raped*, encouraged a victim identity, which estranged her relationships at home, school, in the community and at university. Similarly, Emma's victim identity lingered over a long period that stretched from her teenage years when she almost became a victim of child marriages. She explained how the effect of the victim identity affected her life, *"our father never bothered to pay our tuition fees, he sent us to our maternal grandmother's place. He said he never cared whether I lived or died"*.

What emerged is that participants experienced the painful effect of victimhood that both RCT and FST conceptualise as systems of exclusion that prevent human beings from achieving their fulfilment. In the RCT view, victim identity created disconnections, disempowerment and took away the participants' creativity to form meaningful relationships. Dietz et al. (2017) contend that people crave connection, but they are also afraid of it due to previous hurtful, frightening, and

humiliating relationships. This fear makes individuals create strategies of disconnection to maintain an artificial equilibrium, suppressing pain, which may in turn inhibit positive growth. Hiding information on sexual violations by the participants is evidence of avoiding pain and creating an artificial balance in their life which can either be both beneficial and non-beneficial to them. Despite some suffering that could be experienced on the journeys of resilience and recovery, Ruan et al. (2021) concur with Gaither et al. (2015) that multiple identities can improve individuals' creative performance. Thus, when one is able to shift from one personality to another, it takes a lot of thought, creativity and energy to do so. In the next section, I discuss the survivor identity that participants adopted on their journeys of resilience and recovery.

6.2.1.2 Survivor identity

In order to challenge the 'victim' identity, participants had to adopt a different identity, the 'survivor' identity. Various authors concur on the optimistic notion of the survivor label (Papendick & Bohner, 2017; Mittal & Singh, 2018; Hurtado et al., 2021). Being a survivor indicates will, action, resistance and making a conscious decision to reframe one's identity in order to remove the weakness associated with the 'victim' identity. Papendick and Bohner (2017) describe a person who continues to live despite a negative experience as a survivor. The authors further explain that the term 'survivor' involves the agency and initiative to change one's situation. Thus, an individual views life through a different lens that promotes positive posttraumatic growth. Survivor identities are shown in narrative co-constructors' stories.

When Emma narrates that she joined a support group for people living with HIV, this is indicative of the survivor identity. She explained:

I started coordinating support groups. I would encourage others to stay positive, I became a solution to others' problems. When some give testimonies that 'Aunt Emma helped me', it made me feel I had a reason to live, I had a role to play.

Likewise, Liz narrated that she engaged in activism as an act of altruism that would change her from a victim identity to a survivor identity:

After I walked out of the abusive marriage, I sought enrolment into the university. I isolated myself from everyone – family and friends in order to concentrate on my school work, but in isolated environment I could not manage. I joined student activists union and was so vocal that I got suspended in my final year.

Such acts of altruism become a sign of adopting a survivor identity. In Chapter Two, I referred to the need to belong, which is described as a principle of African communalism entailing societal bonding and genuine relationship within a community (Seife, 2021). This is also embedded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where an individual yearns to belong to a group. After suffering humiliation due to sexual violence, which in Martinez-Gonzalez et al. (2021) view, is a highly destructive form of disconnection that results in isolation from social life, Emma and Liz both found comfort in showing acts of altruism. These acts give them a new identity of respect and appreciation unlike circumstances where they were victims who would be labelled *a prostitute who infected a boyfriend with HIV or an orphan who was useless*, respectively. By adopting a 'survivor' identity, altruism removes the blame and gives them confidence. From the FST lens, Emma and Liz show that they managed to utilise their epistemic advantage by trusting the deliverances of their mind (Leefmann, 2022). Humans seem to need intersubjective validation of their beliefs, so by being surrounded by a group that believed in their counsel, Emma's and Liz's self-trust was enhanced.

In an attempt to exhibit a survivor identity, Sweetie uses her intellectual self-trust that consists of the affective and cognitive stance that she takes towards cognitive capacities, experiences, and thoughts which are manifested in her actions (Kassar, 2020). In order to avoid and get rid of the pain of the guilt of *aborting her baby*, she narrated:

I accept that I made a mistake by aborting my baby and I asked God for forgiveness. I feel at peace and emotionally I am keeping up well although there are times that I think about it and start crying and I believe it is normal since it's a process of healing from the big wound.

Similarly, Talia Bae, regardless of the victimhood she suffered from childhood up to her life in the tertiary institution, she decided to transform and adopt a 'survivor' identity. This is indicated in her decision to be open about her life journey to her new boyfriend:

There is this guy who showed interest in getting in a relationship with me. I met him when I went for teaching practice. I told him my story and he does not judge me. When you share your story with many people, you take the burden off your shoulders. Telling him about the violations I suffered would help me know if the relationship would be genuine or not. He even encouraged me to participate in this study.

In contrast to the belief of FST regarding power, that major institutions in society have control over the world and they control how everyone should experience it, Talia's new boyfriend exercises power with her. Thus, he restores the identity of a 'normal' girl in her which enhances the survivor identity. The earlier mentioned need for intersubjective validation is evident where Talia is even encouraged by a *fiancé* to participate in a sexual violence study. His understanding of Talia's life story, which both FST and RCT would view as going against the hegemonic masculine belief in the purity of females who should enter marriage makes Talia reclaim her power of decision making and strengthen her 'survivor' identity.

What also emerged is that participants resonate with Dundas' study where participants experienced a binary identity. This is whereby an individual, exhibits both victim and survivor identities (Dunda et al., 2021). This is shown in the narratives of Ivy, Patricia and Sweetie. On one hand, Ivy explained: *I feel that I am just physically there... I am just living, I just feel like a ruined piece, I don't know what to do about life.* On the other she says, *"I want to get better, I want my parents to feel proud of me"*.

Patricia indicated she adopted a binary identity when she explained that she indicated how she kept her distance from her family members, an indication of the victim identity. RCT conceptualises isolation as a sign of disconnection that impedes post-traumatic growth. In her 'survivor' identity, she avoids people depending on the family that ostracised her for falling pregnant while at university.

My father wanted to take me home after the university counsellor called him to discuss the issue with my boyfriend's father. My boyfriend's father did not accept to take responsibility. I knew how my brothers were, they would not take the issue lightly so I decided to go to the Eastern Highlands to work in the plantations so that I would fend for myself and my baby.

Patricia's narrative suggests that she adopted both 'victim' and 'survivor' identities. Being ostracised by her family members, especially her siblings and being rejected at her boyfriend's home made her a victim but she decided to move out of the victim mode. She decided to take action by working for herself and the unborn baby.

Similarly, Sweetie, at one point, blames herself for making a wrong decision of aborting a baby and then feels she has to forgive herself and also ask God for forgiveness. She also hides her sorrows in studies. She said, *I feel I should be in school for long. I need to focus on both school and work. I think I need my mind active by continuously learning so that I have a variety of ideas.*

Burying herself in books and work could be, on one hand, a way to attain the survivor identity, but a close scrutiny might indicate on the other hand, the hidden victim identity. In taking this decision, she could be giving in to powerful norms that are set in favour of the dominant group (Van Dijk, 2017). Being highly educated and being a workaholic could either mean proving a point that regardless of what happened in her life which is considered undesirable, she becomes a powerful woman who has achieved what was meant to be a male dominated position in society. Gaining knowledge in FST is viewed as a symbol of power (Sweet, 2020).

Multiple identities of participants became part of the epiphanies of their journeys of resilience and recovery. These identities seemed to alternate depending on the triggers that made some painful experiences resurface. In the next section, I discuss agency. In this cluster of meaning, participants elaborated how they took control and responsibility for their lives on their journeys of resilience and recovery.

6.3 Agency: taking control and responsibility

The notion of ‘agency’ is complex, multi-layered, and context-specific (van Reeuwijk, 2010). This sense of agency is what Borhani et al., (2017) describe as the feeling of initiating and controlling one’s own actions and sensory outcomes. Sexual agency as defined by Vanwesenbeeck et al. (2021) is the ability to initiate sex, make sexual choices, communicate one’s desires, and meet one’s needs. It gives one autonomy on the rights and ability to define and control one’s own sexuality, freedom, coercion, and violence. In the sexual violence phenomenon, this can be the capacity to actively and independently choose and effect changes in one’s life (Fakier & Wild, 2011).

Van Reeuwijk (2010) and Vanwesenbeeck et al. (2021) argue that sexual agency is employed to serve both internal and external goals so as to navigate sexual contexts and expectations. These goals aim to: manage sexual risks, negotiate desires and preferences, make sense of experiences and maintain relationships. They further contend that the following intersecting factors influence agency in sexual choices: class, ethnicity, age, and religion. Ranganathan et al. (2017) provide another dimension of sexual agency in the context of material exchange. This can be likened to the transactional sex that may occur in social institutions, such as, institutions of higher learning. They describe transactional sex as a conduit through which women exercise agency, for instance in situations where women's options are constrained by family poverty or restricted employment opportunities.

Next, I present an analysis of how participants exercised sexual agency as indicated in their narratives.

In Terry's narrative, she shows agency to serve both internal and external goals that would enable her to navigate sexual contexts and expectations. Terry decides to manage sexual risks, negotiate her desires and preferences, make sense of her experiences and maintain relationships. In the excerpts from her narrative below, she deliberately chose her options, for example, married men as her sexual partners, and she is motivated by the need to belong, which could be her way of 'keeping relationships'. According to hegemonic masculinity, it is the male who wields power over the female in sexual relationships, but in Terry's case, she admits exercising power over men:

I have slept with almost 70 men. I usually have sex at night in the dark. Most relationships are with married men because I don't have to get attached to them.

In addition, Terry alludes to a fear of being alone without a partner and feeling insecure. On one hand, she feels agentic to conquer men in their own game while on the other she feels vulnerable.

I have tried to stop the sex but I cannot. I am scared to say 'No' because I want to belong. I like the approval of men that I'm a great sexual partner.

However, Terry also shared that after she had experienced the *horrors of incest and gang rape*, she believed she had lost her power to the abusers. In this context, Terry becomes agentic in 'taking back her power' in respect of her sexual activity.

Regardless of her failure to stop having casual sex with married men or having been sexually violated, Terry shows some agency towards stopping the harassment she was facing at the university. Her course lecturer had made sexually suggestive moves which she rejected. He would *verbally abuse* her in class. Terry recalled:

.... the intensity with which he pursued me...that....is the thing I didn't understand like he would call.... he would text.... like I would see 40 missed calls, he is not my boyfriend, he is not my husband, do you know what I mean, he is not my parent, he has no right to leave me 40 missed calls.

Terry took control and responsibility for her situation and showed agency to end the sexual harassment by reporting it to the chairperson. Healicon (2012) referred to this as being an 'active' participant in one's own story. Van Reeuwijk (2010) argues that sexual agency is employed to serve both internal and external goals. In this case, Terry's internal goal was to protect herself from the unwanted actions of her course lecturer. Showing her mother, the missed calls and texts on her mobile phone could be an attempt to serve an external goal, such as support from her mother to advise her how to act. Terry had been labelled a deviant due to her sexual violence history. Exposing the lecturer's behaviour could have been her effort to address misunderstandings related to her sexual behaviour. Further, it was a strategy to challenge and end the oppression from a patriarchal society.

Relational cultural theory emphasises belongingness as a requisite for assuring connectedness in relationships. In this case, Terry's yearning for belonging is ambivalent in that, on one hand, she desires to belong; and on the other, she does not want to become emotionally attached to the men with whom she has sex, hence her choice of married men. According to RCT, relationships cannot be isolated from culture. This suggests that culture and power hierarchies of a society influence how people relate to each other. Drawing on RCT, Terry's agency suggests that culture gives value to power where oppressive relationships are institutionalised within society and have a direct impact on the interpersonal relationships of its members (Jordan, 2018). Both RCT and FST resist power dynamics that perpetuate oppression of the underprivileged. Therefore, Terry recognised her potential to change her situation, she resisted and demonstrated agency for positive traumatic growth.

On another dimension, Bay-Cheng (2019) argues that sexual agency should be viewed as evident among those who are compelled by social and material conditions to exercise it through sexual compliance, compromise, and concession. This perspective sheds some light on the experiences of Patricia, Liz, Cee, Sweetie, Ivy, and Anne. In respect of Patricia, her agency is shown when she consents to continuously have sex with her boyfriend in the *hope of getting married*. She comes from a dysfunctional family environment. In order to compensate for the love that she never received from her mother, she seeks this emotional gratification from her partner. As indicated in Chapter 3, human relations consist of emotions that are both social and cultural. Thus, these emotions are governed by dominant power hierarchies or stratifications in the society. Such emotions are inherent in Patricia's narrative and they lacked mutuality. She believed that if she became pregnant, she would be cared for materially and emotionally by her partner on account of being the mother of his child.

I could feel that something was wrong but he said that if I ever got pregnant he was able to take care of the child.

It is common practice in the dominant patriarchal culture, in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general, for young women who fall pregnant to get married (Menon et al., 2018). The man is usually made to take responsibility for both the baby and the mother. Patricia's agency in giving in to pressure from her boyfriend, compromises her goal of attaining a tertiary qualification.

In Anne's case, her poverty at home exposed her to sexual violation, however, when she felt she could no longer take the violation, she decided to take action. Anne was in a predicament as she had *no laptop for her studies*. Her social and financial situation led her to seek a relationship with a young man, *I would go to his lodgings to do tasks on his laptop because my parents could not afford one*. She ended up engaging in what she terms '*unwanted sex*':

I called him, 'Bestie, come to my place. Let's go along the paddock area where there are no people. So that day we entered the paddock, it was like there was a gate, we got inside and found a place to sit. That's when his first attempt occurred. Everything that happened was by force, I don't want to lie. He forced me. I could scream and no one would hear me.

Mai (2020) avers that agency is dynamic, it evolves according to the situation. This is evident in Anne's sexual agency when she tries to stop unpleasant sexual experiences with the same boyfriend who had *abused her*. This resonates with Harding's (2019) thesis on strong objectivity which states that women succeed in challenging the distorted view that society has about sexual violence and its consequences. In her suggestion to *go along the paddock area where there were no people* after the boyfriend had once *attempted to penetrate her while at his uncle's place*, Anne thought of clarifying her view of their *affair*. She thought the best way to resolve the misunderstandings was to have a *face-to-face talk* with her boyfriend. Unfortunately, her boyfriend

mistook her need for privacy as a way of giving in to his *sexual demands*. As indicated by Harding (2019), the dominant group's interpretation of reality is presented in a distorted way, that ignores the suffering of the oppressed or the subordinate group. Anne shared:

I was open with him. I said, 'Bestie, I really love you so I am begging you to understand me if you really love me in the same way I do, understand me well. I am not ready for these things.

Instead of taking Anne's word, her boyfriend distorts the thought behind clarifying misunderstandings at a quiet place as an invitation to have sex. The boyfriend's thoughts confirm the notion that the dominant group might describe the situation as enjoyment or they might justify it as a free choice, deserved or inevitable. In his mind, he felt Anne had brought it on herself by making a choice to go to a secluded place where no one would *disturb them*. When Anne described what happened regardless of her effort to resolve misunderstandings amicably as *everything that happened was by force.... he forced me*, it indicates that Anne felt her boyfriend's behaviour was irrational and uncalled for. As a university student who is *better enlightened*, Anne thought he would easily understand issues and take a 'no' as it is.

Harding (2019) describes the comfort zone of the dominant group where they hold positions of power and privilege and they separate and insulate themselves from the demise of the subordinate group. Anne's boyfriend started to sexually harass her during lessons when she resisted continuous sexual 'exploitation'. She showed agency to stop the taunts from the boyfriend who sexually assaulted her. She divulged her abuse to a friend, who in turn sought help from her brother-in-law in the Secret Services. The boyfriend was threatened with imprisonment and stopped the harassment.

Similarly, when Sweetie could not get support from her boyfriend and was afraid to share anything personal with her *'fierce' aunt*, she recalled picking herself up after the terrible abortion that nearly took her life. She decided: *I feel I should be in school for long...I need to focus on both school and work*. This could be an indication that Sweetie tried to evade realities of life by burying herself in studying and work, in a positive way, which could be perceived as a form of agency. This highlights her recognition of self-actualisation and her need for self-fulfilment. This type of agency resonates with Hitlin and Elder's (2007) life course agency which is a long-term version of existential agency. In this type of agency, a survivor makes decisions at a turning point and transition in her life. Sweetie seemed confident to sustain her commitment to long-term plans. Her agency is indicated in the determination she had in achieving her long-term plans. Kabeer (2021) highlights that empowerment is one form of agency.

In the same vein, Liz acknowledged her power to persevere in order to achieve a higher qualification regardless of taunts from her *abusive husband*. She explained, *"To me, it was a blessing in disguise because it made me rethink proceeding with my education. I had to go for a temporary teaching post to raise my tuition fees"*.

After reporting her case, Talia Bae faced many hurdles including the fact that a member of the police, and the Dean were relatives of the perpetrator. Her extended family members could not support her in her fight to obtain justice. When asked what she believed her future would hold for her, she responded:

What I want maybe is just ---graduating and a wedding. I also wish for a good life so that people realise that what happened was just fate, and that even when it happens one can continue with life.

This determination gave her the strength to pursue her education. This reflects autonomous internal energy (Motloba, 2018). Motloba (2018) contends that where autonomy is concerned, one has an intention to act and it is not incidental. Thus, Talia understood what she wanted to be in life and volunteered to change her life without any external control or manipulation. Such agency reflects what FST describes as ‘double consciousness (Haraway, 1988), which culminates in a psychological shift as Talia mobilises her knowledge and survival skills to resist relations of power and she gathered courage to transform into a survivor. She resisted the stigmatising labels assigned by society after she was victimised.

Similarly, Patricia showed that she had the autonomous power to make life decisions without the support of her family and boyfriend, the father of her child:

I began to find a strategy to raise my money. I went home for the vacation whilst raising money to run away and start a new life with my child. I then came to Harare intending to leave for Inyanga to look for a job.

Her intentionality suggests that she was agentic. However, her plans did not materialise due to the interference of the university counsellor, who involved her father and the father of her boyfriend. She also displayed agency when she tried to get justice after she was threatened by her baby's father. She found the courage to get help from the student counsellor at the institution where she studied.

In the same way, Lilly realised that she could not remain silent about the abuse of students by a lecturer. First, she told her mother the truth about her absence from university and then confided to a friend.

But there is one of my friends I opened up to. She was a member of the SRC (Students' Representative Council). So, when she asked, 'How is your workplace?' I said, 'Oh I did not manage to go' and explained what transpired and she exclaimed, 'What! you should

go and report him, and you should have gone for a re-mark. Don't worry about the 'discontinue' decision on your results.

Lilly also empathised with and feared for the other female students who were at risk and very vulnerable.

I was hurt to note that he was forging ahead with his bad behaviour and he would hurt more girls. It hurt more that I had reported my case.

RCT assumes that people do not grow through separation, but rather through interdependence and the obligation by individuals to offer social support to others. In the concept of ubuntu, interdependence indicates empathy that gives agency to fighting for the 'voiceless'. Such action also promotes positive post-traumatic growth whereby an individual's helping behaviour exhibits selfless concern for the wellbeing of others despite the consequences for themselves, and without expectation of reward (Prior et al., 2021). Such action, gives the survivor peace of mind and removes the guilt of being unable to prevent their own abuse (Stidham et al., 2012).

Similarly, Ivy believed she needed to pick herself up and make a better future for herself. She was also committed to restore her parents' faith in her. This resonates with what Bardy and Gilligan (2020) term 'bounded agency' where one becomes proactive in planning how to restore relationships. Such agency is said to be socially situated; thus, it is determined and influenced by the environment. Intrinsically, she feels she had disconnected from both herself and the family:

Sometimes I think that I must not let my past spoil my future... but sometimes I would feel like I disappointed my parents so I owe them. At least they could be proud of me again.

The most agentic behaviour that Emma displayed was when she shared the experience of abuse in the White garment church at a conference in Johannesburg. She narrates:

I spent 23 years in the first prison which is bigger than Whawha or Chikurubi and the prison guards in that jail were well-trained to oppress, silence, or rape the prison inmates.

This prison is called White Garment Johane Marange Apostolic church! In this prison they spread hurt, insult, abuse, and there is experience of feminisation of poverty which they call “preaching.

Such courage indicated that Emma had been liberated or was in the process of trying to liberate herself from the oppression she underwent.

Terry against all odds resisted being bribed by the perpetrator’s lawyers at the expense of her integrity. She explained:

... he brought in his lawyer it was like; we are offering you.... I don’t know what the legal term is...is it settlement.... but basically, we are not admitting guilt but wanted to settle the issue by offering like US\$4000 out of court.... I couldn’t agree.....

Terry attained some satisfaction when justice was served. She had initiated the course of justice and more girls spoke out as a result of Terry’s agentic behaviour. Thus, Terry became the *voice* that awakened the agency in other oppressed female students, a form of altruism:

...people in the department sort of knew what was going on. They had a problem with him.....I think that’s why they finally let him go.... because they could tell that hey..... he didn’t learn from his first encounter and he still perpetuating his behaviour

Cee showed agentic behaviour when she bypassed protocols and reported her issue to the Head of the institution. She narrates:

I was motivated to go on and said, no! These people are trying to push me into the corner so that they force me to get their way with me. So, I had to go straight to the principal’s office.

Cee’s action confirms the fundamental concern of critical theory to question why humans are prevented from possibilities of self-fulfilment (Tarr, 2017). She yearned to change her identity from a poor orphan to a self-actualised lifestyle, but the dominant group hindered her from realising her goal. She displayed double consciousness (Lento, 2022) in knowing how both

oppression within the learning institution worked and how to navigate through difficulties that she faced in her subordinate position. She used her epistemic advantage to work her way through the system to resist and fight for her right to education. She realised she would find a way of getting resources that would make her attain her goal. For Cee, her agency resulted in *entrepreneurship*. She sought permission to begin *a small business, selling chickens, to cover her tuition fees at university*. She had to seek innovative ways of navigating her way through the institution's hierarchy to obtain permission, without compromising her self-respect, by giving in to their sexual demands. Hitlin and Elder (2007) refer to such agency as 'pragmatic agency.' This type of agency is employed in novel situations, which they refer to as 'knife edge' moments.

The findings revealed that participants displayed sexual agency in varying degrees and in complex spaces. Their expression of agential strategies was influenced by many intersecting factors such as ethnicity, age, religion, family contexts, and past sexual experiences. Although in some instances, agency was expressed in irrational, ambivalent, and awkward ways, each participant was an agent in her own story. Haraway's (1988) situated knowledge suggests that where power dynamics and privilege are concerned, a few are afforded opportunities to make greater choices and have agency while the underprivileged and powerless are denied such. This assertion seems contrary to participants' agentic behaviour. It suggests an emerging new generation that does not conform to patriarchal expectations of females. To build some resilience that enables them to survive in male-dominated institutions, participants develop forms of resistance, a 'masculine' character that could be temporal and situated, which could probably be satisfied when they attain the desired qualification (to beat them at their own game). This form of 'resistance' is discussed in the next section which focuses on how participants expressed resistance in the face of oppression and how they were empowered to enable resilience and recovery.

6.4 Oppression, resistance, and empowerment

Research has shown that sexual victimisation occurs in contexts where complexities of oppression, resistance, and empowerment play out (DeLaet & Mills, 2018; Gorbin & Gómez, 2021). According to feminism, sexual violence is often understood in power dynamics (Gurung, 2020). Dominant groups of society make norms and rules that mostly disadvantage the less powerful, who are mainly female. Furthermore, DeLaet and Mills (2018) contend that sexually abused individuals are likely to be motivated towards silence in contexts where they have experiences of oppression, violence, injustice, or pervasive inequities. Shaw (2019) suggests that gender power shapes the dynamics of every human interaction. Some form of oppression is observed in the narratives of sexual violence that was experienced by female students. To overcome this, participants had to put up some resistance in order to develop resilience which would enable them to achieve their goals.

6.4.1 Discourses of oppression, resistance, and empowerment

In sexual relationships, consent can be complicated, especially when one individual holds more power than the other. This has been evident in most of the participants' narratives. Emma, for example, entered a relationship with a man she thought was *decent and God-fearing and sensible*, nevertheless, she faced sexual harassment and assault. There was assumed consent to sexual intimacy which led to assault. She recalled:

I fell in love with a man who claimed he was a Christian and was working in South Africa as a boiler maker. He forced himself on me and hurt me.

Emma's family background rendered her powerless due to limited resources to support her in university. Her boyfriend could have taken advantage of being older as well as having a strong financial background which could give him a better standing with the authorities. Emma also faced

aggressive threats after being sexually assaulted. This occurred when Emma reported her assault case to the police. She explained:

They never listened to me saying, university students are prostitutes. They would ask, 'Where do you work?' and I would respond, I am in university. After visiting my sister in South Africa and I was back in Zimbabwe, I returned to the station to make a follow-up... I said, I am that lady who reported rape.... they said, we told you that your case was closed. You are a student ----.

Being a student meant that she had no power to seek justice. She had already been labelled a 'prostitute' because she was a student. Fortunately, Emma's sister had empowered her, and she did not give up and showed resistance. She recalled:

So, I told my sister about the rape and the behaviour of the police officers. And she empowered me that if someone forces himself on you, even if the police harass you---. it is your right to report, even if you are not a virgin or you have 4 children no one has the right. Set your phone on recording mode and wear it in your bra, record them, and demand to see their superior.

This was enough ammunition for Emma to resist oppression by the system. When they responded negatively as before, she asked to see the officer in charge. In Emma's relationship, there was evidence of a power imbalance concerning financial influence. This was indicated when one officer who responded to the threat Emma made tried to listen to her issue and called the boyfriend to come and intercept Emma before she reached the higher office. The boyfriend emotionally blackmailed her with the notion of labelling her a prostitute:

Ah! Now you are courting police officers. The officer said, I am unable to assist you because he is saying you spent his money; you are a prostitute. Maybe you are accusing him falsely because you spent his money. We know you, students.

The boyfriend as well as the police who are the custodians of the law, used verbal threats to undermine Emma's resistance to oppression. Emma felt that she did not have a choice. She went back to her abusive boyfriend because the law that should have protected her, is oppressive. The empowerment she got from her sister is undermined. She recalled, "*I was forced to get back with him. I felt he was the only person who would understand me*".

Therefore, Emma's resilience was weakened by unsupportive systems, and she engaged in online activism. She exposed the oppression and violence against women and girls by the white garment church, the Johanne Marange religious sect, online. Her Facebook post functioned as a personal testimony that Vitis and Gilmour (2017) refer to as 'critical witnessing'. It allowed Emma to have an online audience that exposed issues and events that had been historically hidden and normalised by most women and girls that belong to the sect. Emma's account of her predicament could result in raising awareness of the key issues and impact legal outcomes, especially in an environment that exhibits a lack of political will. Her critical witnessing is both productive and expressive since the narrative that she posted on social media provokes readers by placing demands for a sense of social justice.

Terry described the lecturer who harassed her as 'a gem' to the institution because, at the time of the study, he was the only doctor in the department. Such influence defined the power dynamics that existed in the relationship between lecturer and student, second, he was an essential resource for the university, third, he had financial power over Terry and finally, he was a man in a patriarchal society. This made him wield power over both Terry and the institution. There was a need for external sources of support for Terry to succeed in her goals to achieve her qualifications. She recalled:

...the thing that helped me most ishaving their support.....uhm... female student support network came through and they came with CS.....Counselling services unit (CSU)... which was the first time we engaged then they took me to.....I think it was Zim Rights.

In her resistance to oppression, Terry sought empowerment from the organisation who in turn introduced her to lawyers who finally supported her in successfully obtaining justice regardless of her position in society and multiple subordinate identities (female, minor, sexual violence survivor, poor) which collectively fit within the victim identity. This indicates what Ballantine (2022) describes as ‘the power of me.’

Anne’s boyfriend similarly had the upper hand in the relationship since he had some privileges of an extended family, who were financially in a better position. She had to depend on her boyfriend for a laptop that she needed to use for schoolwork. The boyfriend also had some experience of dating and university life. His latent oppression manifested in the way he would pretend to induct Anne into university life in order to lure her into his trap, the ‘foot-in-the-door’ tactic. Anne recalls how he lured her:

.... this male friend of mine said, you know these college guys only want to waste your time. They will never marry you. Let me show you guys who are noble enough to get intimate with. So, because he would advise me, I began to like him thinking to myself, this guy is good.

The young man was manipulative in his way of luring Anne and making her powerless so that he could take advantage of her. She had known him to have had *multiple sexual relationships with female students in the university*, indicating he was more experienced than Anne who was new to university life and ‘culture’. She recalled, *“I was disgusted by his behaviour towards girls. He would sleep around and they would discuss with his friend and I used to reprimand them”*.

It seems his persuasive language when he played ‘*good friend*’ made Anne forget his ‘*disgusting*’ behaviour. When she attempted to resist falling into the trap, *I should not fall into this trap*, she is made powerless by the thought of having the “*boy’s family’s support*”. She felt safe when an elder in the boy’s family became involved “*Then one day he was accompanied by his other aunt who is middle age. I wondered why she would come, was this so serious?*” In the African context, having an elder of the family involved in a boy-girl relationship indicates the seriousness of the relationship. This became another challenge for Anne although she tried to resist falling into the trap. Anne finally resolved to see a university counsellor indicating her own initiative to resolve issues that would impede her progress. She had vowed to *end the poverty in her family by attaining an education*. She shared:

I resolved to go and see the university counsellor because the home and school problems both piled up on me and what my ex and his friends were doing to me.

Her resolve to fulfil her goal of completing her studies resonates with Phasha’s (2010) study of South African students whose resilience was strengthened by the drive to attain an education and change their family status. Anne was empowered and managed to resist her ex-boyfriend’s persuasive language. She recalled him coming to confront her, “*as people who have once had sex, we should kiss,*” *etc. etc.* This was a way of weakening her to fall back into the trap, so, “*when he tried to force me, I called out to one of the girls who live at our place and he was ashamed to do anything*”.

This was an indication of empowerment that would free her from the oppressive relationship. Anne takes a further step to seek assistance from a friend’s brother-in-law who was in secret service to end the harassment that she faced due to her refusal to continue in an abusive relationship. This is a sign of resilience enhanced by external resources.

Oppression thrives in power dynamics. As indicated by Brownmiller (1975), rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process which men use to keep women in a state of fear. This is evident in the narratives of the eleven participants. In Ivy's case, her age and vulnerability to religious beliefs in prophets that are taken to be akin to God, weakened her resilience. She feared losing her mother if she told anyone and seemed to be silent and powerless. Also, Liz, Sweetie, and Cee's orphanhood made them powerless. Their existence is not recognised due to their impoverished circumstances but they fight for recognition in the institutions that should provide them with opportunities to reach their goals and change their statuses. This indicates resilience that emanates from internal resources which were enhanced by external resources that they managed to access through some form of activism.

When an individual recognises and challenges cultural values and power relations that contribute to her subordination or oppression, a standpoint arises. She could reject the values and power discrepancies, which is possible when an individual identifies which values and power dynamics account for her subordination. Considering the 'double consciousness' discussed earlier in Chapter Three, a survivor who has been discriminated against because of her gender, financial status, age, or sexual violence history, could strengthen alternative abilities by defying the patriarchal boundaries and beliefs of women as the weaker sex. It has been noted that environments from which survivors hail influence the attainment of resilience and recovery. The next section discusses how the environment becomes a contributory factor to resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma.

6.5 Sustaining ecologies and spatial environments

Kukla and Herbert (2018) argue that human ecosystems are constituted by people, the environment, interactions between people, and interactions between people and their environment. They add that these environments entail material, social, normative, and institutional resources.

In accord with the relational cultural theory's concept of interdependence, sexual violence occurs within these interdependent ecosystems. In an African setting, an individual does not live in isolation. As expressed in Mbiti (1970) 'I am because we are' sense of collectivism, traditionally, the African people uphold a sense of common origin, unity, oneness, and togetherness. Such attitudes inculcated in individuals pervade their ecosystem with a sense of being a brother's keeper, that is ubuntu. Genuine mutuality that results from transformational relationships prevails in the ecosystem. The resilience and recovery depend on how these ecosystems can provide self-repair after suffering sexual violence trauma. A survivor's ecosystem entails her home, the community they live in, academic institutions, the religious, and political communities, and other public spaces they find themselves in. The harm that comes with sexual violence produces various relational moral statuses that attach to individuals and define relationships within them in these ecosystems. How a survivor defines and interprets the relationship determines how they build resilience and gradually achieve recovery after being violated. In the cases of the eleven female students, these ecosystems indicated complex relationships and impacts that influenced their resilience and recovery.

Kukla and Herbert (2018) contend that strong ecosystems are elastic and resilient. They can self-repair. In Liz's case, her paternal aunt who was her sole guardian had ostracised her from the family after falling pregnant. She *re-accepted* her after graduating with her first degree. She

happily shared, *“When the results came out, I had passed then I graduated. My family reunited with me. My aunt came and she bought me a present”*.

Self-repair and reconnection with the paternal family are shown when Liz is accepted back into the family, indicating the flexibility of the ecosystem. Regardless of facing problems on her own, she says, *“...my tears are my strength”*. In her narrative, she demonstrated that she never gave up regardless of her paternal family not providing any support during her hardship. She focussed on reconnecting with her family and creating a sense of belonging. RCT advances the concept of growth fostering relationships that depend on mutuality. Jordan (2000) maintains that in growth-fostering relationships, all people contribute and grow or benefit; and development is not a one-way process. In this case, both participants and their environment contributed towards growth-fostering relationships. On their journeys of resilience and recovery, participants narrated painful experiences of sexual entitlement in which they were regarded as ‘an open cheque’.

6.6 Overcoming the ‘open cheque’ syndrome

Narratives from the eleven participants indicated that as survivors of sexual violence they had to overcome forms of entitlement to sexual favours or privileges by their perpetrators. Historically, in most patriarchal societies marital rape does not exist. Females had no control over their sexuality, especially married women (Yebisi & Balogun, 2017). It has been a norm that the husband determines when and where to engage in sexual intercourse. Such behaviour seemed to have cascaded to courtship, especially when there is a prospect for marriage. Boys seemed to have adopted the same culture where they saw no problem in claiming entitlement to sexual intercourse from their girlfriends. Society would condone the behaviour with comments like *“After all, they were having an affair how can it be termed ‘rape?’”*

Liz encountered such an experience in her forced marriage when her husband who had deserted her returned and forced himself on her. He felt entitled because Liz was *'his wife'* and they had two children together. Her violation was embedded within and enabled by marital entitlement. The husband said, *"there is nothing like rape in marriage"*. If she had to voice it to the community, she would be silenced and humiliated as unable to sustain a relationship. She would be accused of failing to fulfil her feminine duties. In Liz's account, she overcame her situation as she *"moves out of the abusive marriage and chooses to pursue a career regardless of the extra responsibility of taking care of two infants"*.

Cee, Anne, Patricia, Emma, and Terry indicated the aspect of being taken as an *'open cheque'*, after all, *they were no longer virgins*, so there was no need to refuse to offer sexual services to anyone including their boyfriends. Particularly, Patricia and Talia Bae's cases were enabled and embedded within campus rape culture. Their violation can be viewed through the lens of the social dynamics among students. Although Talia's violation was perpetrated by a security guard, he was within the institution's environment. His threats *"you know that there is one who just died and no one ever knew about what happened to her"*, would silence her forever if she did not utilise her epistemic privilege of knowing the channels to follow. Talia shared:

"There was one student some intake before us who was raped, killed and her eyes plucked off, and was thrown out of the campus".

This reveals the unsafe social spaces or ecologies within the campus that make female students vulnerable to sexual violence. Talia Bae had to build some resilience in order to complete her course. The support she got from her parents during the court proceedings enhanced her resilience.

Cee, Terry, and Lilly had to face sexual harassment within a similar campus rape culture where the lecturer as the custodian of course knowledge felt entitled to sexual favours in exchange for

better grades. Cee fell prey because she “*needed access to staggered fees*”. Therefore, activism or external support kept them stronger throughout their tuition.

The fourth thesis of the feminist standpoint theory is power. As indicated in Chapter Three, this thesis focuses on the intersection of everyday interactions whereby power is exercised in the production of knowledge. Gender power shapes the dynamic of every human interaction. As such, power in society can be seen as unequally and unjustly distributed, favouring men. As a result, this injustice leads to the discrimination and oppression of women by men and is shown when men claim entitlement to conjugal rights even when they are just in courtship. In order to resist this oppressive patriarchal stereotype, some of the participants defy this hegemonic thinking. Next, I focus on the analysis of the third research question: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors’ resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma? The following clusters of meaning emerged from the analysis of narratives: network of friends, emotional, psychological and social support, recovery: reconnecting to self and others. Table 6.2 outlines the clusters of meaning that emerged from analysis of the third research question.

6.7 Outline of themes emerging from the third research question

Table 6

Clusters of meaning emerging from analysis of research question 3

Research Question	Terms/phrases identified	Cluster of meanings
Question 3. Why are support systems important in promoting survivors’	Being advised by friends to take action, finding someone to talk to, encouragement to get justice and get psychological help, social support, sharing	Network of friends

resilience and experiences with childhood friends, friends assisting recovery from sexual violence? in stopping abuse,

Emotional support, referrals, keeping behaviour in check, Female Students Network trust for legal, psychological and social support, the police for reporting sexual assault, the hospital for post exposure prophylaxis (PEP), the courts of law for seeking justice, the church for spiritual support, organisations assisting with financial, social and psychological support, extended family for all forms of support

Making new friends, forging new relationships, making new resolution e.g. pursuing and completing studies, non-linear journey, trauma re-activated in the presence of triggers - flashbacks, treating new relationships with extra care, reconnecting to self and others, overcoming feelings of shame, self-blame, self-doubt, diarizing experiences and achievements, self-talk and counselling, writing poetry on life journey

Emotional,
psychological and
social support

Recovery: reconnecting
to self and others

6.7.1 Network of friends

After experiencing sexual violence trauma, survivors require relational healing. This can be acquired where there are trusting and safe relationships. In their narratives, the eleven participants indicated networks of friendships and trust that helped them to enhance their resilience after the trauma. Yebisi and Balogun (2018) point out that after sexual violence trauma survivors' assumptions of themselves and their world view are usually shattered and undermined. They no longer believe in a just, caring, and predictable world. This is how Jay Jay expressed her worldview when she faced negativity at the police station:

There is some utterance made by one of the men in the camp that I did not like. He said 'Why not just say out if the girl has been raped so that we rape her again' so I began to sob again feeling angry that in this world men are ruthless.

Jay Jay expected the police station to be a place where she could get justice and reassurance of safety but her pain increased with the response she got. Having a network of friends and supportive people around her made her more resilient. She recalled a boy who reassured her that she was not alone. Some people also gave her a different view of her situation and stated that the boy never had the intention to rape her but he wanted to kill her.

Such a view removes the stigma of sexual assault and replaces it with a non-stigmatising label that society could easily forget and, at times, collectively fight the crime. This could have contributed to her resilience by minimising the impact of the experience. Yebisi and Balogun (2018) suggest that sexual violence trauma can influence moral and spiritual constructs. The survivor therefore needs to have the ability to find meaning of her circumstances by developing a new worldview that includes her traumatic experiences. The enabling environment that Jay Jay experienced after her traumatic experience, such as, the availability of encouragers, tuition providers, faith leaders

who took her through, and friends who became brothers and sisters she longed for, made her develop a new worldview that gave her hope for a brighter future. She expressed feelings of safety among people she was not related to by blood. When she failed to get support from her aunt, she was encouraged by knowing that one of her friends who is under the guardianship of an extended family member, sometimes goes on an empty stomach. It is like she thinks to herself, *I am not alone, these things happen*. This encouraged her to put more effort towards achieving a qualification that would make her independent. Jay Jay explained her failure to sustain both male and female friendships, and demonstrated a new understanding of herself when she shared:

.....like today my roommate told me that 'you are a person who is in confusion' defining me like that.... but the way I do things is different from theirs because our backgrounds are different. I tell myself that I should not expect people to understand me because they don't really know where I am coming from.

Since Jay Jay understood herself better, her resilience and healing were possible. Through such understanding, she could adopt a diverse perspective of relationships. This demonstrates Jay Jay's ability to define her boundaries and how to renegotiate them. She scrutinised her relationships to promote safety and build connections (Czerny et al., 2018). By understanding her uniqueness, she protected herself from psychological pain that could be inflicted by others who would judge her negatively. In the hostel, she made an effort to live by the boundaries that she identified. This became her sense of internal empowerment.

Anne also revealed the strength of networks of friendship that helped her enhance resilience after her traumatic experiences with her boyfriend. She mentioned having a network of friends that she consulted whenever faced with confusing situations. She recalled consulting a childhood friend about her confusion around losing her virginity. Getting information from a trusted friend gave Anne some peace of mind after her confusion about losing her virginity without bleeding. She also

narrated being encouraged to fight re-victimisation by another trusted colleague when she was on industrial attachment. Anne also shared:

When the director of the industrial attachment made sexual advances, I asked a colleague... She encouraged me to stand my ground. She said, 'if you keep crying and show that you are weak when people harass you, people will know what is going on. After all you are not the first girl to be approached by this director. People will blame me for it. Stand up to him and make him know you are not interested.

In order to end the sexual harassment, she faced with her ex-boyfriend, another trusted friend bailed her out by sourcing help for her. Anne explained:

My friend told her brother-in-law who was in secret service about my problems with my ex-boyfriend. I don't know how she told him. He called my ex-boyfriend to say, do not get near Anne, or call her, delete her number, or else you will be in trouble. I am watching your every step.

According to Miller (1986), a good outcome of growth-fostering relationships is a sense of self-worth. Anne's sense of self-worth was reinforced by the reassurance of safety when trusted friends encouraged her and acted to seek help for her. Having lost her virginity to a man who held her at ransom for it was abuse that weakened her resilience system. The help that she gets from a network of friends at every stage resonates with McGlynn et al.'s (2011) claim of restorative justice that a survivor should access. This aspect of restorative justice in a survivor's ecology resembles Terry's case where the lecturer who sexually harassed her was finally dismissed by the university.

... when I deferred my studies they had to come out to say.... they had a problem with him.... he didn't learn from his first encounter and he still perpetuating his behaviour.... so that's how they let him go.

It was the institution's obligation to dismiss the lecturer due to the magnitude of the impact his harassment would have on the reputation of the institution. This could possibly harm the moral status of the institution and negatively impact on student enrolment in the institution.

As the university protected its reputation, Terry's self-confidence was being restored and her resilience enhanced. Kukla and Herbert (2018) suggest that these are collateral moral effects of sustaining ecologies that attach to individuals. The lecturer performed an action that impacted Terry's and other women's lives. In turn, the university management had to perform their moral duty in order to help the female students and also clear the name of their institution. In this case, Terry was aggrieved and the institution had a duty to fulfil. Each part in the new moral relationship acquires a new moral status, a new worldview that enables the survivor to work towards healing.

Although Lilly gave in to negative peer pressure when she faced a *'discontinue'* after being failed several times by the lecturer, she found a network of friends that she could trust. She recalled opening up to a friend after lying about being on industrial attachment, who advised her:

'What! you should go and report him, and you should have gone for a remark. Don't worry about the 'discontinue' decision on your results ... another friend I disclosed to, pushed me, and volunteered to escort me to the institution to appeal.'

Since human ecosystems are constituted by people, Lilly found herself surrounded by a network of friends who were part of her ecosystem which enhanced her resilience to fight for her right to tuition and social justice. Her friends encouraged her to appeal for a re-write of the module. Lilly developed a new positive worldview when her appeal was granted.

The excerpts from participants highlight relationships that promote growth. According to RCT, individuals desire to engage in more meaningful connections (Jordan, 2008). These relationships create an environment that promotes growth. Growth-fostering relationships, in turn, create the

feeling that comes when we feel a real sense of connection, of being together with and joined by another person (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In the section that follows I highlight the role of the support system in assisting survivors to build resilience and recover from sexual violence trauma. In an attempt to find meaning in participants' narratives, I borrowed ideas from Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putman's (2000) 'social capital.' In examining participants' social capital, I attempted to respond to the third research question.

6.7.2 Complex forms of social capital

This study aimed to explore narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence through the lens of the relational cultural theory and the feminist standpoint theory. Relational cultural theory focuses on human relationships that anchor on interdependence and contextualism (Gurung, 2020). Individuals, as indicated by Jordan (2000), grow through and toward relationships throughout their lifespan. As they interact, individuals engage in both transactional and transformational relationships (Rector-Aranda, 2019). Although the two are said to work on a continuum that promotes growth, in transactional relationships, one individual aims to gain personal or emotional benefit, which could in some instances, not augur well with the other individual who could feel used. Claridge (2018) contends that social capital relates to important questions about why people are motivated to help others even when there is no foreseeable benefit for themselves.

The concept fits well in understanding how support systems promote positive growth after sexual violence trauma. Social capital is about human relationships and networks (Martikke, 2017). Martikke (2017) further describes social capital as consisting of social networks and trust and norms of reciprocity human relationships inspire. It is concerned with personal relations that are based on a sense of collective identity. These relationships are forged among family members, close friends, organisations within and outside an individual's community, and those who share

the same culture or ethnicity. Where there is social capital there is value for social relations and a reflection of the complexity and interrelatedness of appearances in the real world. It is within the various social relationships that an individual can access resources in normal and times of adversity.

When an individual invests in social relationships some benefits can be realised. For example, after experiencing sexual violence trauma, a survivor would benefit more from a network of social relationships to develop resilience and also recover. These are attachment relationships that are central to resilience processes. The presence of a constructive relational context includes positive relationships with other people, spiritual beings, or even animals/pets. Analysis of participants' narratives in this section is undertaken within the context of their social networks.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the need for social support systems and structures that are set up to assist the survivors of sexual violence. These are the legal, psycho-social and medical support, and organisations that can offer the material support that the survivor needs in her journey of resilience and recovery. To access such services, a network of support is needed.

Anne's narrative indicates the importance of social capital, although it worked against her will. Her failure to freely buy a pregnancy test kit at a neighbourhood shop shows how she was bound by the norms of her culture and society. These attributes also determine what a group regards as shameful or acts of pride among the group. Losing virginity and falling pregnant would bring shame to her family and society. These attributes are inculcated in the individual during her socialisation in society's institutions and embedded in her thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Anne recalled aborting the mission to buy a pregnancy test kit at a local pharmacy for fear of bringing shame to her family and the community,

The pharmacy people said, 'Who between you has misbehaved?and the pharmacy is in the area we live where we are known by everyone. So, you would feel the news would reach parents. So, I just thought of that. That day we left the pharmacy without buying.

In the African context, the patriarchal system dictates how females should think, feel, and behave. An individual who is sexually abused might be made to feel inferior or become an outcast due to the loss of virginity that is tied to their dignity. A community that maintains traditional gender stereotypes that reproduce inequalities based on these patriarchal conceptions can cause a survivor to fail to build resilience or recover. Failure to ascertain if she was pregnant could, on the one hand, worsen Anne's confusion, but on the other hand, safeguard her family's reputation. Social capital in this sense helped remind Anne of the norms and values that she had flouted.

Complex forms of social capital have been shown to have made survivors sail through their journeys of resilience and recovery. For instance, in Anne's narrative, she talks about attachments that were both secure and ambivalent in her social capital. In some instances, cognitive social capital acts as a shield to protect her from ecological harm. She accepts existing normative orders when she says; *"all these years up to now I have guarded my virginity"*. These family values kept her from trouble and deviant behaviour that would cause stress. In the same vein, Sweetie shows that the *fear of disappointing her father made her preserve her virginity*. She felt betrayed when her boyfriend insisted on penetrating her because *"she had fallen pregnant in uncertain circumstances"*.

All eleven participants indicated having social bonds with either immediate family or extended family and friends. These people who existed at a certain point of need in their lives helped them view life as worth living. Lilly narrated about friends who *"rescued her from dropping out of*

university” by advising her to appeal for a remark. Her connection to an individual who had information that saved her tuition proved to be essential social capital.

According to Scott and Moorton (2018), social capital is a product of relations between people. These relations facilitate coordinated mutually beneficial outcomes for the collective. Structural social capital within the university indicates collectiveness of action in Lilly’s case where a friend gives information on procedures towards attaining the goal that was nearly aborted, while a security guard leads her to counselling services. The social cohesion among all these people is to fight crime and bring order to the university while enhancing Lilly’s resilience. This is unlike in Talia Bae’s case where a security guard becomes the abuser instead of being a protection shield for the students.

The Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) served as a structural social capital for six of the survivors. Patricia got shelter when she was rejected by her family after falling pregnant before completing her programme, while Sweetie was assisted when she had an illegal abortion that nearly took her life. Liz remembers how the director of FSNT had to push her to pursue her tuition. She proudly recalls;

She pushed me, though sometimes I would feel, she is not helping me, she is neglecting me, but she pushed me, she didn’t want to take the lead. She pushed me saying, ‘take the lead, do this yourself.

The way she was encouraged seemed painful but it enhanced her resilience. She conformed to the tough love because a support of trust had been created in this social network in which the two parties were participating. Terry narrated how FSNT had saved her life when they called her for the retreat, *“I had resigned from my work.... and returned to my home town.... to die.... but when I received a call that I should come here...”*.

Scott and Moorton (2018) contend that there is social bonding in social capital, and when such bonds fail to develop or are strained or broken, individuals are motivated to engage in forms of deviance or criminal activities that ‘reward’ them. Terry’s bonds with her immediate family, especially her mother, had failed to mend since birth. Having social capital in the form of the FSNT was beneficial for her, as she was saved from dying by suicide. Similarly, Cee relates having people coming into her life to save the day for her. She had lost both parents when she was a teenager; *“this pastor who had a similar surname to me.... I called him my brother and he sheltered me.”*

In another instance, Cee narrated that several people such as a security guard assisted her to locate a lady who was looking for a housemate, and a senior woman gave her advice on how to solve her sexual harassment issue. Forming such relationships proved to be beneficial to Cee in her journey of resilience and recovery. Ivy recalled the love she received from her maternal aunt when she went to live with her so that she could complete high school, *“they are very close, maybe that helped me because I felt loved, I felt like I belonged there”*.

After experiencing sexual assault by a ‘prophet,’ Ivy had to resume her secondary education under the custody of a maternal aunt. She became her support to pursue her goals. She felt a sense of belonging which is a resource for resilience. Jay Jay’s life would be a nightmare without any form of social capital. She recalled having no one that she could call her own but she never lacked anything saying:

It seemed God placed people in my life for different purposes.... when they complete their task... they go away. I admire Strive Masiwa... he is the owner of Higherlife Foundation that pays my fees.

Jay Jay's narrative reveals the African norm of collectivism whereby one is everybody's child. Children are considered the responsibility of their community as a whole, and their upbringing is a collective duty of all members of the community (Abdullah et al., 2023). Strive Masiwa's assistance with tuition fees is economic capital that gives Jay Jay some resilience to continue with her education regardless of having no financial support from her own family. In her poem, she indicated how different people became her family on her journey of resilience and recovery:

Fact about life, it goes on
Hers she thought of ending it
God spoke to her through prophets
Don't kill yourself, Christ died for you
She held on, her friends became family
Her teacher, anchor
But how could she have made it?

In this poem, Jay Jay attributed her successful recovery to complex forms of social capital that ranged from spirituality to the presence of real people who became her strength. She indicated the strength to face life's challenges in her title 'Little Miss Big madam' which described her small stature that hid the big person within. It denoted the power she had within, the new identity that obscured the identity that society had given her, namely, an orphan and sexually abused.

Social capital within the family entails positive bonding among the family members. Such can promote resilience in times of sexual trauma. Mothers can be a positive support to their female sexually abused children. Anne indicated feeling good when her mother "*showed some concern when she looked stressed*" after her boyfriend forced himself on her. She said:

I realised that my mom is concerned about me to the extent of noticing that I am not myself, something bothered me... she asked an elderly woman from her home area to find out what the problem was.

In the Shona culture, it is usually taboo for parents to discuss sexuality issues with their own children (Chiweshe & Chiweshe, 2017). Evidence of strong social capital within the culture is the willingness of kinsmen or tribesmen to accept the responsibility of discussing sensitive issues with a child that is not their own. Besides social bonding with her mother, a network of trust is shown as Anne's mother trusts her neighbour to discuss personal issues with Anne. Anne indicated her joy in knowing *that her mother cares*. This was an important resource for her resilience although she never divulged to her mother whatever was bothering her. She recalled:

So, my mom asked me, 'What's happening? Is it that you are dreading schoolwork? That you are opening in March and you dread books to that extent? Hey, you girl you do not like reading.' She was serious but asked in a good way, which would not stress me further.

Individuals who are close to the family are usually trusted with such delicate issues and they are usually akin to relatives and are readily available during times of ceremonies and any other family traditions and rituals from the Shona culture.

When Lilly was suspended from her former high school due to engaging in same-sex intimate relationships, she recalled her grandmother being involved in the solution to the '*problem*'. She narrated:

So, my mom is very superstitious and my granny insisted that 'she is possessed' referring to me. So, they took me to this lady---a 'sangoma' who confirmed that I was possessed and cut me with a razor blade to apply some ash-like substance.

Finding a solution to a problem that befalls a child becomes a family issue, and in this case involving the extended family, although they could not tell the genesis of the problem. The next

section focuses on how participants attributed their resilience and recovery to emotional, psychological and social support.

6.8 Emotional, psychological and social support

After experiencing sexual trauma, survivors may feel vulnerable and fail to cope with these pressures and demands, hence the need for emotional, psychological and social support. Emotional support includes a person's beliefs that she is important and deserves to be cared for by others. Cox et al. (2015) contend that such support is identified as one of the strongest correlates with psychological well-being. Indicators of emotional support include the feelings of being cared for, understood and listened to. Sexual violence is usually associated with victim blaming, but when one observes that there are people around her who value her story as true, she feels some form of satisfaction that brings about effective coping. Getting social support after experiencing sexual trauma protects individuals from the negative influence of trauma by enhancing the perceived ability to cope, reducing the appraisals of the trauma and reducing the harmful psychological responses to trauma (Zalta et al., 2021). These include fear, anxiety, panic, shock, confusion, dissociation, just to mention a few. It is evident in excerpts of stories presented by participants that psychological, emotional and social support played a great part in averting negative effects of sexual trauma.

Sweetie's narrative indicated that she had to seek emotional and psychological support from a prophetess who ascribed to her belief that her predicament was due to evil spirits. She said:

When I went to visit my maternal family and visit my mother's grave, I dreamt a hand that was taking something from my womb. There was a lot of blood and I am afraid I might not be able to have children. I was further aggrieved that my maternal family could not locate my mother's grave. How could that be if they loved my mother?

Her trauma of the abortion could have taken a toll on her emotions and made her drift away from her maternal family. Being able to visit this spiritual prophetess could have reduced the effects of the trauma, although such superstitions would worsen the symptoms by causing more disconnections in vital family relationships. Such beliefs in prophets appears in Jay Jay's narrative where she said, *"When I was raped, I went to our church's prophet who in turn called my uncle..."*.

Instead of going straight to the police, Jay Jay trusted the prophet and believed that he would give her a shoulder to lean on. She believed that prayers and prophesy could buffer the negative effects of the incident and give her hope. She also received encouragement from a male friend who told her, *"my sister was raped when she was in form 2 and now she is in form 6. Life goes on"*.

Jay Jay goes on to attribute her emotional, psychological and social support to having people who cared around her:

My friend saw that I was confused. At home my uncle's wife referred to me as a disobedient child. My friend helped me with tactics on how to complete my practical examination...

What Jay Jay received from friends made her accept reality and increased her social connectedness which is an essential ingredient for recovery.

Terry was fortunate to have a stepfather who believed in her and gave her hope for the future regardless of facing neglect and various forms of abuse from those close to her and from outsiders.

She explained:

My step dad was the only one who believed and encouraged me to take journalism. When he noticed I was not attending lessons he told my mom to follow up.

Talia Bae had a male friend who believed her when the security guard raped her and never left her side when they looked for institution authorities. Talia shared:

When I showed him the used condom wrapped in a tissue while sobbing he became angry at learning what the security guard had done. He wanted to go and physically assault him, but I restrained him fearing that the abuser would harm him.

Talia's male friend shows what Abraham and Prabha (2022) term mutual support and humanity, since he did not judge or blame her for the assault. Anne mentioned friends who would comfort her when she would storm out of the lecture room.

When I look at my ex-boyfriend in class, when he contributes in discussions, I feel angry for what he did to me. Sometimes he says scornful things indirectly about what he did to me. I just go to the toilet to cry. My friends follow me and say it is not good for you to miss lessons.

Anne's friends did not ignore the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being (Abraham & Prabha, 2022). They could have left her alone, since it was her life, but they could not let her fail because of a past incident.

Brown et al. (2019) suggest that supportive therapies comprise emotional, psychological and social support. These could be counselling services, advocacy for survivors, giving information and advice to survivors. Just listening and helping victims talk about their feelings and problems can alleviate suffering. This was evident in narrative excerpts from Anne, Lilly and Patricia. They managed to get information about counselling services in their institution and they were empowered to stop their victimisation. Such services were also obtained by Liz, Patricia, Talia, Cee, Terry, and Sweetie who got psychosocial, legal and financial support from the Female Students Network Trust. This organisation made the survivors feel they belonged to some family that could understand and help solve their issues. In Emma's case, a support group for people living with HIV and AIDS gave her the emotional and psychological support that made her believe in life. She said:

There was this businessman. He looked healthy. He said, 'you do not have to give up on life. I have been on Antiretroviral treatment for 10 years now and I am a successful businessman. When you look at me you won't suspect I am positive.

In her situation, Emma benefited from being part of a group with similar conditions. Observing others of similar situations becomes essential for recovery.

As alluded to in Chapter Three, growth fostering relationships occur where there is authenticity. Authenticity entails relationships where individuals act in honest ways (Lertora et al., 2020). The support systems featured in each of the narratives indicated authenticity whereby each actor knew their roles in the life of the other. Interdependence that both RCT (Gurung, 2020) and the Ubuntu philosophy (Sande, 2021) advocate for was exercised in maintaining the equilibrium of a relational ecosystem. They upheld the mantra, 'I am because you are.' They could not let the afflicted member of their ecosystem break down although they did not expect anything in return for their service – the principle of social capital (Claridge, 2018). Somehow, such actions would be instrumental to survivors in the building of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. The section that follows focuses of concept of recovery.

6.9 Recovery: a non-linear journey

“I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.”

(Carl Gustav Jung, 1951)

Recovery is all about reconnecting to the self, others, and the world after sexual violence trauma-induced disconnection. The journey to recovery takes twists and turns as survivors grapple with events that took place in their lives. Sexual violence trauma usually has negative consequences such as diminished interpersonal functioning, anxiety, depression, grief, anger, and shame (Forde & Duvvury, 2017; Rubini et al., 2023; Hakimi et al., 2018; McQueen et al., 2021; Nesongano et

al., 2022). These darker moments influenced the recovery journeys of all eleven participants. Their diverse backgrounds, history, and forms of sexual violence they experienced, determined the meaning they attached to their journeys to recovery. For instance, reflecting on the painful abortion that she experienced, Sweetie feared leaving the boyfriend who betrayed her:

I am afraid to date or marry any other man.....what if I fail to have children or what if the new person questions how I lost my virginity? I hate myself for killing my baby. At one point I thought of committing suicide because I was ashamed, guilty, and disgraced of myself.

Terry indicated similar sentiments in her reflection of her darker moments:

Lost my virginity at 16 to incest, I am scared I may never have children I don't want a child to be born with the job description of filling my emptiness. I don't have love. My mother never had love. I can't give what I don't have.'

Ivy's darker moments made her have temper tantrums and she reflected, "I just feel angry, I just don't know what I will do with my life. I just feel like I am just a ruined piece". These emotions are exacerbated by cultural constructions of gender. They determine how one processes and expresses the trauma. In patriarchy, female survivors' healing might be influenced by the social environment they live in. The African society, in this case, the Zimbabwean culture, values the preservation of certain virtues, especially for the female child, the preservation of virginity being one.

There are societal values and expectations that a female has to be aware of. Sinko et al. (2019) cite the manifestation of societal values that might confuse the survivor on whether to report the assault due to pressure from some members of society or not. The survivor is pushed into a dilemma of feeling some responsibility to prevent the perpetrator from violating other innocent victims, which

is altruistic. The incongruency that ensues in the reactions of society to her image of a *'damaged good'* and the desire to be a *'saviour'* has an impact on the survivor's trauma recovery process.

Emma's situation was complex in that she yearned to divulge the incest she experienced to the elders of the family to protect other children who were at risk, but she was silenced. She tried to bury her pain by pursuing her education but she reflected on how she would be reminded of her past:

When I see my uncles with their families at gatherings, I feel the pain. I think to myself... how can they be so happy with their wives and children when they ruined our lives? I usually feel like calling the police and shaming them, but I would not want to create a scene at a family gathering...it would break the family apart.

In this situation, Emma is in a dilemma, as she desires to get closure by getting justice, but at the same time she is bound by the duty to maintain a family unit and she made the duty her priority. Her ubuntu values compel her to choose between autonomy and the group. When she was on industrial attachment, she would be compelled to solve others' problems while she felt the pain within. She reflected, *"I was involved in coordinating support groups.... I would hear other people's stories when mine was hidden... I had become the solution to people's stories"*. Sometimes it felt like she became a sacrificial lamb in order to meet society's expectations. According to relational cultural theory, healing from sexual violence is anchored on three objectives; (1) to reconnect with the self, (2) to reconnect with others, and (3) to reconnect with the world.

Before the assault, an individual has an identity, control of the self, confidence, and self-esteem. These can be eroded by sexual violence, hence the notion of disconnection from the self. For instance, Sweetie's view of herself after performing an illegal abortion after a date rape indicates

disconnection from the self, “*I was ashamed, guilty, and disgraced of myself...*”. In this sense, a survivor loses her own identity. She is no longer sure of who she is, the body and mind become ‘*strangers*’ to each other. For instance, in the Shona and Ndebele cultures that the eleven participants come from, every girl is taught from childhood and expected to remain a virgin till marriage (Matswetu, & Bhana, 2018). Losing her virginity in whatever circumstance brings shame to herself and her family. Anne’s narrative also showed how this virtue becomes every girl’s pride and at the same time a source of pain when virginity is lost out of wedlock; “*I feel hurt when I reflect on how I could lose my virginity at university when I was able to keep it intact all these years*”. After sexual violence, the survivor starts questioning her values, strengths, and self-worth. She feels out of control of her emotions and is unsure of her future. At this point, the survivor disconnects from self. To heal, an individual has to reconnect to herself. As in Ivy’s story, disconnection from the self is shown when she said:

I feel lost every time, like I don’t know myself, I don’t even know what I want. I am there but I feel like I am just living, I am there physically.

Thus, there is a need to love oneself and reclaim one’s identity, manage the symptoms of trauma, and regain control of the self. A survivor can reclaim identity by separating the self from the sexual violence experience. Like a butterfly that changes its form to have a new life. Garnering the strength to rebuild self-worth that was lost and overcoming self-doubt helps one regain lost identity. Liz showed the courage to reclaim her identity when she shared her thoughts on how she picked herself up, “*No matter what circumstances, stay focused and don’t lose hope, your life is what you decide, no one can decide your destiny only yourself*”.

Regardless of her being in an abusive relationship, she expressed her joy in managing to reconnect with the self and others; “*all the depression is gone I am in a relationship with a guy I love so*

much.... there is this tendency that I usually want to treat him with caution, but I am happy". In this narrative, Liz indicated that she had not completely buried her pain. The tendency to treat the new relationship with caution shows that recovery is not that easy. Any behaviour that resembles the previous relationship brings flashbacks, hence the need to treat "*every action with caution*".

Like in disability issues, society usually sees the disability before the person. In the same vein, in sexual violence issues, society gives the survivor a new identity, '*the tainted*', '*damaged goods*', and all sorts of labels. They see the abuse first before they see the person. In Talia Bae's case, she narrated an accounts clerk at her institution carelessly tainted her character because she had taken her assault case to court. Everyone found out she had been violated and they would have their own version of her story, *...they consented.... he had not paid her for the service.... her lover...*

It is every woman's wish, all things being normal, to wish for a life partner. It is also prestigious for a family to have a suitor for their daughter, in Zimbabwean society (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2013; Samanga & Matiza, 2020). When this wish is not fulfilled because the woman is not '*marriage material*' through loss of virginity as a result of sexual assault, the survivor gives up on their potential to socially achieve any desirable status in society. She feels worthless among her fellow women. At one point, Terry professed she would not marry in her life. She would rather feel comfortable in a *same-sex* relationship. She felt men *only wanted sex from her*. She was not *marriage material*.

Another issue that can influence recovery is an individual's socio-cultural context. These are an individual's social circle; people a survivor spends time with. Some might have positive and some negative views about life. They might either conform or challenge the dictates of patriarchy. Sinko et al. (2019) cite the need to surround oneself with 'good people' who are willing to help by encouraging the survivor to work towards healing. This is what they term 'quality support'. Failure

to get such support makes recovery a bumpy road as shown in Ivy's narrative. She professed failing to form healthy relationships with other female students. She said: "*One of them was a victim too. So, most of her reactions, I could see myself as I looked at her, it really affected me a lot*". On the contrary, in her poetic presentation, Terry showed that she managed her insecurity:

'Can you believe it?

I'm a whole wife,

Of course, you can

I have been enamoured with Mr.

But it's still so surreal to me.

I see my ring. Sometimes it's like yeah,

I am married to this man.

Getting married has unlocked a new range of content and

I'm excited to figure out how I'm going to package it.... that would be something.

Internalised barriers to healing develop due to feelings of shame, self-blame, fear of being judged and self-doubt. In her excitement, Terry was not sure if she would manage the new identity of being someone's wife, but she was happy showing her wedding ring. All her life until now, she was an "*illegitimate child, a sexual violence survivor, a rebel*". The survivor needs to manage these negative feelings properly. In most instances, survivors choose to suppress or avoid these feelings through various behaviours such as drowning themselves in alcohol, or drugs or just pushing the experience to the unconscious mind. Lilly had such an experience when she was nearly denied a rewrite for the failed modules. She reflects, "*I never thought positively, I just wanted to stay at home and get drunk, sometimes I would sacrifice my money to buy vodka, spirits, that strong stuff, drinking, and feeling happy*". She then benefitted from reconnecting with 'good

friends’ who provided quality support by making her take responsibility for her future, “*Another friend I disclosed to, pushed me and volunteered to escort me to the institution to appeal*”.

Acknowledging that these strategies are unhealthy could help them regain control of their lives. Agreeing to appeal meant that Lilly had acknowledged that her method of solving her problems by burying them in alcohol was wrong. When survivors take responsibility for their healing rather than placing it all on others, it makes recovery less difficult.

When one reconnects with herself, it is easier to reconnect with others and the world. Survivors have to depict feelings of belonging and trust and show moments of wondering how they reached where they are. These are signs of positive growth. Terry’s feelings of belonging are shown in her poetic narrative when she said, “*Can you believe it? I am a whole wife*”. Her words indicated that she herself could not decipher how it happened. After all, she experienced it in her life. Someone called her his own when her own mother could not show her love. Self-love is shown through positive behaviour of feeling comfortable in their own skin, reclaiming their body, and challenging the negative self-view that was created by sexual violence. In recovery, an individual finds time to nurture herself and have hope. In Lilly’s case, she found hope for the future but she felt ambivalent:

Sometimes I think that I must not let my past spoil my future, but sometimes I feel like I am too weak to do that. Sometimes I just start writing stuff in my diary and I cry myself to sleep. The next morning, I will feel better.

This hope is built through being inspired by good role models in their environment, such as survivors of sexual violence who have recovered and who are capable of managing their everyday life and able to achieve their goals. Such role models, assure them of a safer world that can be conducive for recovery. Recovery is indicative of feelings of peace, a feeling of calm and feeling relaxed when a survivor is alone. She no longer feels lonely when she is on her own, she rather

feels comfortable. This is a sign of reconnection to the self. Memories of sexual violence usually take away a survivor's freedom. She will always be feeling obliged to be accountable for each action she takes in life. Recovery is shown by embracing the moments of positive emotions such as happiness and enjoyment. Anne showed some excitement about her conquest of fear, shame, and worthlessness when she said:

When the director at the attachment site made advances, I said to myself, I cannot go back to my friend for advice, no, I should deal with these things alone, on my own.

In order to deal with sexual harassment Anne said:

Some of these things will be making you learn a lesson so that you become stronger. Now I am no longer that Anne, I was that quiet Anne who cries when in situations. Now I am able to manage to stand my ground!

The survivor utilises her internal ability to manage distress and cope with competing demands. She creates a more supportive environment for herself to recover in. This is shown in Ivy's wish for positive growth. She shared:

When I feel negative emotions, I write in my diary repeatedly, many times that I want to change; I want to change. I also write on pieces of paper the meaning of happiness and I tear the paper at the end.

In Emma's case, she showed some feelings of adequacy as she referred to her three children from her marriage as her pride. She said (translated from vernacular), "*I now breed like a white garment church member*", indicating that her previous fears of the possibility of failing to bear any children had gone. She now had a new lease of life.

The foregoing discussion and responses of participants presents evidence that concisely demonstrates the significant challenges that sexual violence poses for survivors on their journeys to recovery. The intersectionality of gender, age, family context, religion, and individual status

determined how survivors navigated their paths to recovery. At the analytical level, this illustration is related to the assumptions of the relational cultural theory that views individuals as moving towards connections that foster positive growth. Within these connections, disconnections occur whereby an individual can disconnect from the self, owing to sexual violence trauma that makes the individual lose identity, control of the self, confidence, and self-esteem. Emma, Patricia, Anne, Sweetie, Terry, and Ivy highlighted how the loss of virginity through sexual assault challenged and disrupted their connection with the self, others, and the world. Jordan (2000, 2010) agreed that disconnections are part of every relationship when people interact in hurtful ways or inflict a myriad of other relational injuries on others, and they contribute to feelings of shame and isolation, decrease in energy, an inability to act, confusion or a lack of clarity about self and others, decreased self-worth, and withdrawal from social contacts. However, Simandan (2019) argues that through their situated knowledge, survivors could challenge the rules of the dominant group and navigate a multitude of possibilities that would have turned their present situation differently, and recovery could be attained, as was displayed in diverse ways by some survivors.

In summary, the analysis of the additional cluster of meanings revealed that participants developed strategies that enhanced their resilience on their journeys to recovery from sexual violence trauma. The analysis unpacked the following strategies adopted by the participants: acts of altruism, embracing moments of positive emotions such as happiness and enjoyment, reconnection to the self, loving the self, reclaiming identity, managing symptoms of trauma, regaining control of the self and surrounding oneself with people with positive attitudes towards life. The following setbacks were reported by the participants: flashbacks at behaviours that resembled the violation, negative labelling by society, placing importance on virginity regardless of obtaining a higher qualification, doubting one's self-efficacy, and being too self-aware in new relationships. Drawing

on Harding (1995) and Haraway (1988), I contend that these strategies and setbacks in obtaining resilience and recovery highlighted by the narrative co-constructors are indicative of the impact of the survivors' understanding of their marginalisation that stems from the social order of the patriarchal system, and their efforts to challenge them.

6.10 Concluding remarks

The focus of this chapter was to examine the meaning female student survivors of sexual violence attached to their experiences of sexual violence trauma. The meaning-making shed light on research question 2: How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery? The following themes emerged: adopting multiple identities, agency: taking control and responsibility, oppression, resistance and empowerment, sexual entitlement and sustaining ecologies and spatial environments. Research question 3: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma? was analysed and the following themes emerged: network of friends, emotional, psychological and social support, recovery: reconnecting to self and others. The varied strategies adopted by survivors to build resilience and recover were considered. The setbacks that survivors encountered on their journeys to recovery were also explored. Finally, the impact of patriarchy and the social order on resilience and recovery and how survivors conform or attempt to challenge the social order were explored.

The chapter that follows, links the theoretical, empirical, and narrative concepts through survivors of sexual violence's subjective understanding of their journeys of resilience and recovery. This next chapter, which is the concluding chapter, presents a summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world.

(King, 2003, p. 10)

7.1 Introduction

This study explored the narratives of resilience and recovery from sexual violence of female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe. Chapters five and six presented and analysed narratives of survivors of sexual violence in order to interpret and understand their journeys of resilience and recovery. The purpose of this chapter is to bring together and theorise a narrative that illuminates participants' experiences of sexual violence and how they navigated their journeys of resilience and recovery. Firstly, I reaffirm the purpose of this research study and present an overview of chapters, highlighting how they are linked. Following this, I outline the methodological reflections of this narrative journey. Thereafter, I discuss the key findings and the extent to which these addressed the research questions presented in Chapter One, as well as the original contribution of this study. I conclude this chapter by providing recommendations for further research.

7.2 Overview of the Study

In this section, I present the purpose of this study and outline the key issues discussed in each chapter, highlighting the coherence of the chapters. The purpose of this research study was to explore the narratives of the experiences of sexual violence of students at selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe and how these female student sexual violence survivors navigated their journeys of resilience and recovery. As I indicated in Chapter One, sexual violence of any form

affects an individual in different ways such as physically, emotionally, and psychologically. As such, individuals process trauma differently depending on their inner strengths, environment and support systems, among other factors. With the magnitude of cases of sexual violence against girls and women in Zimbabwe where one in three females are violated every day, I was motivated to explore how female students living in such an environment navigated their journeys of resilience and recovery.

In the next step, I intertwine the theoretical and methodological approaches to connect the chapters. Chapter One discussed the background of sexual violence and its magnitude and influence on psychological well-being of various populations. It is against this background that I presented the rationale and aim of the study. Next, I outlined the theoretical framework and the methodological approach adopted in this study. I then described my motivation to explore this sensitive topic which drained me emotionally. My doctoral journey that was shrouded in ‘ups and downs’, made me reflect and deepen my knowledge and understanding of the complexities shrouded in meanings given to experiences of sexual violence by different survivors. Presenting a personal narrative on my positionality in this study gives the reader a sense of who I am. I then outline the three research questions that guided the study and analysis of data:

1. What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence?
2. How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery?
3. Why are support systems important in promoting survivors’ resilience and recovery for sexual violence trauma?

Chapter Two provided an outline of the impact of sexual violence on resilience and recovery within the global, regional and national perspectives. Next, I discussed literature on various pre-disposing

factors and their influence on protecting and promoting sexual violence perpetration, as well as the victim/survivor binary. I presented debates on power dynamics in sexual violence issues, including the influence of culture, religion, and patriarchy in the normalisation of sexual violence. Thereafter, I outlined the complexities of attaining resilience and recovery. I then discussed the multi-faceted concepts of oppression, resistance, agency, and empowerment, as well as the importance of support systems, care models and the Zimbabwean policy responses to support and care of victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Chapter Three discussed the two theoretical frameworks adopted to make sense of survivors' subjective understanding of their journeys of resilience and recovery. Using theoretical bricolage, I elaborated upon the connections and disconnections, mutuality, and growth-fostering relationships that occur in relational interactions drawing on Jordan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey's relational cultural theory. Next, I outlined the interplay of gender, agency, and structural power relations as delineated in Harding, Haraway, Collins, Smith, Hartsock, Rose, and Jaggar's feminist standpoint theory. Furthermore, I examined the four theses of feminist standpoint theory namely the situated knowledge, strong objectivity, epistemic advantage, and power relations, and their implications in understanding journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma.

Chapter Four described and justified the qualitative methodological approach, the critical paradigm, and the narrative approach employed in exploring the meanings attached to survivor's journeys of resilience and recovery. I highlighted the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts of this study and the choice of sampling strategy. I adopted Cresswell's (2020) seven steps of data generation and Crossley's (2000) six-step process for analysing narratives. I further examined the impact of hegemonic masculinity on growth fostering relationships, connections and disconnections, mutuality and authenticity, and power dynamics in the co-construction of

narratives of sexual violence. I presented the analytical process I adopted in finding meaning of survivors' personal narratives. Implementing the constructs and themes from the literature reviewed, theoretical and narrative research, I formulated a method for analysing and making sense of the co-constructed narratives.

Chapter Five presented biographical sketches of the participants. I then analysed clusters of meaning linked to the survivors' subjective views of their journeys of resilience and recovery, which addressed research question one: What stories do female survivors narrate about their experiences of sexual violence? The following clusters of meaning were explored: oppressive social spaces as limiting ecologies, human rights violations in the African context, complexities of stigma in the African context, vulnerability shrouded in secrecy and privacy, complexities of dealing with law enforcement agents, normalisation of sexual violence and lack of political will. I addressed issues of voice and power in the co-construction of narratives by infusing the actual responses of participants which were presented in italics. I employed Simandan's (2019) conceptualisation of Hraway's situated knowledge, Harding's strong objectivity, Medina's (2013) conceptualisation of epistemic advantage in navigating resources by marginalised groups and the crosscutting concept of power that both the relational cultural theory and the feminist standpoint theory question and challenge. I paid attention to contradictions and conflicting meanings presented in participants' narratives. In exploring the journeys of resilience and recovery, I also employed the relational cultural theory concepts of authenticity, connection and disconnection, and mutuality in determining the nature of relationships that facilitated perpetration, resistance, agency and empowerment.

Chapter Six addressed research question 2: How do sexually abused female students in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe construct their journeys of resilience and recovery? and

research question 3: Why are support systems important in promoting survivors' resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma? These research questions aimed to unpack survivors' understanding of their journeys of resilience and recovery. To address the second research question, the following clusters of meaning were discussed: adopting multiple identities, agency: taking control and responsibility, oppression, resistance and empowerment, sexual entitlement and sustaining ecologies and spatial environments. The following clusters of meaning were discussed in relation to the third research question: network of friends, emotional, psychological and social support, recovery: reconnecting to self and others.

In Chapter Seven, I present the summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research. This chapter also outlines the overview of the thesis and highlights how the different chapters are linked. I link empirical, theoretical and narrative insights from the previous chapters and highlight the key findings that emerged. The following section discusses the methodological reflections of this study.

7.3 Methodological reflections

After orienting the reader to the focus and purpose of this study, I present reflections on my methodological journey through the study. When I embarked on my PhD journey, I had an idea of what I wanted to research but could not figure out how I could structure the ideas into a topic. In this first step of my doctorate journey, feelings towards and experience with vulnerable populations were the motivation that informed my involvement with the topic. In every meeting that I attended at the Victim Friendly Court; sexual violence was topical. Therefore, the motivation and drive to find out more about survivors of sexual violence increased. The next challenge was conceptualising and designing a research proposal within the stipulated timeframes. This task required some expertise in crafting a proposal that would meet the requirements of the proposal

review panel and research ethics committee. This meant several consultations with my supervisors who were meticulous in their supervision. The next methodological reflection focused on co-constructing narratives with survivors of sexual violence. Initially, I had the idea of situating the study within the interpretive paradigm which would allow me to interpret and understand the stories within the natural environment of participants. I pondered on whether just interpreting the narratives would highlight the complexities enshrined in the phenomenon. This meant looking beyond the interpretive paradigm.

The next step was to search for the literature which considered stages that would lead to the understanding of survivors' stories. Delving deeper into the topic, it dawned on me that each survivor's reality needed probing and deeper understanding. I made a methodological choice to adopt narrative inquiry, as a suitable approach which afforded participants the opportunity and space to express their stories and experiences of sexual violence. With this methodological choice, I decided to draw on the feminist standpoint theory and the relational cultural theory which fall under the critical paradigm.

The tenets of the two theories would address the subjectivities and power dynamics that are usually embedded in intimate relationships. Relationships depicted in people's stories are not constant. They are usually affected by changing phenomena within three commonplace aspects namely temporality, sociality, and place. These aspects would be addressed by the triangulation of narrative inquiry with the mentioned theories which take into consideration an individual's history, social environment, and time period after violation. After reviewing relevant methodological literature, I believed that narrative inquiry was the appropriate research design to illuminate the voice of the survivors and the meaning of their experiences. In order to give voice to the survivors,

I draw on the critical paradigm that was most appropriate for this study. This enabled me to foster conversations and reflections of the views expressed by the participants.

The participants and I were able to question the status quo, the ‘natural’ state, that is patriarchy and its dictates, on how females should behave, carry themselves and feel in the face of inequalities. Adopting the critical paradigm lens, I was able to challenge the system that maintains these inequalities. The participants’ multiple truths would be revealed through probing their stories further. Locating the study within the critical paradigm was effective in capturing constructions of participants’ journeys of resilience and recovery thus, addressing the research questions that the study sought to respond to.

Bearing in mind that sexual violence is a very sensitive issue, I was faced with the challenge of recruiting participants for the study and finding an appropriate site to conduct the interviews. Talking about sexual violence is taboo in the African context, especially the Shona and other Zimbabwean cultures. Most females in the study environment would not willingly share stories about their sex life with strangers, so I had to find ways to recruit a study sample that fits within the research criterion and appropriate site for the interviews. Having a guidance and counselling group within a selected institution assisted in obtaining a sample of female students who connected me to other participants who fell within the sampling criterion.

Although I work with sensitive issues almost every day, the issue of eliciting constructions of experiences of sexual violence trauma would prove to be like excavating the past inner feelings of survivors (Polkinghorne, 1995). It was also very emotional for me when I listened to participants’ stories of sexual violence. I had to maintain neutrality and remain non-judgmental in order to allow for free expression of the participants’ emotions. I was anxious about the possibility of re-activation of the trauma and also participants’ intentions to harm perpetrators. After recording

several interviews from each participant and transcribing them, I felt overwhelmed and emotional. Therefore, I needed to have a back-up plan before embarking on the study. I negotiated with a private counselling organisation and the counselling department of the focal institution to provide counselling services, in the event of emotional trauma. After reflecting on my narrative journey and the challenges I encountered on my journey, I now present the key findings of this research.

7.4 Findings: reflecting on key insights

Narratives, like the people who tell them, are fluid, changing through time and in response to context

McKibben, and Breheny, (2023 p1).

The preceding section highlighted my methodological reflections. This section discusses the key findings. I echo Clandinin and Connelly's (1990, 2000) and McKibben, and Breheny's (2023) contention that narratives are subjective. Meaning given to a narrative at any point is influenced by sociality, spatiality, temporality, emplotment and time (Clandinin, 2007, 2013). Drawing on the critical paradigm adopted in this research study, it is possible that the reader might unveil diverse and new meanings of the journeys of resilience and recovery from sexual violence trauma. The analysis I engaged in on the co-constructed narratives of experiences of sexual violence trauma, could influence the victims, survivors of sexual violence, perpetrators of sexual violence, the field of counselling, communities, families, policies and programmes on sexual violence both in academic institutions and the government at large. In chapters five and six, I summarised the clusters of meanings which responded to the research questions presented in Chapter One.

The following section discusses the key findings in relation to the research questions.

7.4.1 Conflicting discourses of fate versus agency

Narratives of all survivors highlighted conflicting discourses which attributed sexual violence to fate (it happened for a reason) versus discourses of agency (taking control and responsibility). On the one hand, most participants attributed sexual violation to fate. Fate is associated with spirituality, the belief in non-human divine powers. This belief was revealed after several interviews when the survivors were probed about how they felt about the violation at the present stage of their life journey. Schimmoeller and Rothhaar (2021) contend that spirituality encourages people to search for meaning. Their belief in a divine being was indicative of the Shona/ Ndebele and African cultures that are rooted in religion. Fate was construed in either positive or negative dimensions, whereby positively, God created a situation to make way for good things to happen in the survivors' life. For instance, having the epistemic privilege of attaining double bounded knowledge of both the dominant system and their subordinated status, which gave them the ability to re-create themselves or renew their capabilities of facing adversity without faltering. McCauley (2013) attributes such a perspective to subordinated existence whereby the survivor learns how to survive within an oppressive relationship or environment. It is like giving up the fight for justice in order to keep the family or relationship intact. For instance, where incest was perpetrated, the particular survivors professed having feelings of anger at watching the perpetrator interacting happily with his family when the survivor was failing to foster any healthy sexual relationships. Although Leo et al. (2021) contend that belief in fate is a way of finding peace, purpose and connection to others after trauma, I argue that surrendering to fate would indicate suppression of negative emotions. Such reactions would perpetuate the dictates of patriarchy of silencing a woman and promoting a rape culture. It would rather be beneficial if fate is coupled with the search for justice and protecting others who would fall victim to the perpetrator.

Negatively, God was viewed as cruel, particularly when religious leaders were perpetrators of sexual violence. To some of the survivors, fate meant the devil was at play. So, seeking the help from self-styled prophets would be an option. It becomes a paradox when the same self-styled prophets who were implicated in the perpetration of sexual violence are seen as saviours by some of the survivors. This would indicate the failure of the subordinate group to free themselves despite knowing the harms inflicted on them.

The influence of time in a narrative episode was evident when survivors' negative views about God had changed. When comparing narrative episodes, data indicated contradicting emotions about their traumatic experiences in relation to God. In some of the cases, survivors attributed God's will to enable them to access opportunities they would not have had 'if they had not encountered adversity.' This suggests that resilience and suffering occur on a continuum. This resonates with Miller and Stiver's (1997) concept of a central paradox which maintains that although strategies of disconnection are intended to protect individuals from both perceived and real risks of hurt or rejection, they also keep people out of the connection they desire. This indicates the latent desire that survivors would have had for God's protection although the painful experiences obscured their true desire for God's presence in their times of need.

In an attempt to unpack this change of attitude towards God and its implication for attaining resilience and recovery, I draw on Jordan's (2000) assumption that people grow through and towards relationships throughout their life span. Regardless of how much they drift from healthy relationships, they yearn to reconnect. Given that all survivors suffered different forms of sexual violence which disconnected them from themselves, others and God, the African Ubuntu, strong religious background drew them towards rebuilding their relationship with God and others. This confirms the subjective aspect of narrative inquiry. It is essential to understand survivors of any

adversity in consideration of time, place, history, political and social background. Regardless of their age and modern life styles, they relied on spiritual intervention for their recovery. In summary, survivors attributed their resilience to a divine being who created some opportunity for them in both positive and negative ways.

On the other hand, conflicting discourses of agency also emerged from participants' narratives. Reeuwijk (2010) argues that agency should be viewed as complex, multi-layered and context specific. This means that agency can manifest in a variety of ways as expressed in the meaning survivors gave to their experiences of sexual violence. I will first discuss agency as the individual's capacity to have the power and resources to fulfil her potential. This resonates with Horkeimer's claim that human beings and their possibilities for self-fulfilment is a fundamental concern for critical theory. Realising ways of manipulating the environment and managing to bounce back after experiencing sexual violence trauma was indicative of agency in survivors. Survivors thrived to change their situation, for instance the effort that some survivors made in order to stop sexual harassment in various contexts was a form of agency. Narrative episodes shared during the interviews with survivors were dynamic and showed survivors' ability to manipulate their environment to facilitate their road to recovery. Although some participants fell pregnant after the sexual violence, they managed to find ways to resume their studies. Also, although some participants had no home to call their own, they demonstrated agency by getting assistance from organisations and well-wishers who financed their tuition fees and other material needs. Therefore, participants displayed agency by going against societal stereotypes, which viewed survivors as giving up on their goals when they fell pregnant and failing to pursue their education.

Sexual agency entails one's ability to initiate sex, make sexual choices, communicate one's desires and meet one's needs. In hegemonic ways of thinking, such agency is perceived negatively when

exhibited by subordinate groups (women). In a patriarchal society, such behaviours, when exhibited by a woman, are indicative of deviant behaviour. There is a pattern of agency that challenges Jordan's (2018) contention that culture valorises power, and its oppressive relationships are institutionalised within a society evident in the data. Jordan (2018) asserts that these oppressive relationships are believed to have a direct impact on the interpersonal relationships between its members. Men are regarded as having power to manipulate the weaker sex in sexual relationships. Survivors indicate behaviours of 'active agency' (Helicon, 2012) in controlling who they should have sex with, and how they should have it, for instance where a survivor chooses to date and have sex with married men in order to prove her ability to control them. Autonomy is shown in fulfilling one's desires where a survivor exhibits such manipulative behaviour. I argue that it resembles taking back power that was taken away from them through past sexual assaults that they experienced. Such behaviour can be viewed as abnormal, if exhibited by a female within the research context. I concur with Vanwesenbeeck (2021) who describes it as a form of agency that one adopts to feel safe.

Such agency is double pronged in that it is used to serve both internal and external goals that enable the survivor to navigate sexual contexts and expectations. On one hand, the survivor might yearn for belonging (pre-requisite of assuring connectedness in RCT) and acceptance through giving in to sex, while on the other hand, she would be trying to prove her worth in a society where heterosexual relationships are highly regarded and form part of a woman's identity. The next type of agency that I present is the agency adopted for material exchange. I draw on Bay-Cheng's (2019) view that sexual agency can be evident among those who are compelled by social and material conditions to exercise it through sexual compliance, compromise, and concession. Survivors of sexual violence, in some instances, were active agents in their violation where

transactional sex prevailed. In contexts of poverty and environments where opportunities were restricted, sexual violation would be viewed as a conduit through which agency was exercised. Some survivors fell prey in contexts where they accessed laptops for school work or promised a better future if they agreed to have sex without protection. Due to their transactional nature, such relationships would inflict pain on the woman, especially when the men taunt and continue to demand sex on the premise of being allowed to access such services in the past, hence the aspect of sexual entitlement that made the survivor vulnerable to re-victimisation.

A common and old practice of falling pregnant in the hope of getting married (Menon et al., 2018) is evident among survivors, for instance, in Patricia's case. Patricia exhibits some traits where she suffered neglect at home and shows sexual agency that can be understood as compensation of parental or family love she yearned for. In another dimension, I would argue that survivors would be agentic in their sexual endeavours, for instance where patriarchal expectations of preserving one's virginity for marriage is expected. Patricia indicated such discomfort when questioned about how she lost her virginity and was forced to give in to sex. In order to shield oneself from being questioned about how one's virginity was lost, falling pregnant would obscure any doubts about the woman's character. Survivors who were mothers had pride and hope in their children. Their resilience was strengthened by having a '*reason to live*', unlike where survivors doubted their ability to procreate after having informal abortions. This aspect of building resilience on the premise of procreation and securing marriage was indicative of cultural and religious virtues that supersede any achievements that a woman can make in life.

The foregoing discussion implies that agency is dynamic (Mai, 2020) and evolves according to the situation the survivor finds herself. As such, sexual violence can be viewed as a social construct that can be defined contextually. Where survivors became active agents instead of victims, in

Harding's (2019) strong objectivity, they would have challenged society's distorted view about sexual violence and its consequences.

It is essential, therefore, to understand sexual violence in dynamic ways that do not consider women as passive recipients. A divergent way of understanding sexual violence would be effective when assisting victims. In the following section, I take the reader through how complexities of oppression, resistance and empowerment assisted participants to construct journeys of resilience and recovery.

7.4.2 Complexities of oppression, resistance, and empowerment

The preceding section attributed dynamic forms of agency to assisting survivors on their journeys to resilience and recovery. This section takes the reader through understanding the relational cultural theory's claim that culture valorises power and institutionalises oppressive relationships within a society. This is considered to have a direct influence on the interpersonal relationships between its members. Drawing on this assertion, I unpack how survivors navigated the context of patriarchy and managed to build resilience. In accord with DeLaet and Mills (2018) and Gorbin and Gómez (2021), I contend that sexual victimisation occurs in contexts underpinned by complexities of oppression, resistance, and empowerment. It was evident from participants' narratives that power dynamics played a role in survivors' efforts to get justice for the sexual violations they suffered in diverse contexts. I concur with Gurung (2020) that not all females are oppressed but when one recognises and challenges cultural values and power relations that contribute to her subordination or oppression, she develops her own standpoint. Patriarchy has expectations of how an ideal woman should behave, especially being silent regarding issues of sexual violence.

Interviews with survivors revealed that this expectation was challenged by most survivors. They never gave in to the shame that is associated with divulging sexual violation. Talia Bae, regardless of being ridiculed at the selected academic institution where she was studying, at home by some members of the family, at the bus stop by members of the society who read the news about her violation and managed to identify her, challenged the expectations of the dominant group by continuing with her fight for justice. Also, Lilly, Cee and Terry were fearless in fighting against sexual harassment at selected academic institutions where there was the possibility of losing their placement due to deliberate attempts by the lecturers to fail them. They are seen to defy the power dynamics between the educator and the learner which usually renders students powerless and they give in to the demands of the dominant group.

Although Emma developed resistance towards religious oppression that nurtured her by engaging in cyber activism, Ivy was cowered into silence, exacerbating the trauma within. She professed to have kept the violation from her parents and other family members in order to protect them from emotional pain. Her decision militates against her empowerment and recovery. This could be some form of agency where silence is maintained for a positive reason although detrimental to the survivor's psychological well-being. Such an attribute resonates with the Ubuntu concept of compassion towards kinsmen. Ivy viewed her family as dysfunctional, and her actions could be understood in the sense of reducing emotional stress on her sickly mother.

With regard to encounters with the law in accessing justice for their sexual violations, interviews with Emma, Talia Bae, and Terry revealed some form of resistance and empowerment. The three survivors used their epistemic knowledge of their rights to access justice. On the contrary, Emma's resistance was weakened by the accusation of infecting her lover with HIV and the threats she got from the police station. Although at the time she was forced to stay in the toxic relationship, she

indicates being empowered to eventually end it and engaged in acts of altruism, whereby she became a pillar of strength for other victims. Talia Bae and Terry continued to seek justice despite being aware of how connected the perpetrator was to the powerful structures of the law and the learning institution. I argue that although society makes rules that mostly disadvantage the less powerful and disadvantaged, survivors developed their own stand point that resisted the oppression and they got empowered to take appropriate action.

This implies that when dealing with sexual violence, the standpoints of victims or survivors should be considered, so that they are given the power to build resilience on their own terms. Next, I unravel meanings of narratives that depict survivors' ecosystems as a vehicle for resilience and recovery.

7.4.3 Sustaining ecologies and spatial environment

In the previous section, I outlined meanings embedded in the narratives of oppression, resistance, and empowerment after sexual violence trauma experiences. In this section I explore the meaning emanating from the survivors ecosystems, which I have coined sustaining ecologies and spatial environments. According to relational cultural theory, humans thrive in relationships. This resonates with Kukla and Herbert's (2018), assertion that human ecosystems (interactions between the individual and her environment/social spaces) are constituted by people, the environment, interactions between people, and interactions between people and their environment. I concur with the Kukla and Herbert's (2018) argument that a functional ecosystem is knit together and mutually constitutive. As such, sexual violence that usually occurs within interdependent ecosystems, tends to disrupt the equilibrium. In the African context, no one lives like an island, each individual is connected with family, friends and the community.

I contend that in a functional ecosystem each member becomes responsible for the safety of the other. The perpetration of incest in Emma, Talia Bae, and Terry's narratives are indicative of fractured or disrupted ecosystems that could be difficult to repair. To the contrary, these survivors managed to reconnect with those who violated them in an attempt to keep the ecosystem intact. Although, suppressing the pain does not necessarily help as Emma narrates it is re-experienced when there is a gathering at home and the perpetrator is observed interacting happily with his family. Ecological disruptions are also evident in narratives of orphaned survivors. The traditional family is non-existent in their ecosystem. Jay Jay's lack of fixed abode is indicative of a disrupted ecosystem where she became vulnerable to abuse. This indicates the disappearance of the African traditional extended family. The sense of belonging is inherent in all narratives. Sweetie who describes her paternal aunt as 'fierce' and 'uncaring' concentrates on the positive aspect of her aunt's attitude. Such reactions of survivors makes it easy for the ecosystem to repair and growth-fostering relationships to be forged.

To some survivors, spatial environments such as the academic institution or marital home were ecosystems that brought painful experiences and memories. In the next sub-section, I explore what I termed the 'open cheque' syndrome, which captured survivors' narratives of relationships that were dominated with discourses of sexual entitlement.

This implies that when assisting survivors of sexual violence, there is a need to assess their ecosystems in order to establish where their strength can be drawn from.

7.4.4 The 'Open cheque' syndrome

I developed the notion of the 'open cheque' syndrome to symbolise the harm that a culture of sexual entitlement poses to heterosexual relationships. Narrative episodes shared during the

interviews on whether the survivors' relationships within their ecosystem were satisfying or not, indicate moments of both positive and negative feelings about the relationships. Where sexual entitlement was experienced, survivors felt they had lost their autonomy and power to make life decisions. They felt they had lost the original 'self' and needed to take back their power. This is reflective in Anne and Emma's narratives when their boyfriends claimed sexual entitlement because, in Anne's case, he was the one who deflowered her, while in Emma's case, she had infected him with HIV. The survivor in these cases is forced to conform to the dictates of oppressive patriarchal rules that assigns value to virginity to disempower women. There is evidence in their narratives that they resisted and became agentic in taking back their power.

This implies that sexual entitlement, although considered normal and acceptable in a patriarchal system, can be psychologically harmful to the modern woman. Due to this socialisation, a survivor may find themselves in a dilemma about what decision to make. When they navigate their ecosystems, they become empowered and resist the oppression. This is evident in Terry's narrative that is indicative of multi-layered agency which depicts boldness in the face of patriarchy.

7.4.5 Networks of friends and trust

In an ecosystem, survivors thrive when they believe in a just, caring, and predictable world. Perpetrators could have been close relatives or friends. Sexual violation disrupts such relationships and diminishes the confidence that the survivor had in their ecosystem. It was evident in this study, that survivors had mixed feelings towards trusted members of their ecosystems, for instance, the religious figures who made sexual advances or raped those who regarded them highly. Survivors saw their worlds shattered, however, most of the survivors revealed how they had sought divine help from the religious people they once despised. This is indicative of the dialectical relationship between suffering and resilience which was discussed in Chapter Two and the central paradox in

relational cultural theory where individuals disconnect from relationships that they yearn to participate in.

This highlights the extent to which religion and spirituality can disempower people. Regardless of their epistemic advantage, for instance in Sweetie's case, she based her understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder on spirituality. Their multiple identities and backgrounds played out in the way they sought to build resilience.

7.4.6 Complex forms of social capital

It was evident that in their journeys of resilience and recovery, survivors experienced diverse forms of social capital. These were people and structures that enabled them the access to both human and material resources for recovery. Some survivors managed to invest in social relationships and were able to forge new relationships. For instance, in the case of Talia Bae and Liz, their openness to create a network of social relationships helped them to adjust and develop new relationships that were healthy. Ivy and Jay Jay professed failing to engage in lasting intimate or social relationships. Regardless of lacking social skills, Jay Jay managed to access economic social capital which enabled her to complete her degree programme. Ivy would excel regardless of lacking social skills.

This suggests that resilience is complex and each individual can thrive either by accessing either internal or external resilience resources. When assisting survivors both internal and external resilience resources should be considered. When a survivor builds resilience, recovery is anticipated. In the next section I explore recovery as perceived by the survivors.

7.4.7 Recovery as a non-linear journey

Survivors' narratives of journeys of resilience and recovery revealed twists and turns, pain and joy. It was evident that survivors experienced negative consequences such as diminished

interpersonal functioning, anxiety, depression, grief, anger, and shame in their journeys of resilience and recovery. Emma admitted feeling angry when she encountered her uncle, the incest perpetrator, although she had decided to bury the pain. Liz indicated that she would be very sensitive to behaviours that would resemble her abusive ex-husband in her new relationship. These incidents are indicative of flashbacks and relapses that occurred when there was an incident that triggered these past traumas. Although Patricia found solace in her child, her painful emotions would resurface whenever she met the father of her child, while Emma would voice her concerns on social media. Although Emma's reaction can be termed 'cyber activism', doing it repeatedly could mean that she has not yet healed and is attempting to find healing by shaming the system that violated her.

This suggests that recovery is not a linear journey. A psychological wound is not easy to heal. It is like an internal physical scar that an individual carries for a life time. Voicing the pain through psycho-social support eases the pain and promotes positive growth. Next, I reflect on the original contributions of this study.

7.5 Original contributions: methodological and theoretical insights

In this section, I highlight the methodological and theoretical insights as original contributions of this study. The notion of theoretical bricolage was a key concept of this study. In Chapter Three, I asserted that my study adopted the critical paradigm. Given the complexity of the issue under study, the diverse constructions of the journeys of resilience and recovery would require a critical analysis of the meanings that emerged from participants' narratives. Therefore, the critical paradigm was most suitable.

Another significant contribution of this study is the triangulation of the narrative inquiry tradition with two feminist theories that fall under the umbrella of critical theory: The Relational Cultural Theory and the Feminist Standpoint Theory. Sexual violence is a relational issue. Constructions of sexual violence can be best analysed through narration of interactions that resulted in the violation. The concepts used in describing relationships in RCT complimented the descriptions of structures within which sexual violence occurs. This complimentary aspect of the two theories and the narrative approach brought out diverse dimensions of constructions of the survivors' experiences. For instance, where agency is concerned, diverse meanings were derived from the survivors' standpoints whereby it was revealed that not all are victims of sexual violence and not all victims are passive in their violation. In the African context, agency is usually shown in the form of silence, to protect the family's honour and the self. In this study, survivors showed some agency in seeking justice regardless of the publicity of the violation.

The significant role of agency in the resilience and recovery of sexual violence was also highlighted in this study. The unique agency of participants to take back their power by controlling men in opposite sex relationships was highlighted in their narratives of resilience and recovery. It is taboo in African culture, especially in the Zimbabwean context, for a female to engage in sexual encounters for her pleasure or revenge for violations perpetrated on her. This is evident in Terry's narrative where she claimed to date married men for her own satisfaction of proving her worth. Her behaviour indicates that sexual violence can be considered a social construct that depends on the context. Therefore, I argue that the narratives of resilience and recovery highlighted in this study could serve as a motivation for other survivors of sexual violence and draw attention to their agency to cope with and survive sexual violence.

Another issue that could contribute to new knowledge and debates is the concept of building resilience hinging on the premise of procreation and securing marriage. This aspect militates against the modern women's virtues of building resilience through achieving an education and having a career that renders them independent and being dependent on men. This is indicative of how powerful the traditional rules of nature are. These cultural and religious virtues of procreation and marriage seem to supersede any achievements a female had attained. In this study, it was suggested that survivors felt inadequate without these two aspects and their recovery was unclear.

Even though Machinga (2011) attributed consulting with spiritual figures for health, economic and other issues, to older members of the family on behalf of the young ones, this study revealed that spirituality has no boundaries. The study revealed a growing trend in young Zimbabwean women of trusting self-styled prophets for health and psychological solutions, regardless of their level of education. This alternative path of health seeking behaviour by the young women could entail inadequate care services within the Zimbabwean context to address and support victims and survivors. Findings of this study also have the potential to stimulate discussions about how patriarchal societies and cultural taboos and myths perpetuate sexual violence in societies, and points to the urgent need for multi-sectoral interventions to address sexual violence.

The following section addresses how the study benefits the society..

7.6 Contribution/benefits of the study to society

The study "Survivors of sexual violence in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery" has several benefits to the society including:

7.6.1 Raising awareness

The research on ‘Survivors of sexual violence in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery’ makes the survivors to break the silence and drive the need for advocacy for understanding survivors’ experiences subjectively.

7.6.1.1 *Breaking the silence* – The study gives insights into the often-hidden problem of sexual violence in academic institutions, as well as the wider society, initiating dialogue and raising awareness. Through narrating their trauma stories, victims and survivors are allowed to feel that they are not alone and their burden of self-blame and isolation is lifted. They can be able to reach out for help, which is a critical part of recovering from the trauma.

7.6.1.2 *Understanding survivors’ experiences* – By sharing the survivors’ narratives, the study provides an insight into the complexities of sexual violence, its impact and the resilience of survivors. Mental health practitioners such as counsellors can benefit in improving their processes and techniques when dealing with sexually assaulted clients. The use of narrative inquiry as a counselling method will help the clients divulge the innermost feelings, thoughts and emotions which leads to gradual recovery. Courts of law and the Victim Friendly Unit benefits from the study through utilising the multisectoral approach that promotes counselling both the victim and the perpetrator before passing judgement. Justice can prevail for both the victim and the perpetrator if the real issue is revealed.

7.6.2 Informing policy and practice

The current study will inform institutional and support services policies. Firstly, the findings can inform the development of policies and procedures to prevent sexual violence, support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable within and outside academic institutions. Secondly, the research

can help improve support services for survivors such as counselling, medical care and academic accommodations. Since female students are the most vulnerable to sexual violence, they can be prioritised when allocating campus accommodation.

7.6.3 Promoting social change and justice

Society usually dictates norms and values its members should follow. Through this study, by highlighting the prevalence of sexual violence in academic institutions and communities, some oppressive norms and power dynamics that perpetuate violence of all forms can be challenged. Advocacy against such norms benefit survivors by empowering them to have a sense of agency and hope.

7.6.4 Contributing to global discourse

The essence of research is to add to the global conversation. On one hand, this study contributes to the international discourse on sexual violence, highlighting the need for context-specific solutions and culturally sensitive support services. On the other hand, the findings can be compared to research from other countries, facilitating the identification of best practices and areas for improvement and finally, the research contributes towards improving mental health and well-being of the survivors.

7.6.5 Improving mental health and well-being

Telling their stories without restraint is akin to ‘free association’ in counselling. Narrative inquiry allows the survivor to tell the story as it is, thus it becomes some form of catharsis. It promotes healing and recovery. Therefore, the focus of the study on resilience and recovery narratives provides a framework for understanding and promoting healing and recovery among survivors.

The following section outlines recommendations for further research.

7.7 Recommendations for further research

This study contributes new knowledge to the fields of counselling and social justice, in general, and to the fields of resilience and recovery of sexual violence, in particular. However, it has limitations like any other research study. This section outlines the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. Firstly, the intensity of the analysis of the themes was limited due to the diverse forms of sexual violence that were under study. It was difficult to decide which variable was affected by the study. Considering the subjectivity of the survivors' opinions, saturation would be easier to obtain if a few forms of sexual violence were studied. I recommend that future research on sexual violence should concentrate on a homogenous variable, for instance, survivors of rape or child sexual abuse, or incest instead of studying sexual violence broadly.

Given that this study aimed to explore meanings of sexual violence experiences and how they influenced journeys of resilience and recovery, to some extent, survivors' voices could not be as significant as they should be. Also, since narrative inquiry involves telling stories, interviews alone would not be sufficient in illuminating all the versions of the participants' stories since theorising and thematic analysis is finally undertaken by the researcher. I recommend that future research involves the participant in more authentic ways that bring out their voice in its totality.

Although the study involved only eleven survivors of sexual violence trauma, it was evident that a particular dialect dominated the sample, the Karanga ethnic group. In most of the cases among survivors from this ethnic group, incest was dominant. Further research could explore how familial relationships are valued in this ethnic group in order to find ways of changing some practices that are harmful to the female child in such cultural groups.

Furthermore, considering how much tradition and religion appeared in most narratives as a contributor to perpetuation of sexual violence, future research needs to investigate how traditional and religious leaders can either perpetuate or play a role in mitigating sexual violence.

In this chapter, I have integrated the narrative to highlight the purpose of this study and outline the link between chapters. I then shared the contribution to new methodological and theoretical insights and summarised the key findings. I hope the reader will benefit from the knowledge presented and these findings will influence policy on issues of sexual violence in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

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APPENDIX 1: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (CUT)



CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

✉: P. Bag 7724, Chinhoyi ☎: 263-67-22203-5 📠: 263-67- 27214 E-mail : vicechancellor@cut.ac.zw

Vice-Chancellor's Office: Prof. D. J. Simbi - PhD, BSc, MIM, CEng, FZ'weE, FICorr, FZAS, Hons FZ'weE

HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

9 September 2016

Ms Shupikai Zebron
Number 6083
Rusununguko
CHINHOYI

Dear Ms Zebron

RE: REQUEST TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH PROJECT AT CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

We acknowledge receipt of your application letter received on 9 September 2016 seeking permission to undertake a research with students at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

You are kindly advised that permission to undertake your study is hereby granted. However, you are reminded to observe the University Official Secrecy Oath.

The University would also expect results of your research upon completion.

Thank you.



T. A. Kaseke (Mr)
DEPUTY REGISTRAR, HUMAN RESOURCES



APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER FROM DEAN OF STUDENTS (CUT)



CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
P. Bag 7724, CHINHOYI, ZIMBABWE
☎ 263 - 67 - 27211
☎ 263 - 67 - 27211

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS- DEAN'S OFFICE

13 September 2016
University of KwaZulu Natal
Ethical Clearance Office
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

To whom it may concern

PROVISION OF BACK-UP COUNSELLING FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN SHUPIKAI ZEBRON'S RESEARCH: SURVIVING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN MASHONALAND WEST PROVINCE: NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY STUDENT NUMBER 213574425 PhD RESEARCH

The above matter refers.

I write to confirm that Chinhoyi University Students' Affairs Department (Counselling and Life skills Section) will provide back-up counselling for participants in Shupikai Zebron's PhD research; **Surviving Sexual Violence in Mashonaland West Province: Narratives of Resilience and Recovery**. This counselling will be provided in case the participants are re-traumatised during the interviews or if they require the counselling services invoked by the nature of the study.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further assistance regarding the above issue.

Thank You



Dean of Students

G. Dzoro

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE UKZN



16 July 2024

Shupikai Zebron 213574425
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear SZ Zebron

Protocol reference number: HSS/1885/016D

Project title: Surviving sexual violence in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery

Amended title: Survivors of sexual violence in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 12 July 2024 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully



Professor Dipane Hialele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X64001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX 4: ETHICAL CLEARANCE MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

Telephone: [REDACTED]
Telefax: (263) - 4 - 790715
E-mail: mrcz@mrcz.org.zw
Website: <http://www.mrcz.org.zw>



Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe
Josiah Tongogara / Mazoe Street
P. O. Box CY 573
Causeway
Harare

APPROVAL

REF: MRCZ/A/2173

27 June 2017

Shupikai Zebron
Zimbabwe Open University
Counselling Department
Harare

RE:- Surviving sexual violence in a selected academic institution in Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery.

Thank you for the application for review of Research Activity that you submitted to the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (MRCZ). Please be advised that the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above titled study.

This approval is based on the review and approval of the following documents that were submitted to MRCZ for review:-

- a) Protocol
- b) Adult Informed Consent Form (English and Shona)
- c) Data Collection Tools (English and Shona)

• **APPROVAL NUMBER** : MRCZ/A/2173

This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms and documents as appropriate.

- **TYPE OF MEETING** : Full Board
- **EFFECTIVE APPROVAL DATE** : 27 June 2017
- **EXPIRATION DATE** : 26 June 2018

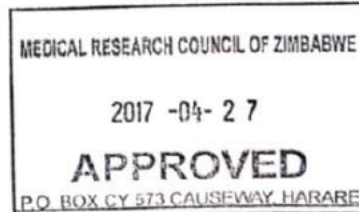
After this date, this project may only continue upon renewal. For purposes of renewal, a progress report on a standard form obtainable from the MRCZ Offices should be submitted three months before the expiration date for continuing review.

- **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENT REPORTING:** All serious problems having to do with subject safety must be reported to the Institutional Ethical Review Committee (IERC) as well as the MRCZ within 3 working days using standard forms obtainable from the MRCZ Offices or website.
- **MODIFICATIONS:** Prior MRCZ and IERC approval using standard forms obtainable from the MRCZ Offices is required before implementing any changes in the Protocol (including changes in the consent documents).
- **TERMINATION OF STUDY:** On termination of a study, a report has to be submitted to the MRCZ using standard forms obtainable from the MRCZ Offices or website.
- **QUESTIONS:** Please contact the MRCZ on Telephone No. (04) 791792, 791193 or by e-mail on mrcz@mrcz.org.zw

Other

- Please be reminded to send in copies of your research results for our records as well as for Health Research Database.
- You're also encouraged to submit electronic copies of your publications in peer-reviewed journals that may emanate from this study.


Yours faithfully,
[REDACTED]
.....
**MRCZ SECRETARIAT
FOR CHAIRPERSON
MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE**



PROMOTING THE ETHICAL CONDUCT OF HEALTH RESEARCH

APPENDIX 5: LETTER TO PROVIDE COUNSELLING (FACT ORGANISATION)

**Family Aids
Caring Trust**



Stand Number 109
North Road
Chinhoyi
Tel: [REDACTED]
webs: www.fact.org.zw

9 September 2016

University of KwaZulu Natal
Ethical Clearance Office
Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

To the one it may concern

**FREE COUNSELLOR SERVICE FOR SHUPIKAI ZEBRON'S STUDENT NUMBER
213574425 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Above matter refers

I write to confirm that Family AIDS Caring Trust as an institution is willing to provide free back up counsellors to assist Shupikai Zebron Student Number 213574425 in her research with students who have/ are surviving sexual violence entitled 'Surviving Sexual Violence in Mashonaland West Province: Narratives of resilience and recovery.'

Our counsellors are experienced and have been handling cases of sexual violence as well as providing medical treatment to the afflicted. We will provide the contact details of the counsellors to the participants so that they will contact them whenever they need them.

Please do not hesitate to contact FACT for any further assistance regarding the above issue.

With Kind Regards

[REDACTED]
Moses Nyamasoka
Regional Manager Health and HIV
Family AIDS Caring Trust
Mashonaland West Region

Email: mnyamasoka@fact.org.zw



"By love, serve one another" (Galatians 5:13)"

APPENDIX 6: CLIENT CONTACT FORM

CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

GUIDANCE & COUNSELLING DEPARTMENT

**SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT SELECTED ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS
IN ZIMBABWE: NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY**

CLIENT CONTACT FORM: ONLY PROVIDE INFORMATION WHICH THE
CLIENT AGREES CAN BE USED FOR CONTACT BY THE RESEARCHER

1. SURNAME -----

2. FIRST NAME -----

3. TELEPHONE NUMBER -----

4. CELLPHONE NUMBER -----

5. TELEPHONE NUMBER OF A FRIEND OR RELATIVE WHERE SHE CAN
BE CONTACTED -----

6. HOME ADDRESS -----

7. INSTRUCTIONS TO FIND HOME ADDRESS-----

APPENDIX 7: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS

████████████████████

██████████ i

Zimbabwe

12 September 2016

Dear

Informed Consent: Participation in a study – “Survivors of sexual violence in selected academic institutions in Zimbabwe: Narratives of resilience and recovery”.

I am Shupikai Zebron, a PhD student researcher in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting a study on female university student survivors of sexual violence, aged 18-25 years. The aim of the study is to explore the multiple, intersecting influences on the journeys of resilience and recovery as experienced by the survivors. Most research on factors influencing resilience and recovery from sexual violence has been carried out in countries of the North. There is limited research on the issue emanating from the African context. The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of how as a woman you have managed to recover and be resilient after the experience of sexual violence. I kindly invite you to consider participating in this study.

The research will involve several interviews that will last for approximately sixty to ninety minutes depending on your narrative style since narrative interviewing is participant directed. During the interview, I will discuss the recovery process including some of your history, your memory of events, difficulties and coping strategies, relationships, factors influencing your recovery process, how you feel about yourself, and how you make sense of the sexual violence. I will also discuss with you your experience of sexual violence. I may have another interview after I have analysed the data. This interview will take approximately one hour. Before this interview, you will be given my interpretation of the data and your experiences, and the accuracy of these interpretations will be discussed.

It is likely that you may experience some distress during and after these meetings. I will be able to support you with help from a psychologist/therapist if such assistance is needed. You may personally benefit from talking about the experience of sexual violence. Research indicates that most people have had positive experiences participating in trauma research even if they feel some discomfort talking about the painful experiences. By participating in this study, you will be making a valuable contribution to the understanding of resilience and recovery of sexual violence survivors.

Several interviews will be digitally taped and transcribed. The recorded data will remain locked in a secure location. The transcripts will be read only by me and by the project supervisors, Dr Jaqueline Naidoo and Professor Nithi Muthukrishna. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. Your transport costs to attend the interviews will be covered by me.

Please understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

I trust that you will give my request of participation in my study your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely

Shupikai Zebron

Date

Business Address: Zimbabwe Open University
Mashonaland West Region
Public Service Complex
Box 285
Chinhoyi
Ph. [REDACTED]
Home: 6083 Rusununguko, Chinhoyi
Cell: + [REDACTED] 8

.....

The primary researcher has answered any questions that I have at this time and has offered to answer questions in the future.

I know that I can contact her by phone at +[REDACTED]/+[REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED] if I should have any questions or concerns. I can also contact the University Research office on the following address:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Or the faculty supervisors Dr Jaqueline Naidoo at +[REDACTED]/ +(27)3 32605867 or Prof Anbanithi Muthukrishna at +[REDACTED]/ +(27)31 2602494 during office hours.

By signing this form, I recognize that I have read and understood the information in this consent form. I will voluntarily participate in this study on “*Surviving sexual violence in Mashonaland West Province: Narratives of resilience and recovery*”.

Declaration

I (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

I hereby provide consent to:

Digital recording of my interviews Yes No

Signature of participant

Date

Are you supposed to include details of Research Ethics Committee if they have further questions?

- All of the above

8. What is your dialect?

- Shona
- Ndebele
- Chewa
- English

9. What is your marital status?

- Single/never married
- Living with partner
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

10. Do you have children?

11. If the answer to question 10 is yes, how many?

12. Do you live with your children? If yes, who looks after them when you are at university?

13. Do you have funding for your studies?

14. If yes/no, how do you manage to pay for your tuition?

15. What is your residential address or instructions on how to get to your place?

16. Did you ever report the sexual violence to anyone, the university counsellor, psychologist or the police?

17. If not you can give reasons for not reporting

Thank you for sharing the above information with me. Now I would like to ask you questions that are related to your sexual violence experiences. As indicated earlier, your answers will be audio recorded, but if you would prefer not to be recorded, then I will only listen and take notes of what you say. If you are uncomfortable with the questions or would prefer not to answer some of them, please let me know.

Open-ended question for conversational interview (probing and follow-up questions) will be based on her answers.

APPENDIX 9: NARRATIVE INTERVIEW AND POETRY

NARRATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTION

Introductory remarks

Thank you so much for sparing your time to talk with me today. The interview we are going to have will help me learn more about the impact of traumatic experiences on the lives of individual survivors. I will also learn about how people survive, cope with and recover from these experiences. The interview will take 90 minutes which will cover topics such as: your history, memory of events, difficulties you may have and ways in which you cope, your relationships with others, your feelings about yourself and how you make sense of your experiences and your life. Let me know if you are uncomfortable as we move with our interview from one topic to another. You should also know that you are free not to answer questions you are not comfortable with. Is there anything you would like to ask before we begin? I thank you again for your time. Are you ready to begin?

Question: Tell me the story of your experience of sexual violence. Share with me the story of your journey of resilience, survival and recovery.

Observation during narrative interview:

Emotional or Psychological state, grooming, physical health state, other

POETRY: Write a poem/poems in which you describe life events before and after the sexual violence occurred, your feelings about the events and the journey you have travelled to this point of being a third year student regardless of the trauma.

APPENDIX 10: FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Follow-up questions

Interview guide (adapted from the Multidimensional Trauma Recovery and Resilience

Interview- MTRRI: Harvey et. Al., 1994-2000 version)

Introductory remarks:

Welcome to the follow-up interview session. Thank you for agreeing to meet. As the purpose of these sessions, you now know that we want our discussions to help us learn more about the impact of painful experiences on the lives of individual sexual violence survivors, especially how individuals survive, cope with and recover from these experiences. Like the previous interview, this interview will take about 90 minutes to cover topics such as your memory of events as they unfolded, your difficulties and your coping strategies, your relationships, how you feel about yourself and how to make sense of your experiences and your life. If you do not wish to answer any uncomfortable question I ask, know that you are free not to answer. I thank you again for giving your time. Are you now ready to start?

1. I suggest we start by discussing **your history**. Can you begin by telling me about your life as a child, starting as early as you can remember, and your teenage life. Just tell it as if you are writing your autobiography. (*interviewer probes for one or two specific memories if the individual speaks only in generalities, positive or negative memories if any is absent*)
2. If you can, may you tell me about a really **painful experience** from when you were growing up. (*probes for if there were other events in childhood /teenage years that were painful, considering participant's ability to access, recall and recount traumatic events, adding prompts such as: when you remember events like these, as you are now, do you have feelings? e.g. like what you felt at the time, is there re-activation of the event*)
3. Let's now get to your **life as an adult**----- what you have done for work/school, who you are, have been, who are important people in your life, and any events of particular significance to you. Whether they are good or bad. (*probing the following domains for personal narratives to determine sequence of inquiry – ability to tell a coherent and continuous life story. Prompting- are there any gaps in your memory, are there any long periods that seem to be missing or hazy i.e. weeks, months or years? Can you generally remember what happens from day to day? Do you intend to forget recent events rather easily?*)

Please tell me about the following issues:

Work/ School history

Family Relationships

Prompts –do you have any family members or friends that you feel are like family, who you know you can count on and who know they can count on you? Are you able to talk about intimate or important things with members of your family?

Romantic and sexual relationships

Prompts –Is it alright if I ask you about sex? What’s sex like to you? Is sex something you generally enjoy, or do you sometimes feel anxious or uncomfortable about it? Do you sometimes dread sex or avoid it?

Relationships in general

Prompts – do your friendships tend to be equal, or does someone usually have the upper hand? Are you able to ask for what you want or need in a relationship? Are you comfortable saying “no” when you need to? Do you have trouble trusting people? Are you ever too trusting? Are there ways you take care of other people? Are there ways other people take care of you? Have you ever been in a relationship with someone who was abusive to you? Have other people worried about your well-being in a relationship with someone? Have you ever been emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive to anyone?

4. Have there been changes in the nature or quality of your relationships over time?

Probing-Interviewer explores changes in different kinds of relationships: with friends, romantic partners, family of origin and so on

I would like you to tell me, if you can, about a painful or traumatic experience you have had as an adult.

Prompts –in recall of painful events like these, do you have feelings? for instance, does remembering make you feel what you felt at the time, or actually feel as if it is happening again?

5. You have told me about some very painful experiences. Do memories of this or other painful events prevent you from thinking about or doing something else? (Participant is probed when they positively acknowledge, on frequency and recency).

Prompts (if appropriate) - *When this happens, are there things you do to try to distract yourself or get away from the memory? Do they work? Do you have different feelings now as*

you look back on these events? When you are recalling events that you once found frightening, do you ever have surprising reactions, like laughing? Do you ever get so upset or overwhelmed by a memory that you can't really function or go to school/work?

- 6. Have you experienced any changes in what you remember about your past or in how you remember – like how vividly, or with how much detail?**
- 7. Are there ways you think the painful or traumatic events you have experienced affect your day-to-day life?**

Prompts – Do you ever have trouble sleeping? Do you ever have nightmares? Do you often feel “on guard,” like you are keeping your eye out for possible dangers? Have you had any traumatic or really frightening events as an adult that are similar to things that happened to you earlier? Are there things you deliberately avoid doing to keep from getting upset? (if yes) Does this ever interfere with your life? Have drugs or alcohol ever been a part of your life?

- 8. What kinds of things do you do to cope or to manage when you get stressed or distressed?**
(probe for both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies)

Prompt – Are there activities that you do for fun or relaxation or to relieve stress? Are there other things you do, like groups you are part of, that help you deal with distressing thoughts or feelings?

- 9. Have you changed in the way you manage your distress or cope with your problems?**
Explore changes since the last interview and, if applicable, since engaging in therapy.
- 10. Let's now talk about your feelings and how you handle them. What is your normal mood – that is, how do you usually feel?**

Prompts – Are you someone who has many different feelings --- like happiness, sadness, anger, fear, excitement, and curiosity – or are there emotions you don't often feel? Do you often feel sad? Anxious or panicky? Ashamed? Guilty? Angry? (probe specific emotions as applicable) Are you an emotional person? Are there any feelings that are especially hard for you to handle? For instance, is it hard for you to feel angry? Or to feel happy or hopeful? (probe how the participant handles these, asking for specific examples) Do you ever have trouble knowing what you are feeling? Do you have periods when you don't feel very much at all or when you just feel numb?

Has there been any change in what you feel, how intensely you feel things, or your ability to deal with difficult feelings? (If so, probe what has changed and what caused the changes.

Also ask if the previous interview brought about changes or, if applicable, changes brought about by therapy.)

11. How do you generally feel about yourself? Do your feelings about yourself change a lot from day to day or moment to moment?

Prompts –

- *Do you think yourself as different or special in any way, either positive or negative? (If participant has poor self-esteem, probe for experience of self as alien, evil or damaged.)*
- *How do you feel about yourself as a woman?*
- *How do you feel about your body? Do you take good care of yourself and your body, or are there ways that you don't?*

12. How is your physical health? Do you often get headaches, back pain, really tight muscles, or stomach aches?

13. Have your feelings about yourself, the way you see yourself, or the ways you treat yourself or your body changed in any way? (Explore changes since last interview, if applicable therapy if any occurred).

14. Does life feel meaningful to you? Does it ever feel meaningless? (If yes, probe for details e.g. intensity and pervasiveness).

Prompts-

- *What makes life meaningful for you?*
- *Are there people or groups who give meaning to your life – people with whom you share a sense of common purpose and values? Do you feel like you are part of a large community? Are you involved in any community groups, activities or causes?*
- *Do you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual person? (If yes) Are religious or spiritual practices an important part of your life?*

15. How do you understand the painful and traumatic experience/s of your life?

Prompts –

- *Who or what do you think is responsible for what happened?*
- *How much does your life now revolve around these experiences?*
- *Does the world seem like a dangerous place to you? Does the way you see the world ever separate you from others or make you feel alone?*

16. Has your understanding of these experiences changed over time? How? Does life seem more or less meaningful to you than it used to?

17. How do you feel about the future?

Prompts –

Are you hopeful about how your life will go? What do you see yourself doing over the next few years? Are you hopeful about the way your life or the lives of other people will unfold?

18. How do you think the treatment you have received in the therapy has affected your recovery? What, if any, changes have resulted from your work with me and/the therapist?

Closing question: I really appreciate the time you have taken to answer these questions. How has this interview been for you? Are there any other areas of difficulty or sources of strength that we have not talked about? Is there anything you would like to add, or anything you would like to ask?

The interview is closed by thanking the participant, inviting future questions, and assuring her of the value and contribution she has made to us, to the field and to other survivors.

The mental status and emotional well-being will be assessed, support will be offered and as needed, provide appropriate referrals and follow-up.

APPENDIX 11: CONSENT FORM FOR THE FOCAL INSTITUTION

CHINHOYI UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
SURVIVING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN MASHONALAND WEST: NARRATIVES OF
RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY
CONSENT TO BE CONTACTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Ms. Shupikai Zebron of the University KwaZulu Natal, is conducting a study in people who have experienced sexual violence in order to determine their journey of resilience and recovery and their understanding of the experiences.

I am being requested to join this study because I have at one point in my life experienced sexual violence and has received initial management for sexual assault in the Guidance and Counselling Department. I should be contacted by Ms Zebron within the next three working days. If I am interested in the study, I will return to the guidance and Counselling Department after hearing from Ms Zebron. I can also ask her to visit me at home instead if I am uncomfortable to talk with her at the Guidance and Counselling rooms or return to the university at the time of the appointment.

If I choose not to participate in this study my tuition at the university and my access to guidance and counselling services will not be affected in any way. I do not need to join the study to get guidance and counselling services in the university.

If I have questions about the study, I may call Ms Zebron at +2[REDACTED]/7 at Zimbabwe Open University, Counselling Department or on her cell numbers +[REDACTED]/+[REDACTED].

Participant's Signature----- Printed Name----- Date-----

Signature of a person obtaining Consent -----

Printed name -----

Date-----

APPENDIX 12: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR



2nd September 2024

To whom it may concern

EDITING OF PHD THESIS FOR MS SHUPIKAI ZEBRON

I have a master's degree in Social Science, Research Psychology, a master's degree in Social Science Educational Psychology and a TEFL qualification from UKZN. I also have an undergraduate and honour's degree Bachelor of Arts in Health Sciences and Social Services from UNISA.

I have 15 years of teaching experience and have been editing academic theses for students from UKZN, UNISA, the University of Fort Hare, and DUT for the past ten years. I have further undertaken editing, transcribing and other research work for private individuals and businesses.

I hereby confirm that I have edited Shupikai Zebron's thesis titled "**NARRATIVES OF RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY BY SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SELECTED ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN ZIMBABWE**" for submission of her Doctor of Philosophy in Education. Corrections were made in respect of grammar, tenses, spelling and language usage using track changes in MS Word 2019. Once corrections have been attended to, the thesis should be correct.

Yours sincerely



Terry Shuttleworth (Hons BA Psych Coun, UNISA; Tefl, UKZN; MSocSc Res Psych, UKZN, MSocSc Ed Psych, UKZN).

DISCLAIMER

Should the student not attend to the changes suggested by the editor and make additions to the thesis after editing has been completed, the editor cannot guarantee the language, grammar and tenses are correct at the time of publication.

APPENDIX 13: TURNITIN REPORT

Shupikai Zebron PhD Dissertation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

10 %	8 %	5 %	5 %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	1 %
2	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	1 %
3	www.researchgate.net Internet Source	<1 %
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