

THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEAVING AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to determine the experiences of women leaving an abusive marriage. These experiences are classified in terms of support factors and challenges when leaving. Included in this study are the circumstances that contributed to making a decision to leave the abusive situation and the long-term effects on the participants.

Domestic violence is a highly prevalent phenomenon that is found all over the world, including South Africa. According to some research, the extent of family violence warrants an urgent solution to be devised, as a comparison is drawn between family violence and human rights violations.

This study was conducted, using Interpretative Phenomenological Methodology. Fifteen women were interviewed by way of using semi-structured questions. The scope of this study included investigating: the types of abuse; childcare issues; the process of leaving – including the role of the justice, medical and religious institutions; long-term effects of abuse and the role of self-worth in deciding to leave.

It was found that there was a significant correlation between the literature and the evidence found through this study in terms of challenging and support factors.

Challenging factors for participants included: isolation; financial dependence on the abuser; perceived or real lack of social support; a lack of awareness around the effects of the abuse on the children and a diminished sense of self. In contrast to this are the support factors which included: family support, financial independence, evidence of harm to the children and a renewed sense of value in the 'self'.

Recommendations for practice describe ways in which the medical, justice and social service departments can enhance their services to families who are living in abusive circumstances by using a strengths-based approach.



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DEDICATION

To my God for His eternal Grace and Faithfulness.

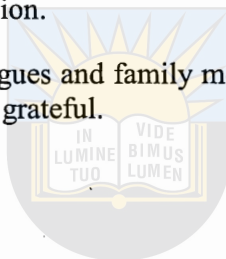
To my son Tyler who is my inspiration and greatest joy.

To my mother who loves and supports me unconditionally.

To my father who has been an example of hard work and tenacity.

To all the participants who shared a part of themselves with me. I am humbled and grateful for your sincere contribution.

To the many other friends, colleagues and family members who lifted me up in moments of discouragement – I am forever grateful.



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My Supervisor, John Victor Rautenbach, who has had the patience of a Saint. This project would have been impossible without his unwavering support and encouragement. His faith in me is what kept me going.



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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to McHugh and Frieze, (2006) domestic violence was viewed as something that happened on a very small scale and was hardly worth considering as a major problem in society. Furthermore, it was often perceived as the result of women refusing to submit to, or obey their partner. This has changed over the past few decades and domestic violence and intimate partner violence have become more and more recognised in terms of the severity, frequency, types of violence and the effects this has on the family and women in particular. For instance, domestic violence can now be categorised as anything from shouting, to throwing things, to becoming more intimidating by shoving or even becoming outright physically abusive and hitting one's spouse (McHugh and Frieze, 2006:121-126). The fact that domestic violence can be defined in terms of various forms of behaviour means that great strides have been made in terms of acknowledging that this phenomenon exists and can thus be labelled.

According to Koss (in McHugh and Frieze, 2006), "25 – 33% of married individuals engage in some form of domestic violence at some point in their relationship" (Koss in McHugh and Frieze, 2006:123). This is thus evidence that domestic violence is a major problem in almost a third of all marriages – which is a significant percentage. Bonnie and Uhleman (2001) state that in Canada, 10% of women have experienced physical violence from their spouse or partner (Bonnie and Uhleman 2001: 2).

Bonnie and Uhleman (2001) state that early research focussed on characteristics that make women susceptible to abuse and their reasons for staying. Studies also looked at character traits of women who were in abusive relationships (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:2). More

recently, however, a greater focus has been on therapeutic issues and the process related to women who survive intimate partner violence. Nicarthy (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) emphasized the need to start asking why women leave and what enables them to stay away from an abusive partner rather than look at why they remain (Nicarthy in Bonnie and Uhleman 2001:3).

McHugh and Frieze (2006) state that in most instances, the solution to end violence in the home is by encouraging the woman to leave, which they say has been viewed as “counterproductive” and “victim blaming”, as the abuse may continue even after the woman has left (McHugh and Frieze, 2006). In cases where the woman does not have the financial resources to leave, has no family support or if there is fear associated with leaving - this is not an option for her and it is therefore unfair to assume that the abused woman has the power to the end the abuse by leaving. This can be seen in McHugh and Frieze’s comment on previous research which says that that there have been many studies done on the reasons women don’t leave the abusive spouse – these ranging from *psychological* factors, such as fear or learned helplessness, to *financial* issues of not being able to provide for the family, to *social issues* such as divorce not being viewed as acceptable by friends and family (McHugh and Frieze, 2006:127).

Weiss (in Rangarao and Sekhar, 2002) states that “...parents may view divorce as a disgrace to family reputation ... (and that) ... some women turn to their parents, siblings or other relatives for accommodation and economic assistance” (Rangarao and Sekhar, 2002:551). This highlights the manner in which family often views divorce in different societies as well as the fact that women experience financial difficulties once leaving a marriage. This also shows the

reliance that women have on family for support when leaving, as well as their need for financial assistance. This implies some form of dependence and reliance on the abusive spouse.

This research will not focus on the reasons women choose to stay in an abusive marriage or the types of domestic violence or family violence. The focus of this study will be on the process and experience of women who make a decision to leave an abusive marriage by way of divorce. I would, however like to make reference to some of the reasons women find it difficult to leave the abuser as identified in literature. This is valuable in describing the context from which women plan to leave.

It seems that the woman may remain in the relationship longer if there has been a great emotional investment and connectedness on her part (Pfouts, Strube and Barbour in Bell and Naugle, 2005:22). Other reasons “include lack of financial and housing resources, lack of child care, few relationship alternatives, lack of employment or education, batterers’ promises to change, fear of...retaliation, and social pressure” (Brookoff et al in Bell and Naugle, 2005:22).

Although this study focuses on the process of leaving, factors which contribute to staying in the abusive situation cannot be ignored. According to Hadeed, (2006) literature identifies various things that impact women affected by intimate partner violence, i.e. severity of intimate partner abuse, childhood abuse, financial capital, the presence of children, perception of abuse, psychological factors and various interpersonal factors. Strube and Barbour, (1983) discuss two main factors which contribute to women remaining in abusive relationships, these being, economic dependence and psychological commitment. Many factors contribute to a woman’s financial dependence on the abusive partner, such as: a low level of education, ‘motivation’ to find work and responsibility for children (Strube and Barbour, 1983: 786). This financial

dependence is one of the main reasons women are not able to leave an abusive relationship. “Women with fewer economic resources were more likely to tolerate severe abuse; they had no alternatives” (Kalmuss and Strauss in Strube and Barbour, 1983:786).

According to Strube and Barbour (1983), society has placed the responsibility of a successful marriage and happy family on women. Thus their high level of commitment to saving the family at their own expense is often evident. Women who are married also have a greater value in society than those who are single and without children. This high level of commitment leads a woman to tolerate abuse and therefore remain in the abusive situation, or return several times in an effort to ensure the success of the marriage (Strube and Barbour, 1983: 786 and 787). In Strube and Barbour’s study, economic dependence was a major reason women remained, particularly if she was unemployed and in a “long-term relationship”. However, they suggest that there are other factors to consider, such as; “woman’s prior exposure to violence in her family of origin, the extensiveness of her social-support system, and her emotional and physical well-being (which)... contribute to her tolerance of abuse and ultimately to the decision to leave” (Strube and Barbour, 1983: 791 and 792).

As can be seen in many studies; finances, psychological state, family support alternatives, education level, perception of societal values, fear of the abuser and commitment to the relationship are some of the factors associated with women remaining in an abusive relationship. This study will examine the support or enabling factors for leaving the marriage and the challenges explored by women who leave. Many of these factors will be discussed from this angle.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various theories are discussed in this section, as defined and described in literature. These are: the ecological framework theory; normative resource theory; learned helplessness theory; survivor theory; psychological entrapment theory, investment model; masochist theory, the development of the human ego structure, feminist theory and the model of energy management.

2.1 Ecological Framework Theory

Goodman, Dutton, Vankos and Weinfurt (2005) state that “(v)iolence against intimate partners remains one of the most pervasive and intractable social problems of our time(s)”. They conducted a study to look at the way in which women used the resources at their disposal to prevent themselves from being abused continuously. They made use of two theories to do this, namely: the *ecological framework* and *normative resource theory* (Goodman, et al 2005:312-313). Bronfenbrenner (in Goodman et al, 2005) describes the ecological framework as the various levels of interaction (individual, interpersonal and systemic) which cause a woman to remain in, or leave an abusive relationship (Bronfenbrenner in Goodman, et al 2005:312-313). This could refer to her previous experiences of violence (individual), her support from family/friends (interpersonal) and support available through the justice system (systemic).

2.2 Normative Resource Theory

Crosbie-Burnett and Giles-Sims (in Goodman et al, 2005) describe the normative resource theory as the belief that the ability to control one’s spouse is directly linked to ones access to resources (Crosbie-Burnett and Giles-Sims in Goodman et al, 2005:313). This therefore

alludes to the fact that women who are impoverished and who do not have emotional or financial independence have a greater chance of being abused continuously in their relationships or in different relationships.

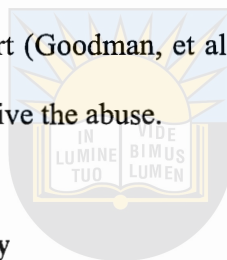
2.3 Learned Helplessness Theory

Walker (in Goodman, Dutton, Vancos and Weinfort, 2005) uses the theory of “*learned helplessness*” to review the way in which women respond to abuse. This describes how women eventually come to the conclusion that there is nothing they can do to cause the abuser to change. In the long term this can lead to depression and anxiety. According to Bell and Naugle (2005), this model was developed by Seligman and was used to identify clinical depression. In a situation where women are abused, the theory states that abused women believe that they will have to face certain consequences, regardless of their actions or reactions. This is incredibly disempowering as the abused woman will lose faith in her ability to leave or end the abuse. In some instances, she may blame herself for the abuse, thus causing an increase in depressive symptoms (Walker in Bell and Naugle, 2005: 23). In her ‘battered women’ description of learned helplessness, Walker looked at the ‘motivational construct of apathy, cognitive construct of problem-solving difficulty and the affective constructs of depression and self-esteem’. In this, Walker concluded that there was evidence that learned helplessness in victims of intimate partner violence was a result of abuse in childhood and abuse as an adult (Walker in Bell and Naugle, 2005:23).

Through her experience, the abused woman believes that she was unable to stop the abuse as a child and therefore will not be able to put an end to it as an adult.

2.4 Survivor Theory

Gondolf and Fisher (in Goodman et al, 2005) developed what was later known as “*survivor theory*” to interpret women’s responses to violence. This is in direct contrast to the “*learned helplessness*” theory, in that it describes how women attempt to leave their abusive situation and seek assistance and support (Goodman, et al 2005:165-166). This theory focuses on a woman’s *resilience* and *will* to survive the abuse.



2.5 Psychological Entrapment Theory

Bell and Naugle (2005) identifies a theory entitled, “*Psychological Entrapment*” theory. This theory states that the commitment into a relationship will increase as the investment in that relationship increases. What this means is that a woman who is in an abusive marriage will have a greater chance of remaining in that marriage if she has invested a great deal of “time, energy and money” into the relationship. Remaining and trying to make the marriage work is a means of justifying the investment already made, with the hope that one day, the investment will pay off. In this situation, an abused woman may try to win the abuser over by being compliant and nurturing towards him. She may also remain in the abusive relationship because it is easier to remain in the abusive situation than make a decision to leave (Bell and Naugel, 2005: 23-24).

2.6 Investment Model Theory

The *Investment Model* is another theoretical framework that highlights some of the reasons women would choose to stay in an abusive relationship or leave. According to Thibaut

and Kelley in Bell and Naugle, (2005) this model describes a “cost/benefit analysis”. In other words, the woman in an abusive relationship weighs up the cost of leaving against the benefit of staying and vice versa. The woman initially looks at the benefits in her marriage and weighs up costs to herself and her children if she remains in the abusive situation. (This includes looking at “security, housing (and) emotional support (vs.) ... frequency/severity of abuse, instability, effects on children” and so forth) (Kelley in Bell and Naugle, 2005: 25). According to Rusbult and Martz in Bell and Naugle (2005), a woman is “most likely to leave the (abusive) relationship when there (is) low relationship satisfaction, little investment in the relationship, and numerous, rewarding alternatives available” (Martz in Bell and Naugle, 2005: 26). These rewarding alternatives could be a new job, a new relationship or assurance of support from a family member for example.



2.7 Masochist Theory

Bonnie and Uhleman (2001) highlight some theories identified in literature regarding domestic violence. Firstly, they mention the fact that Caplan (1986) said that the reason women put up with abuse is because they are *masochists*. In contrast to this, Kuhl (1984) (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) found no correlation between masochistic tendencies and abuse in his study on ‘Abatement and Nurturance’ (Kuhl in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:2). Similarly, the notion that women who leave an abusive relationship tend to get involved in a similarly abusive relationship is discussed by Walker (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001). Walker states that in instances where women leave an abusive relationship, they seldom get involved with someone who has similar traits (Walker in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:2). According to Bonnie and Uhleman (2001), society still holds the view that women in abusive relationships are in some way responsible for

their situation (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:2). Hence the lack of empathy and understanding towards victims of abuse and continued victim blaming.

2.8 Feminist Theory

Dobash and Dobash, Shechter and Walker in Hadeed (2006) discuss two theories; the *Feminist Theory* and the *Object Relations Theory*. The Feminist Theory says that “IPV is rooted in an unequal distribution of power between men and women in a patriarchal society”. This unequal power creates more work opportunities for men, leaving women financially dependent on their male partners (Dobash et al in Hadeed, 2006:111).

2.9 Theory of Development of the Human Ego Structure

Celani in Hadeed, (2006) introduces a theory of the development of the human ego structure to explain why some women refuse to leave a situation of Intimate Partner Violence. When a child grows up in an abusive home, the child learns to relate in one of two ways; using “the moral defence” or “the splitting defence”. In the case of an abused woman, the moral defence is when she holds herself or others responsible for the abusers actions. The splitting defence is made up of two separate ego states; namely, being hopeful or abused. One of these states is evident at a time. Both of these enable an abused woman to return to the abuser without feeling afraid. When in these states of “abused” or “hopeful”, the woman is not able to remember the abuse, as this is a means of defence (Hadeed, 2006:111).

In Celani’s theory, 3 childhood processes are discussed – which are said to “give structure to the human ego.” Namely: *differentiation*, *introjection* and *integration*.

- Differentiation

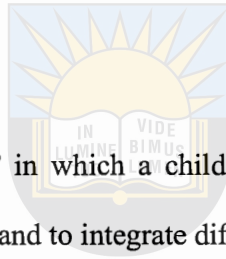
The first state is where a baby sees him/herself as part of the mother. This is called “differentiation”.

- Introjection

“Introjection” is the second phase and refers to the period when the baby/child “internalizes, categorises and remembers what it received from its caretakers – either love and comfort or frustration and neglect.”

- Integration

The third phase is “integration” in which a child “learns to merge the good and bad aspects of the “other” into a single view and to integrate different feeling states”.



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2.10 Model of Energy Management

Reeves (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) looked at the grief model of energy management which explains that a person has varied capacity for making decisions, depending on the phase they are in after ending the relationship.

- Firstly, “primary energy is devoted to absorbing and accommodating the impact of the loss”.
- Secondly, the woman may “have energy for survival needs but may feel little capacity for making life decisions or changes”.
- Thirdly, the woman may “begin to experience energy to make small life enhancement decisions”. Counselling techniques include teaching the women

about these phases and enhancing the self-awareness in order for them to know when they are ready to start making decisions (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:8 and 9).

3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The value of this study will be experienced by all who are in a position to offer support and assistance to women who are in an abusive marriage, those who have left the abuse and those who are planning on leaving. E.g. health care professionals, counsellors, family members of women in abusive marriages, staff in support services such as police officers and religious leaders. Consequently, the study will offer insight into the thoughts, fears and needs of women who are in the process of leaving an abusive relationship.

4 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences of women as they leave an abusive marriage – including support factors and challenges?

5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research will have specific objectives that will be used to achieve the ultimate purpose of establishing the unique experiences of women who have been in an abusive marriage and left as a result of the abuse. These objectives are as follows:

- To look at the experiences and circumstances that led to the decision to divorce.

- To explore the support factors that enabled the women to leave the abusive marriage.
- To explore the unique challenges facing women who have initiated a divorce from an abusive spouse.
- To look at the long-term effects of abuse on women.

6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have discussed the history and different view on domestic violence including the different theories that have been used to interpret and comment on violence in the home.

The purpose of the study is clearly outlined and the findings of the research objectives will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Definitions and Context

This chapter will seek to define and describe the various terms examined in this study. Statistics from related research will also be used to contextualise the various circumstances that surround the phenomenon of domestic violence and the process of leaving the abuse.

Domestic violence is one of the key terms used in this study. This chapter will aim to contextualise domestic violence by including various statistics of the prevalence of domestic violence, as well as the various types of domestic violence.

Intimate partner violence is another term used widely to define the context of an abusive relationship and is very descriptive in capturing the closeness and relationship between parties involved in domestic violence.

In this chapter, I also explore the way in which men typically abuse women; including intimidation, threats, physical and sexual harm.

One cannot discuss the preceding issues without considering divorce and the role this potentially plays in positioning women and their children in a safer place away from the abuser. This is often the intention of leaving, but literature shows that initiating a divorce can sometimes place a woman at an increased risk of harm. Fleury, Sullivan, and Bybee (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006) state that in most cases, abuse does not stop when a woman leaves an abusive relationship and in some cases, becomes even more severe (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 201).

This chapter will also look at the process of leaving the abuse, as well as the effects the abuse has on children. Aspects such as religion, culture, social support, medical and court assistance and long-term effects are also explored.

1.2 What is Domestic Violence?

According to Bachman, Saltzman, Tjaden and Thoennes (in Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee and Sullivan, 2003), “(d)omestic violence is a pervasive problem in our society that adversely affects the physical and emotional well-being of millions of women annually (Bachman, et al in Goodkind, et al 2003:347). Hence domestic violence is not limited to a few women in isolation and the effects go beyond the physical scars that are often associated with abuse.

Holden (in Yount, 2005) states that domestic violence “refers to assaultive, coercive behaviours that adults use against their intimate partners” (Yount, 2005:2). Tjaden and Thoennes (in Yount, 2005) give reference to a national survey that was conducted in 1995 to 1996 in which it showed that 25% of respondents said they’d been “raped or physically assaulted at least once in their lifetime by a current or former spouse” (Yount, 2005:2).

According to Campbell and Boyd (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006), “Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to a pattern of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse by a current or former intimate partner in the context of coercive control (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 200). Kurz (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006) says that intimate partner violence is one of the main reasons women decide to divorce their spouses (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 200).

Kalmuss and Seltzer (2001) cite the United States Centre for Health Statistics, 1980, in which it stated at that point that almost 50% of new marriages would end in divorce and that it

was no longer a given that adults would remain married to the same person, or that children would grow up in a home with both their biological parents (Kalmuss and Seltzer, 2001: 113). Bumpass (in Kalmuss and Seltzer, 2001) concurred, saying that almost 40% of children would live through their parents' divorce before they turned 16 and about 33% of these would witness their "custodial" parent get married within five years after their divorce (Kalmuss and Seltzer, 2001:113).

Weitzman (in Shepard, 1992) agrees with Bumpass, saying the incidence of divorce has increased dramatically in the 1970's and 80's. He estimates that more than 50% of children in the United States under the age of 18, have witnessed their parents' divorce or separation (Shepard, 1992: 357). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (in Shepard, 1992) go on to estimate that 25% of these divorces are as a result of domestic violence in the home (Shepard, 1992: 357).

1.3 Why do some men abuse their partners?

Yount (2005), states that women who are "dependent" on their spouse/partner, away from their own family and living with their in-laws are more vulnerable and have a greater chance of having experienced physical abuse (Yount, 2005:2).

Men use emotional abuse for the purpose of breaking the woman down emotionally, making her feel worthless and less than a human being. For instance, "being told that she is stupid, ugly and incompetent; she may be called degrading names and belittled through the ignoring of herself, her needs, her opinions and any previous agreements the couple reached together. She may be embarrassed in public, constantly accused of actual or intended infidelity; and negative comparisons may be made with other women. At the same time as all this is

happening, the blame is constantly shifted onto her, by a man who sees himself as always right and his partner as always wrong and who isolates her from any other influences who could challenge this – such as family and friends. She is not permitted to participate in any education or leisure activities or receive professional help” (Mullender, 1996:24). Walker (in Mullender, 1996) states that mood swings enable the abuser to maintain “control” over his partner by acting remorseful at times and at other times behaving aggressively (Mullender, 1996:240). Graham et al (in Mullender, 1996:24) says that emotional abuse is very similar to “the torture of hostages”. Hostages have no freedom, are prevented from sleeping, are on the lookout for random beatings and have to endure verbal abuse (Graham, et al in Mullender, 1996:24).

Goode (in Yount, 2005) states that men resort to abuse when they do not have means to get women to act in a particular way. MacMillan and Gartner (in Yount, 2005) add that men resort to violent behaviour when they feel that they have lost power in a relationship due to an imbalance in the earning capacity of each person in the relationship, for instance when their wife or girlfriend earns more than they do. They then try to exert control in an effort to “reinstate their dominance” (Yount, 2005:2).

1.4 Domestic Violence as a Human Rights issue

Christiani (in Fishbach and Herbert, 1997) states that “(h)uman rights abuses involve issues of coercion, of profound ... inequalities in the ability to control basic conditions of daily life. When groups of people are denied control of their basic living conditions, and their health and even existence is placed in jeopardy, a public health issue expands to become a human rights issue” (Christiani in Fishbach and Herbert, 1997:1172).

When studying Domestic Violence, it is clear that Morgaine views domestic violence as a human rights issue, and advocates for the reframing of domestic violence to be looked at more seriously within communities. She therefore encourages communities to be actively involved in issues of domestic violence, particularly in ensuring that abusers are involved in programmes that hold them accountable for their actions (Morgaine, 2006: 125). Bunch (in Morgaine, 2006) goes even further by saying that states should strive to uphold the rights of women in the same way that human rights are upheld (Morgaine, 2006:113).

1.5 Domestic Violence in the South African context

Boonzier and de la Rey (2004) look specifically at the South African context of domestic violence, estimating that between one quarter and one sixth of South African women have been abused by their partners (Boonzier and de la Rey, 2004: 1003). Vetten (in Boonzier and de la Rey, 2004) stated that there are approximately 80% of rural women who are exposed to domestic violence (Boonzier and de la Rey, 2004:1003). In another study, 30% of South African women were found to be in abusive relationships (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka and Shreiber in Boonzier and de la Rey, 2004:1003). These figures are highly significant and show the extent to which domestic violence is a problem in South Africa.

Boonzier and de la Rey (2004) conducted a study which aimed to highlight the way in which victims of abuse give meaning to their suffering in the context of the social, cultural and economic context of South Africa. Some of the findings of this study indicated that "...women's naming and making sense of their experiences of violence were linked to the particular context within which their experiences occurred". For instance, women who lived in dire poverty highlighted the extent of the financial abuse. They also found that most women had

tried to end the violence they experienced, by seeking support from family, religious institutions as well as legal resources (Boonzier and de la Rey, 2004:1003-1026).

1.6 The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Divorce

When considering divorce as a phenomenon, Price and McKenry (in Rangarao and Sekhar, 2002) define divorce as "...the legal dissolution of a socially and legally recognised marital relationship that alters the obligations and privileges of the two persons involved. It is also a major life transition that has far-reaching social, pathological, legal, personal, economic and parental consequences". Divorce is not something that just happens as a once off event, but can be seen as a process which begins with one of the parties feeling unhappy with the marriage and then leading to some form of separation. Divorce can be seen as an escape from a difficult/conflictual marriage and that even when couples reunite, this is often temporary, as they report even more unhappiness than before (Rangarao and Sekhar, 2002, 541-552).

Research shows that both divorce and domestic violence are highly prevalent in various countries and societies and there is evidence that both are on the rise. We can also see that there is a relationship that exists between domestic violence and divorce. This being the fact that there are many women who make the decision to leave an abusive marriage and do so by legally separating themselves from the abusive spouse through the process of divorce.

1.7 How abuse affects women in the long term

Dysfunctional marriages have negative physical and mental health implications for those who remain in these relationships according to a study done by Hawkins and Booth (2005:445). Campbell and Lewandowski, Cowki, Smith, Bethea, King and McKeown, Sutherland, Bybee

and Sullivan, Tollestrup (in Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, and Sullivan, 2003) agrees with this, saying that “(b)eing physically and psychologically abused by an intimate partner or ex-partner has been found to be related to heightened levels of anxiety and depression as well as to an increase of physical health problems” (Campbell et al in Goodkind et al, 2003:347-368).

Women who leave abusive relationships experience grief and loss as though there has been a death. This could be the death of a family, a marriage etc. Campbell (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) looks at the ‘types of loss’ the women go through as a result of Intimate Partner Violence. These are identified as:

- the loss of her expectations about herself.
- the loss of her expectations about her relationship.
- the loss of hope for a meaningful life.

These losses are experienced whether the woman leaves the abuse or remains in it (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 3). Turner and Shapiro (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) echo this view in that the woman loses the dream of a perfect/happy relationship – of feeling safe and loved – experiencing this loss is similar to grief the woman may experience when losing someone to death (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:3). Bonnie and Uhleman (2001) show that women experience sorrow and depression, guilt and blame and decision-making difficulty as a typical grief-state reaction over the loss of their relationship and dreams and meaning of life. They also give direction for counsellors who work with victims of Intimate Partner Violence as they work through various stages. Firstly, in sorrow and depression, Walker (In Bonnie and

Uhleman, 2001) state that once the abusive relationship ends, women are at a higher risk of displaying depressive signs (Walker in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 4).

Jarvis, Gordon and Novaco (2005) conducted a study in which they looked at the psychological stresses experienced by abused women. They did this by using psychometric assessments with women after they had left an abusive relationship and moved into a shelter. The findings indicate that the women experienced Post-traumatic stress as could be seen from their poor quality of sleep, difficulty in staying focused and intense feelings of fear. Their levels of anxiety and anger were also high (Jarvis, et al 2005:400).

Vythilingum (2004) simply defines post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as “an anxiety disorder resulting from exposure to traumatic events.” She also says that domestic violence is a significant catalyst in causing victims to develop PTSD (Vythilingum, 2004: 556). The DSM IV (in Vythilingum, 2004) goes on to say that these events must have involved serious threat of harm or death which caused intense “fear, horror or helplessness”. Symptoms should be present for more than a month and must cause great disruption to the person’s life, in order to be classified as PTSD (Vythilingum, 2004:556).

Walker (2006), states that one of the effects of domestic violence on women is known as “Battered Woman Syndrome” (BWS) which is a subcategory of post-traumatic stress disorder. The symptoms that accompany this are: feeling as if the abuse is happening when it is not; avoiding anything that might add to the psychological stress caused by the battering; being hyper-vigilant; becoming involved in unhealthy interpersonal relationships; possessing a negative body image and experiencing sexual challenges (Walker, 2006: 142-157).

In a study done by Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure and Snow (2005), “108 primarily African American women (were) recruited from the community who (had) used violence with a male partner”. Their findings indicated that women who had suffered abuse as children were highly likely to use violence in future intimate relationships. “(C)hild abuse traumatization and women’s experiences of being victimized were predictive of both depressive and post-traumatic stress symptoms, and being victimized also was related indirectly to depressive symptoms through avoidance coping” (Sullivan et al, 2005: 290).

Therefore there seems to be a relationship between women using violence in their intimate relationships where there is evidence of them having being victimized” in some way as children. According to this study, women who had been victims of violence, “were 10 times more likely to be perpetrators of violence in their intimate relationships than non-victimized women” (Sullivan, et al, 2005: 290).

Further studies show that women who had experienced sexual abuse as children had a greater likelihood of using violence in adult relationships and being “victimized” further. Women who had experienced physical abuse as children did not seem more vulnerable to victimization or using violence themselves in future adult relationships (Feerick in Sullivan, et al, 2005: 291).

Rossmann, Hughes and Rosenberg (in Sullivan et al, 2005) cites behavioural theory which states that “having violent behaviour in one’s armamentarium to deal with conflict can be learned through direct experience, modelling, and/or perceived reinforcement” (Rossmann et al in Sullivan, et al, 2005: 291). “Women who are abused as children might not experience the use of violence against them as unfamiliar. Being victimized as a child might lead to learned

expectations that a loved one ... would exhibit violent behaviour in efforts to resolve conflicts or to assert power and control” (Sullivan et al, 2005:292). It can also be learned that to “comply” with the perpetrator ensures ones safety.

Chaffin, Wherry and Dykman, Roth and Cohen (in Sullivan et al, 2005) describes avoidance coping “as a strategy to deal with stressful life events...such as intimate partner violence and is typically related to negative psychological outcomes” (Chaffin et al Roth, et al, in Sullivan et al, 2005: 293). In Sullivan, et al’s, study, it was found that “women’s experiences of being victimized, both in childhood and adult intimate relationships is associated with greater levels of depressive and posttraumatic stress symptoms and greater use of avoidance coping” (Sullivan et al, 2005:297).

Woods (in Anderson, Saunders, Yoshihama, Bybee and Sullivan, 2003) states that 44% to 66% of women who had been away from the abuser for an average of 9 years reported symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (Woods in Anderson et al, 2003: 808). This study was particularly interested in finding out whether women who are vulnerable to mental illness post-separation can be identified early enough to provide assistance (Anderson et al, 2003: 813).

There are certain conditions which cause victims of abuse to be affected mentally, post-separation. Such as: continued exposure to abuse that sometimes worsens after leaving; grieving the loss of the relationship; financial pressure as a result of leaving; taking on the demands of being a single parent; coping with the needs of children as they adapt to the separation; the degree and frequency of abuse for the women as a child and adult; lack of and limited family or social support and access to basic resources such as food and shelter (Anderson et al, 2003:813).

Campbell (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) stated that self-blame was experienced by women after the loss of an abusive relationship. Initially, women blamed themselves for the abuse, and later on blamed the spouse for his abuse, but then felt guilty for remaining in the abusive relationship (Campbell in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 7). Group counselling is very useful in enabling the abused woman to experience “empathy” and “understanding” within a “supportive context” (Janoff-Bulman in Bonnie, and Uhleman, 2001:7).



2 LEAVING THE ABUSE

2.1 Leaving as a process

NiCarthy (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) found that the “process of deciding to leave ... an abusive spouse ... [is] typically difficult, confusing, and prolonged (NiCarthy in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:8). When making the decision to leave, women consider their employment status, time spent in the relationship, previous attempts to leave and the effects on the children” often within the context of continued intimidation and threats with violence should she not return (Strube in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 80).

It is worth noting that women who have been in abusive relationships may leave and return to the abuser several times before permanently ending the relationship (Schutte, Malouff and Doyle in Bell and Naugle, 2005: 21). This is indicative of the fact that leaving an abusive relationship is a process and not a once-off event.

Blackman (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) looked at factors which contribute to a situation in which a woman experiences repeat abuse: her psychological state; trying to rationalise an irrational situation; the perceived or real lack of available resources and considering when the appropriate/best time is to leave (Blackman in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 8 and 9). This view acknowledges the complexity of leaving as a process which is dependent on the woman's state of mind, options available to her in terms of family support, financial and other resources. The external circumstances and environment together with the woman's internal processes form the basis for decisions she makes with regard to *when* she leaves as well as *where* she goes when she leaves and *whether or not she returns*.

What was found was the fact that trying to appease the abuser and fighting back did not seem to yield good results in terms of ending the violence. Making use of support networks was more helpful, as was making use of the legal resources or reaching out to organisations that provide assistance for abused women (Byrne and Taylor, 2007:163-184).

Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan (2001) conducted a study in order to find out more about the subjective experiences of women who had divorced or separated from an abusive partner. The focus of this study was on the experiences of these women leading up to the decision to divorce the abusive spouse as well as the execution of these plans. This study also included the factors that made it difficult to leave, as well as the factors that made it possible to leave. Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan (2001) interviewed 15 women and used semi-structured interviews to obtain information about the women's experiences (Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan, 2001: 37). According to Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan (2001), too many studies have already been done on the reasons for women staying in abusive relationships, which seems to make the woman

responsible for the abuse and fails to acknowledge the many women who have left (Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan, 2001:38).

When looking at the actions needed to carry out their decision to end the marriage, the authors noted various *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal* and *structural-organizational factors* that played a part in the manner in which abused women implemented their decision to end the marriage. These actions are discussed in detail below:

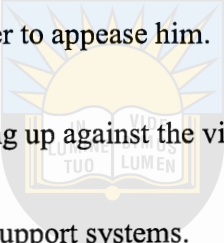
- With regard to Intrapersonal issues, it was revealed that the women generally felt feelings of "failure, fear, apprehension, worry, insecurity (as well as positive feelings of increased strength, self-worth and self-confidence".
- With regard to Interpersonal issues, women received emotional as well as tangible support from their families in the form of "acceptance, understanding ... accompaniment... (and) financial assistance"
- With regard to Organizational support, some of the women began divorce proceedings while living at home and others from within the shelters. The women who had received assistance from women's shelters seemed to have been the most satisfied with the support they received while going through the divorce process.

2.2 Strategies when leaving the abuse

Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, and Weinfurt, (2005) did research looking at the different ways victims of domestic violence try to end the abuse or escape from it. They designed a list of

categories which would provide an index of different “strategies” employed by 406 participants. These participants were recruited while seeking help through different channels such as the courts. Some participants were in the process of laying charges of abuse, some had been living in shelters, while other participants were applying for protection orders.

The findings showed that victims of violence made use of many different strategies to keep themselves safe, including:

- 
- trying to please the abuser to appease him.
 - fighting back and standing up against the violence.
 - making use of informal support systems.
 - making plans to be safe.
 - making use of legal systems, such as calling the police.
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2.3 Motivating factors for leaving the abuse

Women who leave the abusive relationship have the ultimate goal of having the ... “ability to dream and make future plans and to rediscover their own feelings, femininity, sexuality and self-respect... (and) the establishment or hope of a new, safe and healthy couple relationship” (Flinck, Paavilainen and Astedt-Kurki, 2004:388).

The results of their study indicated that all the participants experienced a “turning point” where they made a decision to leave the abuser. The main reasons for the women ending the

abusive relationship were attributed to “intrapersonal aspects” but the researchers also discovered that there were “interpersonal, structural-organizational and socio-cultural factors” that played a part in the women opting for a divorce.

Gelles, Short, Gornter et al (in Bell and Naugle, 2005) identify some of the conditions that enable a woman to leave the abusive situation. These include the escalation of the abuse, potential harm to children, greater “access” to “financial, educational, (or) occupational” resources and support from family and friends. (Gelles et al in Bell and Naugle, 2005:22)

Intrapersonal factors that were identified describe the disempowered condition of these women who felt unprepared and unable to leave the abuse due to emotional, financial or social resources and circumstances. The women’s plans and decision to leave came about as a result of her feeling ready and capable of leaving.

2.4 Support factors

2.4.1 *Family and friends*

Women seek support from family and friends in an effort to deal with the abuse on an emotional level as well as to be safe from the abuser (Bowker, Krishnan, Hillbert and VanLeeuwen, Tan, Basta, Sullivan and Davidson, Thompson et al, in Goodkind et al. 2007: 348).

When these women decided to leave, they often shared this information with their closest family members and in most cases this person was the woman's mother. Women also shared their intention to leave with "friends, acquaintances, work colleagues, neighbours or other women at the shelter” (Haj-Yahia and Eldar-Avidan, 2001: 45 - 63).

Goodkind et al (2003) did a study looking at the extent to which battered women confided in family and friends regarding the abuse they experienced and the reactions of their family and friends. They recruited 137 women who had fled the abusive relationship. It was found that women who had been married to the abuser and who received more threats received more support from family. What was also evident was that the level of support was linked to the number of times a woman had left the abusive relationship. Those who had attempted to leave several times received less support than women who had left fewer times. This was due to the fact that family and friends became “hurt”, “frustrated” or “helpless” when the woman returned to the abuser each time. The women experienced tangible support from family and friends as being more helpful than emotional support alone (Goodkind, et al 2007:347-368).

2.4.2 *Social support*

Women who asked for help from community resources dedicated to treating and preventing family violence were most satisfied with the assistance they received in terms of the urgency with which the request was dealt with.

According to Flinck et al, (2004) “Survival (is) promoted by support from a good therapist, a spiritual community, a good physician of souls, faith in God, family of origin, friends, a new partner relationship, positive feedback on work, strengthening self-esteem and hobbies” (Flinck et al, 2004:388).

According to Mullender (1996), “social workers and probation officers need to learn to listen to women and not to impose rigid categories on what they ask or hear...(s)killed and sensitive interviewing... is crucial not only because of the sensitive nature of the material but because women’s coping mechanisms include suppressing incidents they could not name,

understand or bear at the time” (Mullender, 1996: 23). As women experience abuse, they may be punished for any interaction with men. Any support services to abused women should bear this in mind when offering services to these women, as contact that is perceived by the abuser as unwarranted, may result in further harm to the woman (Mullender, 1996:25).

2.4.3 Support from the justice and medical fraternity

There are many researches that allude to the injustices and incompetence within the justice and medical system. “Contemporary manifestations of the misuse of justice and social service systems continue, as when a woman who has been battered is held responsible for the child’s suffering and is, therefore denied custody or support, with credibility and custody instead given to the batterer” (Bergner in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:7). Due to the historical disempowerment and financial dependence on many women, legal advice is often out of reach, where it can be seen that the men, in contrast can afford legal assistance. “Control and intimidation by the spouse is frequently compounded by the absence of support from the legal and social systems” (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001: 8).

There are many reasons women who experience domestic violence would require medical treatment. Some of these, as identified by Jansen van Rensburg (2005) are “injuries, HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and mental health problems”. Women also have other health concerns such as “headaches, backaches, fatigue, abdominal and pelvic pain, recurrent vaginal infections and symptoms of depression”. When women seek support for the violence they experience at home, their first port of call is often through medical practitioners (Jansen van Rensburg, 2005:47).

Jansen van Rensburg (2005) goes on to say that medical practitioners often fail the victims of violence in the following ways: firstly, medical practitioners often do not detect victims of domestic violence. He comments on a study done in 1998 with South African doctors, where it was found that medical practitioners did not find that it was necessary to address issues of abuse when they came across such cases. It was also found that they perceived themselves to be “too busy” to address these issues and that these issues were “too sensitive”. He adds that medical practitioners felt traumatised by having to deal with descriptions of domestic violence and would therefore fail to identify the cause of injuries, while treating the injuries in isolation (2005:48).

Duma and Ogunbanjo (2004), states that medical practitioners often fail victims of domestic violence when they neglect to document the details of domestic violence incidents accurately. It seems that some doctors and nurses dealing with sexual assault have received some training in the collection of evidence, but there has been no evidence of training them on the correct documentation of intimate partner violence according to (Duma and Ogunbanjo, 2004:37).

In addition, Judge C Craft (in Duma and Ogunbanjo, 2004:38) said that forensic documentation is like a “snapshot(s)” of the condition of the “victim” at the time of the consultation. He went on to say that medical practitioners are the “eyes and ears of the jury and the judge who never saw the injuries or heard the story of the victim... (as this)...enhances sentencing and punishment of offenders”. According to Kennedy (in Mullender, 1996), women who have been emotionally abused for an extended period of time may appear “flat, devoid of affect, drained of energy and fight” when appearing in the court or getting assistance from social

services. They may not understand the urgency of the request for support or find the testimony of abuse believable, as the woman does not appear afraid or angry as they might expect (Kennedy in Mullender, 1996:25).

O'Sullivan (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006) states that even though research clearly shows that women may continue to be abused after leaving the abusive relationship, and that children are "affected" by witnessing conflict between their parents, domestic violence is not viewed as a significant consideration by the courts with regards to deciding on custody (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 203).

Hodson (2006), states that even though there are initiatives aimed at creating awareness around issues of domestic violence, these may not be sufficient to prevent harm caused to victims and their children. He says that protection orders are impractical and it seems that "the laws and society's condemnation of domestic abuse is meaningless". Abusers go on to abuse new victims and do not suffer any consequence for their actions. Hodson proposes that acts of domestic violence should be considered when the court looks at the dissolution of marriage. This might send a clearer message and be more effective in ending domestic violence (Hodson, 2006:388).

Hodson states that "very many countries do not factor domestic violence into financial outcomes of a divorce".

Looking at the practices in South Africa, marriages are either "in community of property (where all assets and liabilities are the joint assets and liabilities of both parties) or out of community of property (where the parties have signed an ante-nuptial contract". Parties are also

able to include/exclude an “accrual system”. In the past, ante-nuptial agreements sought to “separate estates”. This was seen as unfair, particularly in cases where the husband built up his estate as the “breadwinner” while the wife took care of the children and home. The court then introduced section 7 of the Divorce Act which made it possible for assets to be transferred between parties to make it more equitable. There are particular circumstances in which assets can be transferred, such as; “the conduct of the parties” and “the reasons for the breakdown of the marriage”. This left an opportunity for abused women to be compensated for the abuse sustained in the marriage. Hodson (2006) goes on to cite one such case: Beaumont; and derives the following principle from the outcome: “a wife who suffers abuse at the hands of her husband would be entitled to some form of compensation” (Hodson, 2006:402). Unfortunately the accrual system does not allow for the same flexibility of transfer of assets, and there is therefore “no scope for a domestic violence compensation or penalty order” (Hodson, 2006: 403).

2.5 Challenges when leaving the abuse

Schutte, Malouf and Doyle (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) looked at some of the issues facing women as they planned to leave an abusive relationship, indicating that these women may place themselves at increased risk of ‘further harm’. Not only are these women at risk of continued abuse by their violent partner, but harm is caused by the environment/society the woman lives in – where she has limited options available to her (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:3).

When participants expressed their desire to end the marriage, they experienced a surge in aggressive behaviour towards them. There was increased "risk" to the children due to the instability in the home and the women felt a strong sense that they could no longer put up with any further abuse. In addition to this, there were "external" changes in the woman's life outside

of the home. The results showed that many of these women had tried to leave previously and that there was a significant increase in the violence against them when they made known their intention to leave.

The challenges women faced as they left an abusive situation, can be seen in the inefficiencies of the medical fraternity, justice system and social system. The very nature of abuse creates a situation in which most abused women become isolated from family and friends.

2.6 Implications of leaving an abusive marriage on childcare

One of the biggest reasons women leave their abusive spouses is for their children – partly from wanting to protect them from harm, but also to ensure that they will have a better life ahead of them. Women typically do this by “replacing previously destructive patterns of interacting with constructive, supportive ways of getting along”. The family establishes a predictable, respectful environment that provides a foundation for strengthening family members’ emotional health (Wuest, Merrit-Gray and Ford-Gilboe, 2004:257).

Bradley-Berry (in Byrne and Taylor, 2007) states that “some children who are exposed to violence early in life, experience altered brain development”. This can be seen in an “exaggerated reliance on the primitive ‘fight or flight’ response, which causes hyper-vigilance, difficulties sitting still, poor concentration and learning problems” (Byrne and Taylor, 2007:187).

Shore (in Hyde, Lamb, Arteaga and Chavis, 2001) agrees, saying that when young children are exposed to violence and are traumatized, this could result in “neurological” damage (Hyde et al, 2008:109). Other negative effects on children could also include “aggression and delinquency, emotional and mood disorders such as depression and anxiety; post-traumatic stress

symptoms such as exaggerated startle reflex; nightmares and flashbacks; health-related problems and somatic symptoms such as sleep disturbances; and academic and cognitive difficulties (Margolin and Gordis, Schwartz and Gorman, Straus in Hyde et al, 2008:109).

Research suggests that “children who feel secure about the stability and predictability of marital interactions are more likely to regulate their emotions about conflicts effectively, and consequently, are less likely to experience negative psychological outcomes” (Brown, Fitzgerald, Shipman and Schneider, 2007:408). In addition to this, children who do not have the stability and security in their home life and who witness domestic violence in the home show a tendency toward emotional and behavioural disorders (Cummings in Brown et al, 2007:408).

According to Hardesty and Chung (2006), women who have joint children with their abusive partner are especially susceptible to on-going violence after they have left the relationship. The main reason for this is that the children present a justification for future interaction between the parents. This poses a major safety risk for the abused woman (Hardesty and Chung, 2006:200). Shepard (1992) says that women are prevented from feeling liberated from abuse when visitation and regular contact with the abusive partner is necessary (Shepard, 1992: 358). Kurz (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006) goes on to say that women are susceptible to financial abuse when they are forced “to retain attorneys, pay court fees, or cooperate with their abusers out of fear of losing child support”. He goes on to say that women may succumb to persistent intimidation during the process of negotiating the divorce settlement, custody and maintenance issues by finally giving up on fighting for what is in the best interest of the children (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 201).

Shepard (1992) says that women experience psychological abuse when men do not return children at agreed upon times or who “use” visitation with children to keep in touch with their partner. It is psychologically harmful for women to be in a situation where they “fear for their own or their children’s safety” (Shepard, 1992: 358).

According to Walker and Edwall (in Shepard, 1992), “abusive men are frequently reported to continue their harassment of the women in circumstances that surround the pickup and return of the children” (Shepard, 1992: 358).

Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (in Hardesty and Chung, 2006) say that “on-going conflict...can be harmful to children (and that) exposure to on-going parental conflict after divorce may outweigh...the positive benefits of children’s involvement with non-residential fathers” (Hardesty and Chung, 2006: 202). There is little doubt that children are harmed when witnessing or experiencing violence in the home. Wolfe (in Shepard, 1992) puts this into perspective by saying that “family violence... (is a predictor)... of children’s externalizing and internalizing behaviour problems. The seriousness of children’s adjustment problems was related to the frequency of wife-battering... and to the levels of anxiety...of the mothers” (Shepard, 1992:358).

Kelly (2006) highlights the fact that there are factors which influence children’s living arrangements post-divorce, such as hostility at the time of separation (Kelly, 2006:41). Jaffee, Crooks and Bala, Johnston and Ver Steegh (in Kelly, 2006) state that on most occasions children desire contact with their father’s, but there are times when children do not want to have contact with their fathers due to family violence, conflict and feelings of being under threat emotionally and physically (Jaffee et al in Kelly, 2006:42).

According to Silverman, Mesh, Cuthbert, Slote and Bancroft, (2004) women who leave an abusive situation often have to undergo court processes, whether it be for the purpose of obtaining a protection order or gaining custody of their children. According to a study done in Massachusetts involving 39 women, it was found that courts do not pay the necessary attention to the fact that abusive husbands are highly likely to abuse their children, as well as their wives and therefore may put children in danger by awarding the abuser custody or visitation rights (Silverman et al, 2004:951).

Studies on the effects that family violence has on children paints a frightening picture for women whose children have been exposed to or been victims of family violence. It gives the impression that there may be many challenges facing this family. A single mother may have to deal with children who have become aggressive or socially withdrawn. She may have children who have suffered neurological damage which has resulted in learning difficulties as a direct result of the violence in the home. These and many other outcomes can be expected in instances where children have been exposed to family violence, which poses further challenges to a woman trying to make a new life for herself and her children. This once again highlights the need for additional support the woman may require, as well as the mental burden she may find herself carrying whether she remains in the abusive situation or if she leaves.

3 RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ISSUES

Flinck, et al (2004) state that seeking help from an abusive relationship is made more complex by the religious and social context of the woman. Women found it difficult to break their wedding vows and experienced feelings of guilt regarding this (Flinck et al, 2004: 387).

Nordien, Alspaslan and Pretorius (2003) conducted a study of Muslim women's experiences of domestic violence. They state that "people often use religion and culture to explain or rationalize violence against women". Some of the findings include the fact that women believe that the emotional abuse was worse than any other kind of abuse, but that they were able to deal with the effects of the abuse "because of their faith in God and prayer" (Nordien et al, 2003:38-52).

Hoff (in Nordien et al, 2003) further stated that "a woman's decision to stay is a result of cultural rules she has learned about marriage and a woman's role as traditionally defined". From this study it was also found that the community also had a part to play in women deciding to remain in an abusive marriage, for fear of being ostracized.

According to Nordien et al, (2003) "(w)omen are disempowered in terms of finances and awareness of their rights in Islam. This compels them to stay in the abusive relationship" (Nordien et al, 2003:38-52).

Nash (2006) looks at Christian women who find themselves in an abusive marriage. He starts by saying that churches, by their very nature require marriages to remain "intact". When abuse arises in this context, "...some institutional leaders may minimize or de-centre the problem of spousal violence". He goes on to say that "...forms of religious counsel ... place marital intactness before the harsh realities of abuse (and) could...aggravate the entrapment experienced by many abused women" (Nash, 2006:195-197).

4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Hyde et al, (2008) recommended that practitioners:

- Screen caseloads for possible domestic violence cases.
- Obtain additional training in the field of domestic violence and the effects on children.
- Network with community service providers.
- Adopt practices which integrate mental health services within a “broader community network of support” (Hyde et al, 2008:119).

Blodgett (in Arteaga and Lamb, 2008) highlights the need for “crisis intervention” for children who have experienced domestic violence. Basic needs, such as being safe, secure and fed, need to be prioritised before further counselling/therapy is provided – as they will be more susceptible to such treatment options when basic needs are met (Blodgett in Arteaga and Lamb, 2008:103).

Jouriles and McAlister Groves (in Arteaga and Lamb, 2008) highlighted the need to involve health professionals, namely “paediatricians” when assessing children who have been impacted by domestic violence. They added value in gathering information from various “sources” (Jouriles and McAlister Groves in Arteaga and Lamb, 2008:106 and 107).

Counsellors should not judge women who stay in abusive relationships. Hadeed’s study found that some abused women suffer from mental disorders and are therefore not able to make rational decisions (Hadeed, 2006: 118). According to Celani (in Hadeed, 2006), women who are mentally ill need “long-term treatment to repair compromised personality structure”. Practitioners should look at all possible reasons women remain, in order to better understand them (Hadeed, 2006:118).

Ben-Ari (in Hadeed, 2006) says professionals “should help women develop choice-making skills by outlining options and how these options serve women and society” (Ben-Ari In Hadeed, 2006: 119).

Handoff (in Crusto, Lowell, Paulcin, Reynolds, Feinn, Friedman and Kaufman, 2008) showed that due to the “potential short- and long-term negative effects of exposure to family violence on young children, there is a need for programmes” that promote early identification of these children, as well as the necessary care and support for them and their “caregivers” within their homes (Crusto et al, 2008:2).

Counsellors who work with women in this stage should ‘validate’ the women’s experience of loss – the losses of a significant relationship, of a clearly defined role, and of shared economic or parenting responsibilities, as well as the less readily apparent losses of expectations and beliefs about one’s self, one’s future, and the world (Campbell and Janoff-Bulman in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:5). The goal of therapy is to “support and strengthen the damaged self”. “The counsellor acknowledges the clients’ strengths, conveys hope and respect, expresses commitment, provides information about the process, and pays close attention to the pacing of counselling because of the risk of re-traumatization by the memories” (McCann and Pearlman in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:5).

Bergner (in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001) states that the main purpose of counselling is to “improve the status of clients who have been systematically degraded by an individual ... with power and authority over them” (Bergner in Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:7).

Bonnie and Uhleman (2001) continues, saying grief counselling aims to “honour the depth of distress” experienced by the client (Bonnie and Uhleman, 2001:5).

5 CONCLUSION

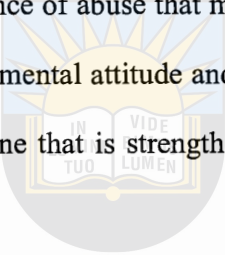
According to literature, domestic violence refers to any situation in which a person harms their partner physically, sexually, emotionally, financially or in any other way. It is evident that violence in the family also elevates the divorce rate in society; hence the two issues are closely linked. Some research states that domestic violence should be taken as seriously as Human Rights violations, as there is little difference between the two. Women in abusive marriages are not able to manage their own living conditions or make their own lifestyle choices as these are often regulated by the abuser. In many ways, an abused women is like a prisoner – physically and sometimes mentally or both.

Men abuse women when they feel that they cannot enforce their will over their partner in any other way. The effects of the abuse can be long-term. Some effects mentioned are Depression, Anxiety and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Children do not go unaffected and may suffer physical and emotional harm that is permanent as a result of being exposed to the abuse. An example of this is the development of a learning or behavioural disorder.

Literature shows that leaving is a process and not necessarily a once-off event. At times, women leave several times and return to the abuser before leaving for the last time. Women leave their abusive partners, primarily for the purpose of creating a better life for herself and her children. In order to leave successfully: it is vital that the isolation is broken and she is able to access support from family or friends – in most cases a mother or mother-figure; that she is able

to sustain herself and her children financially; that she is able to recognise the harm that is being done to her child or children and that she gets to a point where she believes that she has value and does not deserve the treatment she receives from the abuser.

For those working with abused women, such as doctors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and so forth, it is recommended that they receive training on the identification and treatment of abused women and children. It is also important that these professionals are able to correctly and accurately document evidence of abuse that may be useful in potential court cases. Professionals should display a non-judgemental attitude and validate the loss that the family has experienced. The approach should be one that is strengths-based and focuses on restoring the dignity and worth of the woman.



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CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

1 INTRODUCTION

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) state that “the purpose of exploratory research is to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or a person” (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995: 42). They go on to say that case studies are used in order to organize information around social issues. In addition, this information may be obtained through various methods, including interviews and will be qualitative. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) also state that exploratory research through case studies is “time consuming” and requires much effort in analysing and comparing data (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:44).

This research was an exploratory-descriptive study, as the main purpose was to gain insight into the phenomenon of the experiences of women who had left an abusive marriage. This phenomenon can be considered a social issue, as literature has identified it as a condition that is prevalent in society and can be seen in the literature review of this proposal. The study was qualitative, and information was gathered through semi-structured interviews that were conducted with women who had left an abusive spouse. (See Addendum 1)

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

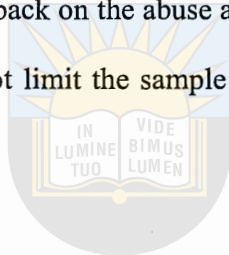
Rubin and Babbie (1997) state that there are times when probability sampling is not feasible, as there is no pre-defined list that one can select participants from. In these situations, it is necessary to make use of non-probability sampling methods (Rubin and Babbie, 1997:266).

They describe purposive sampling which is used to identify participants based on the researchers knowledge of the community and is based on the researchers requirements for the study (Rubin and Babbie, 1997:266). Snowball sampling is described by Rubin and Babbie (1997), as another method of sampling within non- probability sampling. This method is used when it is difficult to identify or find the desired participants for the study. In order to do this, Rubin and Babbie (1997) suggests that the researcher interview participants that have been identified, and to request referrals to additional sources from these participants (Rubin and Babbie, 1997:271).

I made use of non-probability, purposive, snowball sampling in this study. The main reasons for this was that probability sampling was not feasible as there is no pre-defined list of women who have left an abusive marriage. Smith (1996) recommends that when using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), sample sizes should be small, due to the time it takes to record the detailed information that is required for IPA (Smith, 1996:54). The way in which participants were identified was purposive, as I used specific criteria to identify participants in the community, based on the needs of this study. I interviewed 15 women who had been in an abusive marriage and who have/have had children. Additional requirements will be that these women must have had children from this marriage, and must have been between the ages of 20 and 50. I identified 4 women who had been referred to me and who had agreed to participate in the study. The remainder of the participants were acquired purposively, through networking with other research students, consultations with organizations who assist women who have been affected by domestic violence and through other social contacts. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants.

Written and informed consent was obtained from each participant. (See Addendum 2) Transcripts or recordings were only for the student and the supervisor's use, and would be destroyed on completion of the research project. Included in the document for informed consent is a section ensuring the participant of confidentiality.

I also confirmed that the abusive relationship was over and a requirement was that the divorce must have been finalized at least one year prior to this interview taking place. I wanted the women to be in a position to reflect back on the abuse as opposed to experiencing the effects of the abuse during the study. I did not limit the sample to women from a particular cultural group or nationality.



3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

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I first pre-tested the interview schedule and amended it accordingly. The aim of the pre-test was to eliminate any ambiguous or redundant questions to ensure that data would be collected efficiently. According to Smith (In Smith and Osborne, 2007), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a useful approach when looking at the way in which individuals perceive a particular situation, particularly when this situation is not easily defined. It is not necessary for the researcher to have a "predetermined hypothesis... (and)... the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern" (Smith, in Smith and Osborne, 2007:53).

The tool that is to be used must be flexible, according to Smith and Osborne (In Smith, 2007: 55). Smith, (In Smith and Osborne, 2007) go on to suggest that the most effective way of gathering information is through the use of semi-structured interviews which will allow the researcher to explore areas that may provide more detail that would be useful to the study. I

made use of Smith's suggestions on constructing the interview schedule (Smith in Smith and Osborne, 2007:56).

The participants were sought and interviewed, and each participant was requested to refer the researcher to other potential participants – to allow participants to evolve in a “snowball” fashion.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission (see consent form), and were transcribed to produce one complete document for analysis.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

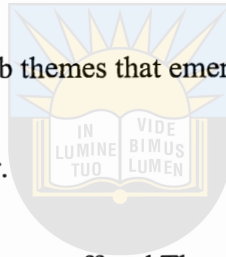
The purpose of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is to study the way in which participants give meaning to their “experiences”. A researcher making use of IPA must take into account the participant's view of his/her experiences. By taking this stance, the researcher aims to put forward an objective account of the participant's experiences. It is important to note that the researcher also has a particular stance/viewpoint and there is therefore a dual process that is involved in IPA: “The participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith, in Smith and Osborne, 2007: 51).

Smith (1996) says that there are two theoretical backgrounds for IPA, namely: Phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism. Phenomenology is “concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of the object or event itself” and symbolic interactionism states that the researcher should focus on interpreting the meaning that participants give to the events or experiences in their lives. By this definition, IPA seems to go

against research methods that require the researcher to study the “event” in question without taking the participants experience or perception into account (Smith, 1996:261).

Biggerstaff and Thompson recommend that the following steps are useful in analysing data obtained from participants. Namely:

- Reading and re-reading the text (a combination of sources can be used, such as: the interview notes, transcripts or diaries).
- Identifying themes and sub themes that emerge.
- Grouping themes together.
- Make a list of themes (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008:218).



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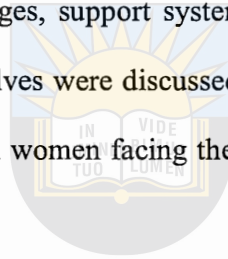
In this research study, I made use of all information that was transcribed from the voice recordings of interviews held with participants. I began by reading and re-reading the text. I then identified the themes and sub themes that emerged and grouped these themes together. These themes were then listed in order to extract information for the purposes of this research.

5 LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of the study was the fact that the research cannot be generalizable due to the small sample size. The information will not be applicable for the entire population, as it will be limited to 15-20 women who are currently living in South Africa.

6 RISKS AND BENEFITS

This is a sensitive subject and the risk was that there could be a low response rate of women who were willing to talk about their experiences. However, the study was conducted in a respectful and sensitive manner and one of the aims was to allow the women to reflect on positive steps had have taken to protect themselves and their children. The study highlighted the circumstances that women faced when trying to leave an abusive marriage to gain freedom, safety and independence. Their challenges, support systems, effects on their children and the long-term effects on the women themselves were discussed. This would give insight to those in helping professions, when working with women facing these circumstances and would enhance counselling methods.



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7 ETHICS

From an ethical point of view I undertook to ensure that all participants would be informed that they did not have to answer anything that they did not feel comfortable with. It was vital that this research did not violate the participant's right to privacy or further traumatize them as they recalled painful memories.

8 CONCLUSION

The non-probability, purposive snowball method of sampling worked well to attract the appropriate participants and it was not difficult to identify willing participants. This speaks of the prevalence of domestic violence in our society.

An exploratory research methodology was used and was useful in gaining insight into the participant's experiences of leaving their abusive partner. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to understand the meaning each participant found in their situations. The researcher was able to come to grips with each individual's personal account of how they experienced the events that led up to their decision to leave, and the challenges and supportive factors they encountered along the way. Atlas.ti 6 software was used to separate and organize themes which were then written up as findings from the research that was done.



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CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the findings of this study. Part of these findings include the way in which participants experienced abuse from their partners, including physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse to name a few. Central to this study are the events that ultimately led to her decision to leave.

One cannot discuss the act of leaving an abusive situation without considering the *support factors*, including support from family, friends and colleagues and the various *challenges* the women faced as they planned to leave. In addition to this are the devastating long and short-term effects on children and participants.

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1.1. Definition and Context

1.1.1 Context

Dysfunctional marriages have negative physical and mental health implications for those who remain in these relationships. This study has examined the factors which challenged and supported 15 women in their plans to leave.

It appears that women have taken on the task of ensuring success and happiness in their family. Being married also has implications on a woman's status, as married women are historically more highly valued in society than single women. When a woman becomes engaged, her friends are excited about her 'getting her man' and by implication, she is the lucky one, but when men get married terms like 'ball and chain' and 'getting hitched' are used to imply

the end of his freedom. It seems that from the outset, the woman has a higher stake in 'keeping her man' and thus keeping the family together.

According to statistics that are referred to above, (see chapter two) 30% of South African women are in abusive relationships, with studies reflecting rural women showing incidents of domestic violence being as high as 80%. Studies show that women, who have grown up in an abusive home as children, are far more likely to be abused in their future relationships or to demonstrate abusive behaviour. This is due to their learned expectations in which violence is seen as one way of settling disputes. Men abuse women when they are unable to evoke their desired level of compliance from their partner. Women's reactions to abuse vary. Some women remain with the abuser and try to comply with him in order to appease him, while other women fight back.



It is the opinion of some authors that women's rights should be treated with the same importance and urgency that Human Rights issues are dealt with, as breaches on the rights of both groups are very similar. In the abuse of women, as with human rights violations, their freedom to make choices and decisions for their own lives are taken away, they are often tortured physically or emotionally and believe that they are at the mercy of their 'captors'. Both women and victims of human rights violations may find themselves in situations where unreasonable demands are made on them. They are punished if they do not meet these demands.

1.1.2 Domestic Violence

There are various factors which determine the woman's decision to remain in the abusive situation or to leave. These, as listed in literature are: child care; few relationship alternatives;

lack of employment or education; batterers' promises to change; fear of batterer retaliation, and social pressure".

Literature and the participant's accounts also show that the abuse does not stop when a woman leaves an abusive relationship and in some cases, becomes even more severe. The abusers do not only use physical violence, but maintain the levels of fear using more subtle means such as threats, gestures and glares. The abuser also displays mood swings to keep the woman in a constant state of insecurity and watchfulness for further violence.

Abusers ensure that the woman becomes isolated from any family or friends who could challenge the dysfunctional behaviour that is evident in an abusive marriage. In many instances, the women were not permitted to pursue their own career and educational goals or leisure activities. Even professional help such as counselling was not allowed.

According to literature, men behave violently when they start to feel that their power is decreasing in the relationship, such as his partner earning more than he does.

When participants informed the abuser that they would like to end the marriage, the abuse increased in many instances. Joint children also increased the chances of on-going and repeat abuse due to inevitable Court processes. These include applying for Protection Orders, participation in divorce processes and dealing with custody issues.

Domestic violence is viewed by some as the consequence women face for failing to submit to her partner. Women have endured all types of abuse from their partners, such as shouting, throwing things, hitting, injuring children or pets and driving recklessly.

According to studies, Domestic Violence begins with physical abuse in 90% of cases. The physical abuse leads to other types of abuse such as financial, sexual, emotional, etc.

In South Africa, Medical Practitioners fail to detect cases of abuse when seeing patients due to the fact that they do not see this as part of their role due to the sensitivity of the issues, their own perception of being overworked and an unwillingness to deal with their own trauma upon listening to the details of the abuse. It was also discovered that Medical Practitioners have, in some instances, been trained on how to collect evidence in cases of abuse, but not on methods to document this evidence. This makes future claims of violence on the part of the woman less credible. It was also noted that courts do not consider domestic violence as a significant determining factor when considering custody during divorce proceedings.

Alcohol and drugs played a role in many of the participants in this study's exposure to abuse, in that they describe situations in which the perpetrator would arrive home under the influence of a drug or alcohol and become aggressive and abusive until he passed out. Abusers are less able to determine the consequences of their violent behaviour, as judgement is significantly impaired while intoxicated or 'high'. This could lead to an increase in the severity of the abuse. In this study, four of the fifteen participants state that their partner was in possession of a firearm and that they were afraid that he would shoot and kill them if they left.

1.1.3 *Childcare issues*

Children are affected either directly, by being victims themselves, or indirectly when they are exposed to violence in the home. The evidence of this can be seen in their behaviour, health, academic performance, self-confidence, withdrawal and anxiety. In addition to this, they may experience depression, Post-traumatic stress disorder, exaggerated startle reflex, nightmares and

flashbacks. Literature states that in some cases children experience neurological damage (altered brain development) as a result of the trauma they experience from being exposed to violence in the home. Another consequence of exposing children to violence is that they would either become abusers in their future relationships or become victims of abuse themselves. It appears that children are different and they respond differently to the exposure to abuse, depending on their resilience.

1.1.4 *Women hitting back*

Beatings elicited a response of fear in some instances, as can be seen in this study where a participant phoned her boss saying: “Please help me or I’m going to be killed”.

One participant stated that after being harassed for about an hour, she would eventually react by “screaming at him”, throwing something at him or she would hit him. He would respond by telling her that *she* was crazy and that *she* was the abuser in the marriage. She states that she did not want to hurt him, but that her aggressive reaction was an attempt to get him to stop arguing or harassing her. For her, this was an act of self-defence. At times the woman’s physical reaction would elicit a physical reaction from the abuser under the guise of getting her under control.

Another participant recalls an instance where she was cornered and in an attempt to get away, she hit him with a knife and went to hide away until he had gone to work.

According to yet another participant; “The one night, I don’t know where I got the strength from, but I kicked him. As he threw me on the bed and he was going to hit me, I don’t

know what I did but I got the strength and I kicked him. I literally kicked him right off the bed and I was so proud of myself’.

For women who retaliated with abuse, their acts are reported as defending themselves, and not as the aggressor. Hitting back did not necessarily bring about the desired results, and in some instances made matters worse, in that they would be manipulated into thinking *they* were the abuser. In this case, the abuse would continue but would take a different form – from physical abuse, to psychological abuse, which at times is described by participants as much worse than the physical abuse.



1.1.5 *Pregnancy*

Abuse during pregnancy was not an uncommon scenario:

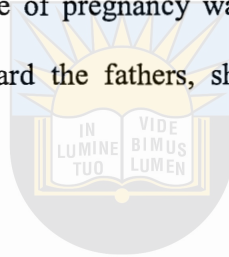
“and he punched me, ‘dwah!’ and I was like 7 months pregnant and he punched me, I was like just under 7 months, and I had to go to work like that”. This is the account of one participant who experienced physical abuse during her pregnancy.

Participants described being left alone and feeling vulnerable during their pregnancies, while their husbands were out with friends.

“I was 8 months pregnant when he started hitting me for the first time and I actually thought I was going to have a miscarriage so they rushed me into hospital and everything was fine and it was about 3 weeks later that I had my daughter”.

For one participant, her miscarriage became ammunition against her: “I got conceived and I miscarried and after that he was always telling me that I am not able to have any children and all that is because he was - he didn’t, he was not physically abusing me, but emotionally, to me emotional abuse is much much much worse than the physical...because immediately after our child passed away, he behaved like this”.

Participants from this study report being abused during pregnancy, after miscarrying and once their children are born. The state of pregnancy was not necessarily a deterrent to the abuser, which speaks of the poor regard the fathers, showed for children from their very inception.



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1.1.6 Abuse in the home

Some participants stated that at times they would be afraid to sleep in the same room as the abusive husband and would sleep in their children’s bedrooms. In some instances, this did not stop the physical attacks, but the abusive husband would beat her in the children’s rooms, at times intentionally waking the children so they could witness the attacks. This seemed to be an additional way of tormenting the women who were obviously deeply upset by observing their children witnessing the abuse. A participant tells of a time when her young son woke up to see his father beating his mother and initially tried to join in, thinking that they were playing a wrestling game. When he heard his mother screaming, he realised that this was not a game and he became afraid. His mother also realised that he was becoming traumatised by being exposed to this abuse and she made a decision to leave.

In another incident where the children were exposed to the abuse, the teenage son tried to defend his mother and became a victim of the violence as his father kicked him away.

1.1.7 Alcohol and Drugs

Some of the women refer to instances where drugs and alcohol play a part in the abuse. They describe situations where the abuser would come back home under the influence of alcohol in the middle of the night and wake them up with various acts of violence. In other instances, he would beat them while under the influence of alcohol and then fall asleep; “because I was bleeding, he had his satisfaction, I was bleeding and he was so drunk that he fell asleep but he did have his firearm with him”.

As can be seen, these women were exposed to a real threat of violence as some of the participant’s abusive partners had weapons of some kind. Another woman says that her husband abused alcohol and cannabis. According to her, he said that the cannabis made him feel powerful. It made him feel increasingly bigger and her and the children smaller. He was, as she described, a large man, who had previously been a boxer and this added to their fear of him.

2 DISCUSSION

2.1 Findings

2.1.1 *Circumstances leading up to the decision to leave*

During the period that lead up to the decision to leave, the data has pointed at 3 categories of circumstances, namely; a major event, a seemingly insignificant event and infidelity. There were other circumstances, but these reasons stood out as the main themes. Major events consisted of extreme violence which had dramatically escalated and in one situation; the abuser had bought a gun in secret and had shown signs of fatally harming his wife.

Seemingly insignificant events are stated as such, due to the level of abuse experienced by the women. In some instances, women endured severe physical and sexual abuse, but one day decided to leave without there being any major events. These circumstances include reports such as “I got tired”, and being criticized as a mother. The intention in the naming of this category is in no way intended to minimize abuse, but has been named as such due to the comparison of previous abusive events.

For four of the fifteen participants, sexual and physical abuse was tolerated, but they chose to draw the line at infidelity. For one woman, the infidelity resulted in another woman allegedly becoming pregnant with her husband’s child.

This section shows the individuality of each woman concerned. No two circumstances are the same and what one woman may find intolerable, another may overlook until one ‘seemingly’ insignificant event becomes the ‘last straw’. These circumstances cannot be predicted and it seems that the predominant reason for leaving was as a result of a major event

that created enough fear to spur the woman into action. This fear was as a result of her life or that of her children being threatened.

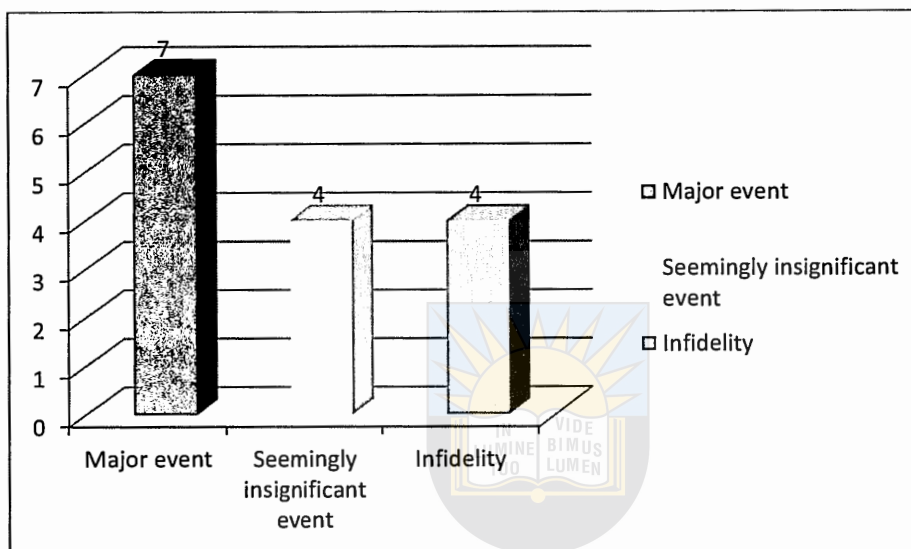


Figure 1: Circumstances leading to the final decision to leave

2.1.2 Overwhelming support factors in leaving

An improved sense of self-worth was found to be the greatest motivating and support factor in enabling women to leave the abuse. Statements used by the women include: “I don’t deserve this”; “I don’t need to put up with this”, “remembering who I was deep down inside”. This shows the important role that valuing the ‘self’ plays in enabling women to leave the abuse.

The second predominant factor enabling the women to leave was found to be for a better life for her children. This is supported by literature which highlights the impact awareness of abuse towards children in terms of deciding to leave. Once women become aware that their children are being directly or indirectly affected by the domestic violence, their decision to leave is a non-negotiable.

The role of family support, financial independence and faith cannot be under-estimated as these are recurrent themes throughout the research findings and literature, though they were not the *predominant factors* in this study.

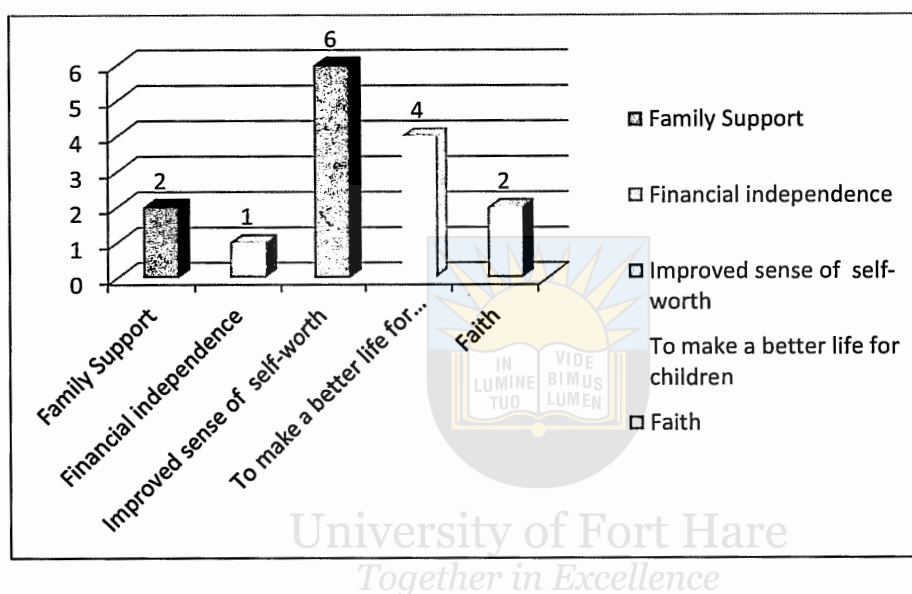


Figure 2: Overwhelming Support Factors in leaving

2.1.3 Challenges associated with leaving

Factors which proved to be the greatest challenges when considering leaving the abuse within this study were balanced between financial independence and psychological issues. Psychological issues have been grouped together to represent the psychological effect the abuse has had on the women and which seem to make leaving the abuse more challenging. Some examples are these are fear of the abuser, a sense of failure (within the context of family and faith), diminished sense of self, the idea that children should grow up in a home with both parents present and the dream of the 'perfect' family.

Lengthy court processes and logistics of moving out proved to be challenges amongst only three of the fifteen participants, while two participants reported no challenges. Their goal was to leave and were determined to the point that they did not foresee anything standing in their way once they had made the decision to leave.

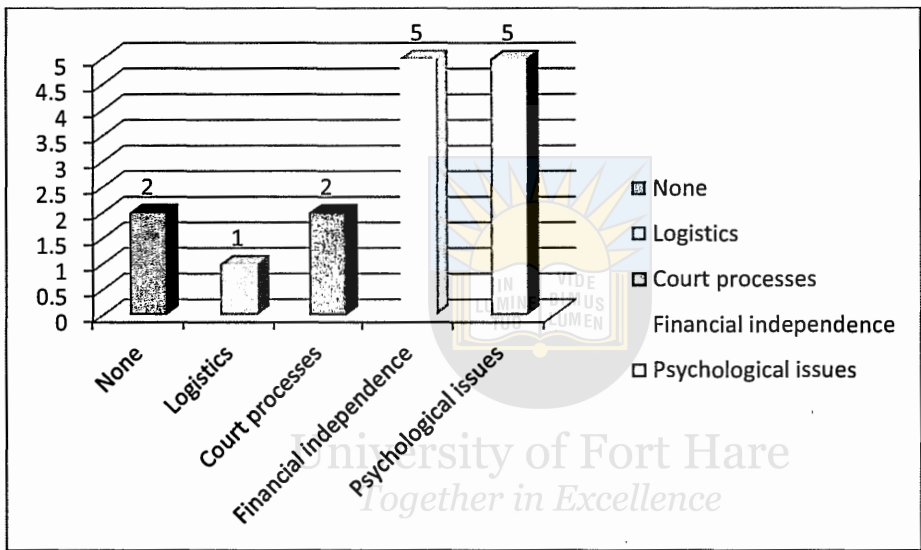


Figure 3: Challenges associated with leaving

2.1.4 Long term effects of abuse

It was interesting to find that women did not only list negative long-term effects, but positive factors as well. On the positive scale, five of the fifteen participants believe that the experience has made them better in some way. They have taken a positive ‘learning’ attitude out of a very difficult situation. These are reflected as achieving independence, having a greater self-worth and a stronger faith.

On the negative scale, participants have continued to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, developed addiction to substances (but are currently not abusing substances) and they report a diminished self-esteem which has not changed since leaving the abuse.

Three of the participants do not believe that the abuse has affected them long-term, either negatively or positively.

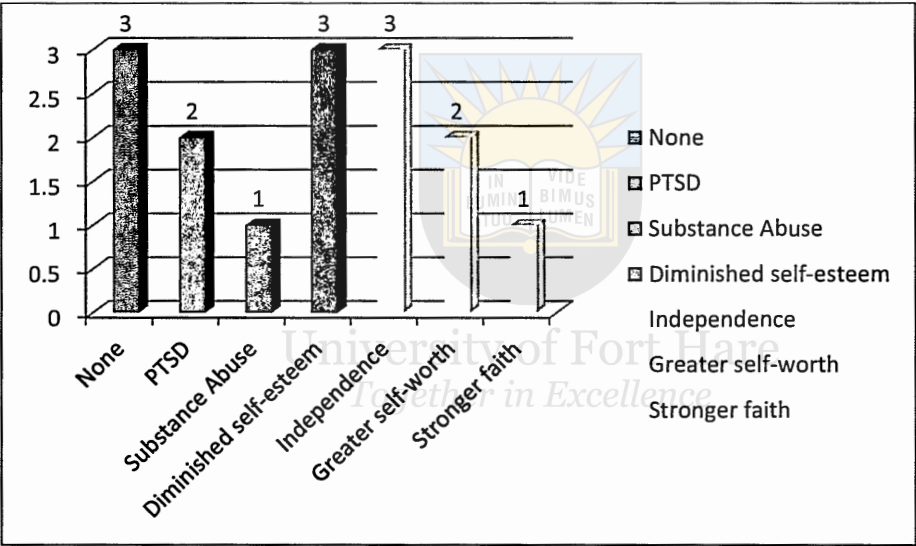


Figure 4: Long-term effects of abuse on women

2.2 How they met

Many of the participants met their future husbands while they were still very young. Seven of the fifteen respondents state their approximate ages as follows: thirteen, fifteen, three were sixteen, twenty one years of age and one simply states “we were young children.” Two of the participants had been married previously and two state firmly that they did not want to be divorced and that this is what kept them in the abusive marriage. There seems to have been a stigma in being divorced. Two of the participants felt that they were ‘lucky’ to be in this

relationship, while other respondents identified trouble early on: “he was an alcoholic when I met him” and “I knew he’s just not good for me”. There also seems to be a theme emerging of the participants looking for some sort of father-figure in these relationships. Statements like; “in hindsight we got married because I was looking for security” and “he seemed the more serious type that um could just bring me on the right path”. Another participant married a man 10 years her senior.



2.3 Types of abuse

2.3.1 *Physical Abuse*

Physical abuse is something that does not just manifest itself in relationships at a later stage of the relationship. According to one participant, at the age of sixteen, when they had been together for about 3 weeks, her boyfriend had already begun kicking and hitting her.

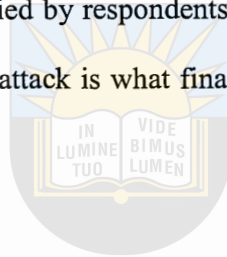
“...he repeatedly abused me physically, but I always gave him the benefit of the doubt that he loves me ... and always made excuses for him, (until) he basically told me that I was the reason that he hit me and why he kicked me around and why he did what he did to me”.

Some of the reasons the participants gave for being beaten physically was for not making sure he was ready for work on time – waking him up late, for standing up for themselves not ‘listening’ to instructions and at other times for no apparent reason: “he would come home 2 o’clock in the morning, wake me up and climb into me or start hitting me”.

Beatings consisted of being kicked, in one instance, wrought iron garden furniture being thrown at her, being shoved or pushed and being strangled. What was evident was that in many

instances, the physical violence seemed to escalate. According to one participant: "...in the beginning maybe he used to hit me once a week, towards the end, say the last six months of the marriage, it was practically every day that he used to climb into me".

Physical abuse includes hitting, shoving, biting and many other behaviours aimed at harming the woman physically. Physical abuse is mainly used as an attempt to gain control over the victim of the abuse. Physical violence tends to escalate over time and increases in severity according to research and this was verified by respondents in this study. This escalation and in many instances one particularly violent attack is what finally convinced the woman to leave, as she feared for her life.



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2.3.2 *Sexual Abuse*

"he used to come home in the early hours of the morning, ..., drunkbeat me up and ... if I didn't want to have sex with him, he would rape me...".

One third of the respondents mention the fact that they were sexually abused in their marriage. It was the experience of two participants that he would come home under the influence of alcohol and demand sex. Two of the participants describe the kind of sex that was demanded of them as offensive and perverted. Another participant describes her abuser as a "sex maniac".

Sexual abuse can be linked to physical abuse in that it is physical in nature and is aimed at showing physical dominance over the victim. According to other studies, the most common category of sexual abusers are partners and ex-partners as they have the most opportunity, and

proving these allegations can be difficult. As a result of this, the women are exposed to repeat trauma of which the effects are no less significant than being sexually abused by a complete stranger according to research.

2.3.3 *Verbal Abuse*

“he absolutely screamed at me ‘how dare you come home at this time of the afternoon?’”

Seven out of the 15 respondents report verbal abuse. The verbal abuse includes being sworn at and threatened.

Verbal abuse can be described in terms of intimidation or threats according to participants in this study. Seven out of the fifteen participants report having been sworn at or threatened by the abuser.

2.3.4 *Psychological Abuse*

“I think he’ll always have this emotional hold over me, you know, through my kids... he’s like controlled us with his money and he’s a clever man and like what he threatens he does you know every threat he’s ever made has happened you know?”.

Participants feel that the abuser has a sense of control over them even after they have parted. For many women, this is evident by the abuser using payment of maintenance/ financial support and the children as a bargaining tool to get what they want: “he used to actually carry on paying me and then about 8 months after he moved out he all of a sudden, oh no, about 6, 7

months after, he out the blue just decided he gave me 2 days' notice and he said I will be cutting the maintenance".

Another participant experienced a different scenario where finances were used to control her long after the divorce. Her ex-husband was granted custody of their son and has continued to place a heavy maintenance burden on her financial provision of her son. He has also made regular contact with her son very difficult. Other forms of control with regard to finances could be seen in the women were allocated funds for the house – what she may and may not spend money on during the marriage, or not being allowed to buy anything without his consent - while he was not accountable for money spent.

In two instances, the participants earned more money than their husbands. This seemed to cause huge problems in the relationship, particularly with regard to decision making on how the money should be spent. The abusive husband seemed intent on making decisions around purchasing even the smallest of items for the family and became angry and aggrieved when the participant made financial decisions or purchases.

Men who have been physically abusive also become psychologically abusive in some instances, as this is a mechanism to reinforce the control they have gained from the physical violence. One of the ways in which psychological abuse occurs is when a man constantly shifts blame onto his partner. In these instances, he sees himself as always right and the woman as wrong. Psychological abuse usually does not end when the couple separates, but the effects remain with many women. In this study, many women felt that the abuser had control over them even after they had left. Other studies show that the women experience psychological abuse when men do not return children at agreed-upon times or when visitation rights are used to gain

access to the woman. In addition to this, it is considered by some studies that it psychologically harmful for women to be in a situation in which she fears for hers or her children's safety.

2.3.5 *Emotional Abuse*

“...that is when I felt emotionally threatened for the first time, when I actually thought; ‘um I don’t know him because of the way he’d lost his temper’ he became..., the difference was night and day”.

Eleven out of the fifteen participants experienced emotional abuse. Participants describe emotional abuse as behaviour that undermines them, breaks down their self-confidence, isolates them, controls them, threatens them and prevents them from adequately mothering their children. In many instances, the entire family had to comply and be submissive to the sometimes unreasonable demands made by the abuser, such as abandoning anything they were doing when the abuser arrived home.

More than one participant stated that emotional abuse is the worst kind of abuse due to the fact that there was no physical evidence, and the harm was therefore difficult to quantify. As one participant put it: “I had lost my soul”, when referring to the emotional abuse she endured.

Other sentiments about emotional abuse – one participant started feeling emotionally abused in her high school years when she was not permitted to socialise with friends, but had to stay home. Another participant started feeling emotionally abused after approximately 10 years

of marriage. In the words of one participant: “what he wanted was more important than what I wanted, he, he was more important than I was”.

Other participants were victimised for reasons such as previous marriages and the perception that they could not conceive.

Still others, related experiences of being told that they are “useless”, being threatened that they would not be employable and therefore not be permitted to take care of their children. These experiences led to them feeling “not good enough”. In the words of one participant: “...you’ve taken all of his abuse over this period of time you, he’s broken you down to absolutely nothing, you’ve got no self-respect, you’ve got no self-confidence you’ve got no friends, you don’t know you’re an individual, you don’t know who you are because this man, this monster’s actually taken everything away from you”. This portrays the sense of being absolutely ravaged by the continuous attacks to the participant’s value as a person.

This type of abuse was described by the woman in the study as any behaviour that was undermining, that lowered her self-esteem such as telling her she’s stupid, ugly or incompetent. Behaviour that ignored her needs or opinions was also emotionally abusive, as was being emotionally unsupportive.

There were 3 factors which contributed to the length and extent of the abuse that the women endured. These 3 factors as were highlighted in the study are: the woman’s prior exposure to violence in her family of origin, her emotional health and the extent of her support system. We have seen throughout the study that women who have previously been exposed to violence are somehow desensitised and see this type of behaviour as a norm so they would

possibly endure more abuse than someone who had never been exposed in this way. We have also seen that the women's emotional resilience has an important role to play in enabling her to have the courage to leave and a woman's support system formed an integral part of her decision to leave. Woman who did not have the necessary support, whether through family, colleagues, social service departments or legal support, would find it impossible to leave, and if they did leave would not be able to sustain themselves without external support.

2.3.6 *Financial Abuse*

There emerged 2 themes when looking at financial abuse; financial irresponsibility on the part of the abuser and using finances to continue to control the victim while keeping her dependent on him. Financial irresponsibility was noted as failing to provide for his family and leaning too heavily on the woman's resources and access to resources. This included spending money that was not his, creating debt that he was not able to pay, thereby creating additional stress for the woman.

One participant states that "he used to gamble ... (money) away and then I had to be left to explain everything, because he never had formal employment ... not even a bank account, so everything was in my name..." Another participant says she was usually requested to ask her family for money. Her husband also used to open accounts to fund his hobbies and when they did not have money to pay, he would ask her to go and request terms of repayment or make excuses/promises to pay the debt. Much of the family responsibility was left to her; "If the kids were sick, if there was financial trouble, if there was anything, I mean his mom died, I was in

hospital, he came and took me out of hospital to go and organize the funeral, you know, I couldn't even finish getting better in hospital".

For many of the participants, it seemed to be their role to ensure that sick children received medical attention, bills were paid and that there was a stable income for the home. "I was the one that brought in the money, that fed the house that did everything". This led to financial instability in the home. One participant tells of the fact that she had two jobs to try to make ends meet, while her husband splurged their finances on entertaining his friends.

In an unusual case, the father gained custody and demanded maintenance from the child's mother. "he's still abusing me financially although we're not together and emotionally by keeping my son from me".

Financial control referred to the way in which the man used finances to control the woman. This was done in many ways, such as not allowing her to work or study further, dictating how finances should be spent on the household and making sure the woman gets his consent before buying even the most inexpensive items for the home or the children.

2.4 Leaving the abuse

2.4.1 *The last straw*

"That was the night when he broke my leg ...he said to me that it was because of my mouth that he did that; so he still didn't feel any remorse for what he had done and I think that was a turning point in my life where I decided I don't need this guy in my life and it took me

almost ten years to rid myself of this person and ...I never looked back. It was the last straw, I moved out of the house, I took everything that belonged to me and I took my child and we left.”

When considering the participants accounts of the last straw that made them decide to leave, participants name more than one factor as the last straw. Four participants refer to one major physical attack such as: “My final decision when he beat me he had punched me out and I woke up and he was choking me”. This escalation of violence seemed to convince them that they needed to leave if they wanted to physically survive the abuse. Three of the women state emphatically that if they had not left, he would have killed them.

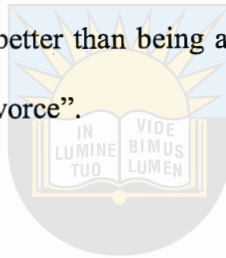
For another participant, she felt that the final straw, was not an event but rather a mutual decision that they’d be better off apart. From her side, however, she had never felt supported by him financially or otherwise. For 2 participants, his infidelity was something that they were not able to tolerate. They had put up with much verbal and physical abuse, but when it was established that he was involved with someone else, and was unwilling to end it, they felt that this was a clear message that they need to move on from this marriage.

Two participants link their leaving directly to support they received from different institutions: one being the court, and the other an NGO that offers support to people with addictions, and their families. In one instance, the court provided her with the protection she needed to put plans in place to leave by using a Protection Order. In another instance, the facts about substance abuse were enough to convince the woman that her situation might not necessarily change should the abuser – who abused alcohol – not decide that he wants to stop drinking.

One participant states that the final straw was when her daughter sat her down and told her that they need to leave. This was after a significant physical attack on the woman. For another participant, she just felt that she could not tolerate any more emotional anguish.

In some instances, the last straw seemed less serious than previous offences, but it was the last incident that tipped the balance and determined her leaving.

“he came home one night and said he’d been to a strip club and I said oh did you have fun? He said oh, very much fun, much better than being at home, and then I went to work the next day and found a lawyer and got a divorce”.



2.4.2 *Support Factors when leaving*

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“I had a very good support system.”

- ***Support from mother***

Support from a mother is worthy of special mention. “...my mother was fully supportive”. The woman’s mother is acknowledged/mentioned in excess of fifteen times. For seven of the fifteen women, their mother and in one case a mother-figure played a major role in enabling the woman to leave the abusive situation through her direct and active support. Participants describe their mother’s as “incredible” and “very supportive”. During difficult times, the women were able to send their children to their mothers. Mothers seemed particularly tuned in to their daughter’s pain and burden they bore as a result of the abuse. According to one participant, her mother became physically sick until she left her abuser.

For some women, they were able to return to their mother's homes occasionally as a reprieve from the abuse, but would then go back to the abuser. In many instances, the women did not leave as a once-off event, but left the abuser several times.

"...and then when he upsets me I move back home so that is basically how it went".

- ***Support from family***

"(my cousin) said to me 'It's okay you can come' I had somewhere to come and although I didn't know anyone I had a support structure that was waiting for me..."

Participants mention support that they received from various people in their lives and not only from their mothers. Mention was made of father's, brother's, sister's, friends and cousin's, uncles, colleagues, neighbours, nanny's and even customers.

"you don't have to sit here, I don't have to die here because my family made it very clear to them and to me that when things are not going my way or if I feel like I've had enough I can always go back home".

"I came to a whole new different province where the only people I knew was (my brother and cousin)." One participant mentioned the encouragement and hope she received from her cousin who gave her a candle for each child that she could light when she missed her children, and that would help her to feel close to them. This was particularly meaningful and comforting for her during these difficult times while she was establishing herself in a new town in preparation for her children to come and live with her.

In some instances, it was the family of the abuser who offered much-needed support. Reference is made to the abuser's sister, mother and in one instance, his ex-girlfriend provided affirmation and confirmed that this is in fact an abusive marriage. "I spoke to an ex-girlfriend of his... and I said to her 'this is what I've experienced, ... am I just making excuses ...or is there any truth to this?' and she said 'well I went through exactly the same thing...'".

Friends also confirmed certain suspicions of abuse; "I said 'do you think (ex-husband) really bullies me?' 'yes, we've been watching it for years and wondering when you were gonna wake up.' And I was like flabbergasted".

This need for affirmation and confirmation seems to indicate that women in abusive marriages rely on feedback from their various sources of support. They question their own experiences and doubt their interpretation of what they endure. Perhaps more weight is placed on others views due to the de-valuation of their own self-belief and self-esteem. According to one participant, her friends reflected to her that she was not ok and helped her by assuring her that she would be better off without her abusive husband.

"Yes they are your problems, but if there are people around you who are helping you, supporting you, they make you see things".

It is clear that through family support, participants had the courage and the assurance that they were making the best decision to leave their abusive partner. They also knew that once they had left, they would not be alone – there would be support available on the other side of their decision.

- ***Support from the employer or colleagues***

“...it was the most amazing bunch of people - they made me feel like a person”.

A third of the participants describe receiving tremendous support from their employer, colleagues and ex-colleagues who they now regard as friends. According to the participants, their colleagues assisted in many ways, such as; listening and giving advice, providing transport to a Doctor, providing accommodation, restoring dignity and making it possible for the woman to transfer to a vacancy closer to her home.



- ***Support through faith or religion***

“I do believe that ...I do have a personal relationship with the Lord and that He does know exactly why I am like I am. It was only being able to continue and know that the Lord was there because without Him I couldn't have managed...I mean there were days when things were really tough and I would just go to bed knowing that He wouldn't let my kids go without”.

Through her faith, one woman says she was able to forgive her abusive ex-husband and his family for everything she had experienced. Another woman believes that her faith in God helped her to endure the difficult financial times following her divorce, knowing that she would be provided for. She narrates a story of a Christian lady who came to visit her with some money, saying she believed that God wanted her to give her this gift. She used this money to buy a sewing machine and start a small business which enabled her to support her family.

Some participants make mention of church friends, church counsellors and their pastors who provided support during their abusive marriage and after they had left.

- *Support through justice system*

“he had been sending me abusive SMS’s but not obviously abusive, just like threats like ‘move to (place’s name) and you will pay!’ and all that ‘the wheel turns’ and ‘what goes around comes around’ and he would send it at one in the morning, at two in the morning and three in the morning and so I opened up a I applied for a protection order to stop this”.

Fourteen out of the fifteen women interviewed, had had contact with the justice system as a result of their divorce. One participant had had a traditional marriage so the dissolution of their marriage was a matter of divorcing in a traditional manner. This was done by calling the extended family together and telling them that they would no longer be married. The family appealed to the participant to re-consider, but she had made up her mind after years of heartache.

Types of assistance that the women received from the Justice system were around applying for Protection Orders, applying for maintenance for their children and ensuring that they did not lose custody of their children – which was used as a threat at times. “So if I wanted my children I’d have to fight for it”.

Only two of the women were able to afford a lawyer. The others relied on assistance from the state.

Protection Orders did not guarantee that the women were protected from the violence once and for all: “... (and he just never came back?) From there we went to court several times, they locked him up”. However, the role that the court served is evident in assisting women to

protect themselves. Attending court processes was also viewed as stressful and intimidating by the women.

Police were often called upon when violence ensued. One woman relates a story of sending her son to a neighbour to phone the police for help – incidentally on the day the Protection Order was handed to the perpetrator “to phone the police because then they knew my life would be at stake”.

- ***Financial Independence***

“...that if I go to work and earn a salary at the end of the month then I was not going to have any more challenges because my salary would support me with everything that I want to do”.

Financial security was a major factor in women being able to leave the abusive situation. In one instance the woman knew that the children’s fraternal grandparents would support the children financially, and this gave them peace of mind. When the participants decided to leave the abusive relationship, they had different circumstances. Only six of the participants were employed and one participant relied solely on maintenance. Five of the participants relied on family for their income and for three of the participants, leaving the abuser made no difference to their financial situation, as they received no financial support from him in any case. (See figure 1 below)

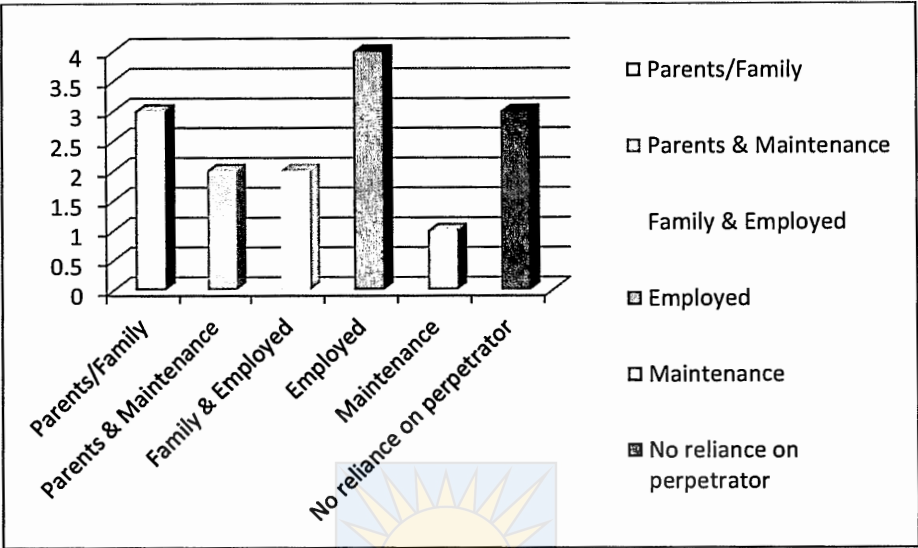


Figure 5: Financial Situation at the time of leaving

• **Support from medical fraternity**

“Things during that time got so bad that my mom took me to a psychologist, and I said to her that I don’t know how I was going to make it through all of this”.

The participants made use of various facets of the medical fraternity. Three of the women were admitted to In-patient treatment centres. While admitted, they were treated by Psychologists, Psychiatrists and Nurses.

The reasons for receiving treatment from the medical fraternity were related to mental health as well as physical health. At times women had to see their GP or go to a hospital due to the physical abuse they endured, ranging from broken ribs, a broken leg and other injuries.

At times, GP’s fulfilled the role of counsellors and the participants were able to debrief with them.

- ***Self-belief***

Self-belief (which can be seen as the opposite of what is described by one participant as ‘loss of self’ in the previous section) was vital in enabling the participants to leave the abusive situation. By coming to a realisation that they deserved a better life, they were freed from a belief that the abuse they endure is their due. Perhaps this is in line with the Masochist theory that women remain in an abusive marriage as a result of their willingness to suffer. When women no longer take a masochistic stance, they are able to break free from the abuse.

“...knowing that I wasn’t the person that he said I was...” (and what helped you to know that?) “I got to know myself”.

“...maybe just my knowing, remembering who I was deep down inside”.

“You don’t need a magistrate to tell you that he is not good enough for you or for the children”.

The women experienced tangible support from family and friends as being more helpful than emotional support alone. Support was sought from family and friends, colleagues and religious institutions to name a few. State legal aid services were reportedly unprofessional in the way they represented the women. Research suggests that the external support also provided a reference for the woman who placed more weight on others views than their own, due to their diminished self-belief and self-esteem. This reference gave her the courage to make the decision to leave, with the knowledge that she was not alone and would receive support and assistance.

2.4.3 *Challenges when leaving*

- ***Financial Dependence***

It is clear from the study that lack of financial security played a major role in preventing the women from leaving the abusive situation sooner. One third of the participants mention finances as one of the major challenges when leaving the abusive marriage.

- ***Justice System***

Challenges faced by women regarding the justice system as recorded in the study are:

- difficulties they had in enforcing maintenance through the courts. "...he ... just decided [to give] me 2 days' notice and he said I will be cutting the maintenance".
- time taken for the police to arrive in an emergency situation.
- time taken for the divorce to be finalised.
- the division of the joint estate is listed as another.
- judgement and lack of empathy one participant experienced when trying to obtain a protection order.

- ***Lack of social support***

Other challenges women faced was rejection from social clubs, the community in which they lived (neighbours) and the abusers family.

Nine of the fifteen participants reported feeling very isolated as a result of the abuse. The abusive spouse prevented the women from maintaining relationships with friends or family to the point that her support system was diminished or non-existent. This posed a challenge for many women as they planned to leave the abusive marriage: *“when I left not knowing who I was, I had no friends”*. The participant’s families also reached a point where they were no longer willing to support the women;

“My family at this stage didn’t want anything to do with me, because they had helped me out for so long”.

“For my family, err my parents didn’t believe in people divorcing and err when I err I didn’t want to tell them because I had been telling my mother that things are not right and she would tell me that you you need to stay”.

- ***Religious factors***

From a religious point of view, one participant believes that she would have received greater support had it not been for the fact that her church in her view is a “male-dominated” church, in which men are encouraged to be rulers of their homes, leaving little power to the women while at the same time allowing the man to abuse his power.

- ***Loss of 'self'***

One of the biggest challenges as described by one participant was her loss of self. More specifically, losing her “self-confidence” and her “personality” and feeling like she did not know who she was.

“I had a name, I didn’t have a personality, I didn’t have confidence, and I didn’t have anything ...so my biggest challenge was to find out who I am because I need to know who I am so I can raise my children”.

Some of the challenges as experienced by women include the lack of support from courts, women’s organisations and medical facilities. After leaving, there are also the difficulties of being a single parent while managing the children’s adaptation to the new situation. In some instances the women’s main need was related to basic resources such as food and shelter after leaving the abuse.

Literature states that the women’s level of support from family was linked to the number of times she had left the abuser. The fewer times she had left previously, the more support she received. Along with the isolation women experienced was the fact that there were few support options when she decided to leave.

2.4.4 Implications of leaving on Childcare

Statements around children were recorded one hundred and seventy five times from the various transcripts – this shows that issues around children and their well-being was a major concern for the participants.

- ***Participants Reflections:***

Many participants allude to the fact that there were changes in the relationship once they started having children. For example, one participant states that she started challenging her husband when she became a mother due to the new role she took on in her home.

“So I said to myself, ‘if (son) has to grow up without his dad, he will be happy, rather than (son) growing up with his mum and his dad and them fighting all the time and being miserable all the time, which would have a negative effect on him and him thinking that it is right for parents to treat each other like that”.

“...so if anybody out there needs to get a divorce, get the divorce and get it over with and start your life over because I don’t agree with this thing that you stay with each other for the sake of the children”.

There seems to have been a conflict in whether it would be less harmful for the children if the participant remained in the marriage or if she left. For one participant, she did not want her child to be raised by someone else. For another participant however, acknowledged that her child’s father was not living up to his responsibility as a father. A theme that came through for many of the participants was a longing for the children to grow up in a home with both parents, while at the same time stating that they did not necessarily agree that it was always best to keep a dysfunctional marriage intact ‘for the sake of the children’. These participants recognised the fact that although it was an ideal that children are raised in a home with both mother and father, that an abusive environment could do more harm than good. *“They remember crying, they try to be strong for you and that’s not a child’s job so don’t say you’re doing it for the children ‘cause you’re doing it for him not the children”.*

“...when he stole from the children I saw he’s capable of hurting the children and I had to make sure that they have a better life”.

What was clear, though, was that once there was an indication that the children were being harmed, deciding to leave the abusive marriage was no longer debatable and the participant then made a decision to leave. When asked about her biggest motivation for leaving, nine of the 15 participants mentioned their children as one of the main motivating factors in making the decision to leave – when they realised that their children are being harmed as a result of the abuse in the home. Other factors which impact on views about the child’s welfare, as can be seen by one participant; “There’s your sense of responsibility towards your family your children and your God”.

For one participant, she had acknowledged the loss of ‘self’ as a result of the abuse, but realising that she could still “fight for ...(her) kids” helped her to make the decision to leave. Leaving the abuse was for the purpose of “making a better life for me and my kids” as one participant described her decision.

“... (b)ecause I said to myself, if I die, my child will not have a mother”.

For another participant, her clarity about leaving came when her home was burgled one night while her and her son were sleeping and her husband was out (as he always was) leaving them vulnerable at home. The purpose of leaving in her case was to protect herself and her son, by moving to her parents’ home.

- ***Regarding using the children as a means to control the participants:***

“I think he’ll always have this emotional hold over me, you know, through my kids...”.

“He would try and get me to do what he wanted me to do using the children”.

Participants experienced and perceived control from their husbands (or ex-husbands) in various ways. In some instances, it was seen as financial control by withholding or threatening to withhold maintenance, in other instances it was by using contact with children as a way to have contact with the participant. Emotional and Psychological control was also experienced by one participant, who expressed fear she had that the children’s father would influence her children negatively and turn them against her.

“I still live in fear that he’ll turn his kids against me and like make it my fault that we haven’t lived as well as what we would have if we had stayed with him because his biggest thing is that I left him and that’s the truth because I did, but why is an issue that I don’t want to tell my kids”.

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Participants reflected on the scars that were left on their children as a result of the abuse as well as the potential damage that may have been done psychologically, had they remained in the situation.

- ***Keeping children safe by sending them to family:***

“My children had to be fed so I sent them to my mother”.

“I was scared he’s still going to come after me cause he was capable of it I had to leave my children for a while...”.

In some situations, participants made a decision to send their children to live with family for a time to ensure their safety. At times, children were sent to family while the participant re-established herself after leaving the abusive situation or recuperated in a Mental Institution.

Asking relatives to take care of children or moving to family with their children was not always convenient or welcomed. "...her daughter coming home with 2 children and she had warned me not to marry this okie, but we don't listen, okay so that's why I went back to him". When this arrangement didn't work, participants were sometimes forced to return to the abusive situation.

In cases where participants were not financially able to sustain themselves without the abusive partner, they found it difficult to make the decision to end the relationship if it meant that they'd have to return to their parents. It was also difficult for the participants to come to terms with the loss of their independence and losing their home that they'd established as it was an additional loss, other than the loss of the marriage and the relationship.

"I don't want to move back to mom and dad with my children, I like my own place, this is my home, I've built it up, I took it from nothing, I spent money on furniture and I've made it into my home. There were many times that I wanted to leave but I couldn't leave for the simple reason that I didn't want to move back home and you try and carry on with my two children, I couldn't do it financially so I was trying to work out something".

There were also regrets that were expressed with regard to leaving and protecting the children, in spite of the challenges associated with leaving: "I failed my children in the sense that I kept them in that hell we were living in then instead of taking them and moving in and

living with the folks for a couple of months or whatever until I could find my feet or find a roommate or find someone to share a house with me...”.

- ***Direct and Indirect Abuse towards the children:***

“He came after me, pushed me down, strangled me and our baby woke up in the middle of the night looked at us and he thought we were playing you know, WW (wrestling) and he asked us “who is Batista, who is Basterio” and that hit me hard to say “why am I exposing my child to this?”.

“What she used to do, as small as what she was, when he starts hitting me, the first thing she used to do was run and fetch (son) and go to her room and lock her and (son) in the bedroom. So they could hear the screaming and shouting and everything else but they couldn’t see it... (a)nd my daughter, emotionally she was totally a mess”.

There were very few reports of direct abuse from the father towards their children, but reports of indirect abuse was evident. Examples of this included children being exposed to and witnessing their mother’s being abused, to being driven by a father who was under the influence of alcohol. Types of abuse included being sworn at, hit and insulted in front of the children and failing to provide for the children financially. “...And when he called me on Mother’s Day, ‘you f###ing bitch’ oh in front of the children as well”.

“But to date he never showed any responsibility towards (daughter’s name) and that alone shows me he’s got no responsibility”.

Participants also expressed unhappiness with the level of interest shown by fathers towards their children and their level of involvement in their lives both during the marriage and after the divorce. “And he came back and saw the kids once and then we never ever saw him again until, well when he died”.

Direct abuse included a few participants hitting children, kicking them and one participant recalls an incident where her very young son was left outside a pub while her husband was inside drinking.



- ***Special-needs children and other challenges regarding child-care and having children***

“After (son) was born (son was born with a deformity) and that was extra stress and I could no longer deal with his (husbands) quirks and comments...:

“...my second child was a daughter that even made a bigger wedge because she was born with a lot of deformities”.

“...and (son) being retarded, he can’t say when he’s hungry or anything, so if he’s hungry he will start crying or whining and the one night um (son) was crying or whining because he was hungry and he back handed my son”.

“Then in 1982 we our child but she didn’t live a long time, she died when she was 4, 4 months”.

- ***Children's responses to living in the abusive situation as reported by participants:***

It seems that there were many instances where feedback was provided to the participants regarding leaving the abuse which confirmed that they'd made a good decision. Children expressed their support of the decision; "it's a good thing that you left daddy" and also identified with similar situations they witnessed on T.V.; "that's what dad used to do to you".

There were no reports where a participant stated that her child/children expressed regret or disappointment with the decision to leave the abusive situation. This implies that the children were indeed affected and were relieved to be removed from the abusive environment. "...my eldest son said to me mom this is the best thing you've ever done". One participant says that she made a decision to leave after her daughter convinced her to do so.

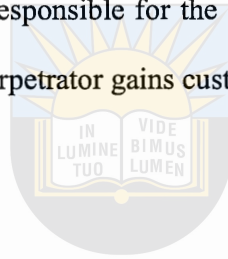
This is not to say that the children did not miss their father, as was pointed out by one participant.

When making the decision to leave, women consider: their employment status; their time spent in the relationship; previous attempts to leave and the effects of the abuse on the children. The women in this study were uncertain about whether the children were better off remaining in the dysfunctional home situation or if it would be better if she left. The women longed for a situation in which the children could grow up in a home with both parents, but acknowledged that at times it was in the child's best interest for the parents to separate.

Once the women could see that the children were being harmed in some way by the home situation, making the decision to leave was no longer negotiable. They made immediate plans to leave. For nine out of the fifteen participants, their greatest motivation for leaving the abuse was

for their children's well-being. Leaving to save herself therefore did not seem as urgent or as significant, while their children's welfare was of utmost importance.

In some instances, children were sent to live with relatives for their safety and to give the mother an opportunity to make preparations for their new life. There were few reports of direct abuse from the father to the children, but many indications of indirect abuse, with children being exposed to the abuse. Indirect abuse was highly prevalent. According to literature, it is a travesty when women are held legally responsible for the child's suffering which results in her loss of custody and support, while the perpetrator gains custody and credibility.



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2.4.5 Long-term effects of abuse

- **Mental Illness**

"Things during that time got so bad that my mom took me to a psychologist, and I said to her that I don't know how I was going to make it through all of this".

Four out of the 15 participants reported symptoms that are in line with severe mental illness. They describe feelings of hopelessness, becoming withdrawn; feeling unable to cope "can't go on", self-doubt, feeling suicidal and one participant reported resorting to drug abuse as a way of escaping her distressing home situation. "Lost my peace" and "numb" were other words that were used to describe their state of mental health. Participants reported feelings of Depression and Post-Natal Depression. The most chilling expression of the depths of despair that was expressed was said in the following way: *"I had lost my soul"*. This shows how desolate and barren some participants had been left feeling as a result of the abuse.

Three of the participants were admitted at some point during their marriage for in-patient Psychological treatment.

- ***Self-worth***

“I think I thought of myself that I’m better than this, I’m worth more than this, I’ve done this I cannot get this to turn me down, I’ve got a child, I’ve got a career, I’ve got my brother, I can do it, I’m a learned person, I’m a professional, I’m registered as a professional somebody. I think the love of my family and the love I had for me, you know, for myself”.

One participant refers specifically to her realisation of her self-worth and her family support as the ultimate reason for her courage to leave her abusive marriage. When analysing the respondent’s views on the effects of abuse on their self-worth, there seems to be a clear sense that their self-worth and value as a person was eroded. One participant experienced the abuse as “...very undermining and it broke down my self-confidence a lot”. The attacks on self-esteem were also described by one participant as “traumatic”.

It is also clear that it was not just the participant’s self-worth as a woman that was affected, but their worth as a mother. “I think for me like I wanted to be the best mom I could be without having to worry about (ex-husband) ...I couldn’t be the mother I wanted to be for my kids because I was too scared of how their father would react”.

Restoring self-worth seemed to be an important part of healing and would take time. “...he constantly robbed me of my self-esteem, ... it takes a while to build myself up again I’d say within 6 months of being on my own with the kids I started to feel, not completely but I felt better as a person”.

Four of participants in this study reported symptoms related to severe mental illness. These symptoms include feelings of hopelessness, being withdrawn, feeling unable to cope, self-doubt, feeling suicidal and abusing substances. In this study participants describe feelings of worthlessness, no self-respect and low confidence.

There seems to be a variety of ‘losses’ the woman experiences as a result of the abuse. The most significant being a loss of ‘self’. This includes doubting herself and being unsure of who she is regarding her personality, choices and so forth. She also loses her dreams of a perfect family and marriage. According to other studies done, the woman experiences these losses whether she remains in the relationship or leaves. These losses are experienced as grief similar to losing a loved one. Feelings include guilt, self-blame, sorrow and depression.

When preparing to leave the marriage, participants experienced feelings of failure, fear, apprehension, worry and insecurity. Participants also reported positive feelings of increased strength, self-worth and self-confidence. The increased sense of value also seems to be a significant factor in giving her the courage to leave – the realisation that she does not deserve the abuse.

Women who leave the abusive relationship have the ultimate goal of having the ... “ability to dream and make future plans and to rediscover their own feelings, femininity, sexuality and self-respect... (and) the establishment or hope of a new, safe and healthy couple relationship”.

3 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the findings of this study which included the types of abuse the participants experienced from their partners. In addition to this, were the events that contributed to the women deciding to leave the abusive home situation and the circumstances that enabled this move. The women faced various difficulties as they left the abusive situation.

What was found was that in order for a women to leave the abuse, it is vital that she is able to sustain herself financially, that she has support from family, that she realizes that this is an opportunity to create a better life for herself and her children, and finally, that she reaches a point where she believes that she has self-worth and self-belief.

Contrasting these enabling factors, are the common challenges of isolation, financial dependence and diminished sense of 'self' as a result of the abuse. These challenges are the prison bars which make leaving the abuse a testing and gruelling experience.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1.1 Domestic violence

Domestic Violence is described as anything that physically, mentally or emotionally harms someone, and is inflicted by their intimate partner. Domestic Violence is also referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Domestic Violence is highly prevalent all over the world, including South Africa. In the past, the type of questions being asked seemed to put blame on the women who were abused, e.g. “why doesn’t she leave?”. The focus is now changing to consider factors that enable women to leave and the challenges they face in preparing to leave the abuse. Types of Domestic Violence that arose in this study include: physical; sexual; emotional; psychological (such as mind games, threats and intimidation) and financial.

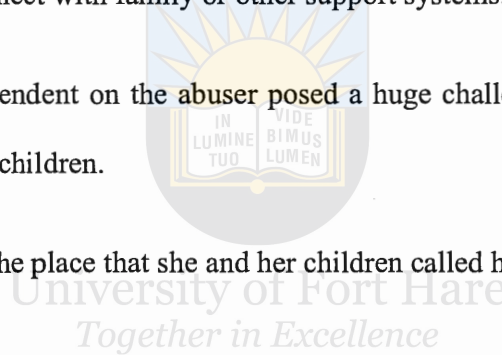
There were very specific support factors that seemed to enable the woman to leave the abusive relationship. These factors were highlighted in literature and were reported by participants in this study. These factors very simply can be categorised as:

- Support from family, friends, employers/colleagues, neighbours, etc. The woman’s mother or ‘mother-figure’ was especially noted as one of the major support factors that enabled the woman to leave.
- Financial security (such as a new job or assurance of maintenance).
- Well-being of the children.

- Improved sense of 'self'.

There were also significant challenges that women who were leaving an abusive marriage faced:

- They had become so isolated from any form of support that making plans to leave, required her to re-connect with family or other support systems.
- Being financially dependent on the abuser posed a huge challenge on leaving her home and providing for her children.
- Difficulty in leaving the place that she and her children called home.
- Having a poor self-image.



1.2 Theories that were researched as part of this study

Various theories were explored. Namely: the ecological framework theory; normative resource theory; learned helplessness theory; survivor theory; psychological entrapment theory, investment model; masochist theory, the development of the human ego structure, feminist theory and the model of energy management.

The theory of learned helplessness and the investment model seems to be the most consistent with this study. Regarding learned helplessness; the psychological effects on abused women are considered. This theory states that abused women start to believe that “there is

nothing they can do to cause the abuser to change”. The end result is depression and anxiety. It was found that many of the participants in this study were admitted to psychiatric institutions or had been on anti-depressants at some point in their lives. This sense of being trapped disempowered and having no control over their own future increased depression. Learned helplessness, according to literature was prevalent in women who had suffered abuse as children and adults.

The investment model states that when women are contemplating leaving an abusive marriage, they use a ‘cost/benefit’ analysis. They would weigh up the cost/benefit of leaving versus the cost/benefit of staying. For example, if she discovered that her children are being harmed and she has a new job, the potential cost of staying would outweigh leaving – as this was one factor that made remaining in the abusive relationship unacceptable – and the benefit of leaving would be higher than remaining in the abusive situation. In this study, these types of scenarios could be seen in every participant’s experiences. As soon as there the cost of leaving became lower than the cost of staying or the benefit of staying became less than the benefit of leaving, the woman became highly likely to make a decision to leave.

1.3 Literature and this study

1.3.1 Types of abuse

There did not seem to be a generalization in the literature that stated which types of abuse are more prevalent, except to say that sexual abuse was closely associated with physical abuse.

This was not the case in this study. Three of the respondents in this study reported sexual abuse, while incidents of physical abuse were much higher, representing eleven respondents.

Emotional abuse was reported by all fifteen respondents of respondents, with verbal abuse reflecting the experiences of twelve of the participants. Financial abuse was surprisingly a common phenomenon, with ten of the participants reporting experiences of this. This was particularly surprising, as financial abuse is not greatly spoken about in society nor was it cited to a great extent in the literature reviewed. The most common form of financial abuse was financial irresponsibility on the part of the abuser. (See figure 2 below)

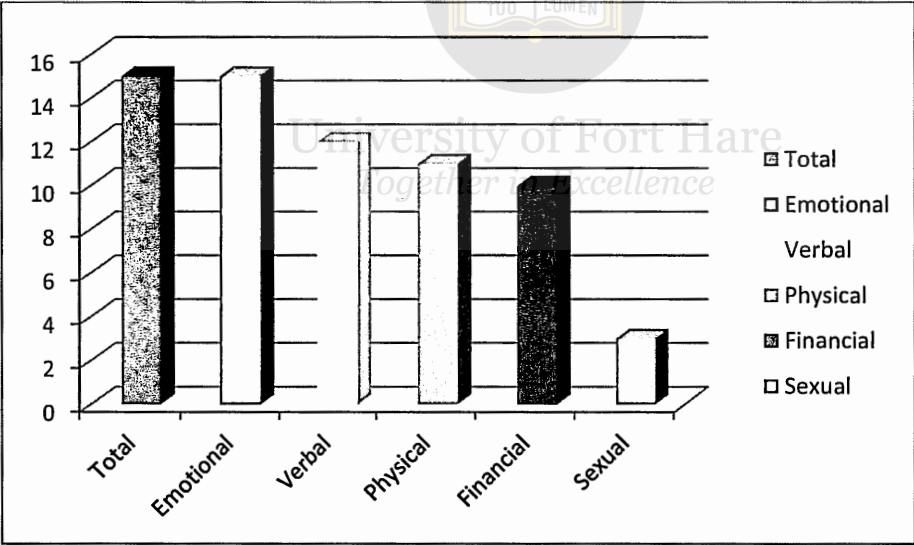


Figure 6: Frequency of types of abuse

1.3.2 Why do some men abuse their partners?

Some men abuse their partners by isolating her from family, friends or other support systems. This is done so that there is no-one who can challenge his behavior. The abuse

involves degrading her, insulting her, neglecting her needs and disrespecting her opinions to name a few. In general, the abuse devalues the woman as a person. The evidence of this isolation and control was evident in this study. Participants reported not being allowed to pursue extra mural activities, such as attending Tupperware parties, socials at their churches or even involving the children in arts and crafts at home.

Literature states that men abuse their partners to maintain their dominance in the home. There is a need for them to show dominance when they feel that their power is diminished in some way, such as lower earnings than their partner. This study identified this type of behavior in the form of lack of support in further studies, obvious jealousy and plans to harm their partner in order to improve their own financial position. One participant decided that she would need to leave her husband if she was to remain alive. It had come to her attention that her husband was investigating his potential financial gain, should she die. This was a final and extreme warning that she needed to heed.

1.3.3 Domestic Violence as a Human Rights issue

Human rights abuses involve the coercion of victims to do things that are against their will. They are not able to regulate their own conditions of life. In this study, participants give testimony to many instances of their rights being removed. Their right to work, care for their children in the way they chose, sleep when they want to (many participants describe incidents where her husband's expectation involved her waking up in the middle of the night or whenever he returned home and making supper for him or being available to him for whatever needs he expressed). In more than one incident, it was in these cases that wives of abusers experienced

rape and sexual assault. At times, these situations also involved the abuser being under the influence of alcohol which seemed to exacerbate the incidents of abuse.

1.3.4 Domestic Violence in the South African context

According to statistics that are available, between 16 and 30 percent of South African women have been abused by their partners. The high prevalence of Domestic Violence can be seen in the fact that respondents for this study were fairly easy to recruit and it was not necessary to market the request for participants. These figures of abused women are higher in rural areas. The way in which abused women related their abuse was closely linked to their context. For example, women who lived in poverty stricken communities were vocal about the financial abuse they experienced.

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Financial abuse ranked fairly high in this study, with two thirds of participants reporting on financial abuse they suffered. This speaks of the expensive living conditions of South Africans and high poverty levels. Women are historically susceptible to being impoverished and disempowered. The abusive situation is an added disadvantage for women in society who have suffered other forms of neglect and disempowerment.

1.3.5 Domestic Violence and Divorce

Literature acknowledges the fact that divorce is a major life transition. In the context of domestic violence, divorce is seen as an opportunity to flee an unhappy or harmful home situation, and also to protect one's children from the effects of abuse.

The requirements for participants in this study included the fact that women had to have had children and been divorced for at least one year. All participants were therefore legally divorced, except for one participant who had had a traditional marriage, and the divorce was therefore managed in the same way.

1.3.6 How abuse affects women in the long term

There are both physical and mental implications for women who have been in abusive relationships. These include anxiety, depression and an increase in physical health issues. Grief and loss was found to be a common response to prolonged abuse. Literature showed that this experience of grief and loss was evident, whether the woman remained in the abusive situation or not. The loss revolved around the disappointment in the way her life had turned out; her marriage, the dream of a happy home life and having to let this go. The associated experience included sorrow, blame and difficulty in making decisions – all congruent with responses to loss through death. Literature showed a prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in women who were abused. Symptoms of this include poor quality of sleep, difficulty in focusing, intense fear, anxiety and anger.

In this study, participants reported feelings of anger, anxiety and depression. Some participants relay episodes where they wanted to commit suicide as a result of their depression. Three out of the 15 participants had been in a Psychiatric facility at some point and were prescribed anti-depressants to treat their depression. This is not a significant percentage of respondents and this points to the fact that medication and healthcare professionals were not the primary source of help for participants in South Africa. This could also be due to the fact that

having a medical aid is unaffordable to a significant percentage of the South African citizens. Access to psychiatric institutions and psychiatric intervention is therefore very limited. State institutions are believed to be of substandard quality and psychiatric care is not readily available as there are long waiting lists.

1.3.7 Leaving as a process

Research on domestic violence describes leaving the abuse as a process and not a once-off event. When women consider leaving, the various things they consider are their financial situation, the investment that has been made in the relationship, previous experiences of attempting to leave and the effects of the abuse on the children. Leaving is impacted by the woman's state of mind, support available to her and her financial security. The woman's circumstances, her environment and her internal processes are what determine whether or not she leaves, when she leaves, and so forth.

In this study, six out of the fifteen participants had left previously and the nine, who had not, appear not to coincide with the views in current research. For most of the women in this study, leaving was a last resort and was only considered when other avenues had been explored or when they were so ill from the abuse that they were admitted to psychiatric facilities. The extent of their economic dependence, support systems, lack of awareness on the effects of abuse on their children and having a value and belief in themselves was a significant factor for these participants.

1.3.8 Motivating factors for leaving

Research states that women, who leave, have the ultimate goal of being able to have a functional, happy and safe future with their children, as well as rediscovering themselves. They reach a turning point when they make the decision to leave, normally precipitated by a significant event or realization, such as the increase of intensity and frequency of abuse, awareness of the threat to their children and access to financial and social support. This is very much in line with the Investment Theory of cost/benefit analysis.

In this study, fourteen of the fifteen participants had a turning point which was directly related to the realization that their children are being harmed. The fifteenth participant had already lost her baby and there were no children in the home. Thirteen of the fifteen participants mention support from their mother/mother-figure as being a significant factor in their decision to leave.

1.3.9 Support factors

Research suggests that women who receive family support found tangible assistance more helpful than emotional support. Such examples are financial support, a place to stay or being fetched from the abusive situation.

With regard to Social Services, research states that abused women are satisfied with the type of community and social support they received. These include support from Therapists, Social Workers, Probation Officers and their spiritual community. This is in contrast to this study in which there was very little mention of community or social services. There was no

mention of therapists. Rather, support from church leaders and church counselors were mentioned.

Research showed an absence of support from the justice system. This was related to a misuse of justice. Healthcare facilities are also not regarded as providing an effective service to women who are abused.

1.3.10 Challenges when leaving

According to research, danger may increase when the woman expresses her desire to leave or to end the marriage. This risk of harm is extended to the children. Challenges experienced by the women include the failures of the justice and medical system, isolation and lack of support systems and meeting children's needs. Men continue to abuse women through future visitation rights or custody/maintenance battles according to research. This was particularly real for one of the participants in the study who lost custody of her son to his father and continues to pay maintenance for her son. She therefore experienced the loss of regular contact with her son and is burdened by the maintenance that is requested of her. It is stated that children who have been exposed to family abuse/violence in the home are likely to have physical, mental and neurological damage.

Particularly interesting in this study, is the fact that one third of participants stated that they had at least one child who experienced a major impairment. 2 Children had been diagnosed with Autism, 1 with a severe physical and mental disability, 1 baby born with a deformity and in 1 instance the baby did not live longer than a few months. It is not certain that these disorders

are as a result of the abuse in the home or whether these special needs children and circumstances added stress onto an already troubled relationship.

Other challenges as expressed by women in this study include the isolation that makes re-entry into society very difficult and access to support from friends or relatives a major issue. Coupled with this is the adaptation to the new role of being a single parent to a child/children – some of whom may have special needs.



1.3.11 Religious and Cultural issues

Religious and cultural factors sometimes complicate a woman's decision to leave and her process of leaving the abusive marriage. For one woman in this particular study, it was seen that her mother-in-law had a higher tolerance for abuse and she therefore implored her daughter-in-law to remain in the abusive situation. The mother-in-law was a Xhosa woman living in a rural setting. It has already been mentioned that abuse in rural areas in South Africa is as high as 80%. In this culture, marital issues are dealt with by the extended family and the onus fell on the participant to explain the reasons for wanting out of the marriage, rather than on her husband to answer on why he was neglecting his wife and children.

In other examples from this study, there is very little mention on the opinion of the in-laws who remained silent on well-known situations of abuse. In this way, family violence is perpetuated by the family of the abuser who do little, if anything, to challenge the behavior of the abuser.

Literature states that in many instances, women remain in abusive marriages because they fear being cut-off from the greater community. In traditional Xhosa culture, the new bride leaves her family and becomes part of her husband's family. If the in-laws do not support or protect her, she is much more susceptible to remaining in the abusive home.

1.4 Recommendations for practice

Counselors and other health care professionals should carefully screen cases for instances of family violence. They should be trained and equipped to identify and deal with such cases when they arise. Counselors should attend to the needs of children from abusive homes by involving the necessary specialists and practitioners, such as Paediatricians.

Support should be given in a non-judgmental way and should include life skills to empower the women to make good decisions in the future. It is vital that the counseling process validates her experience and the depth of her loss. Literature recommends a strengths-based approach which helps the woman to strengthen the 'self' and make her aware of her strengths. Counseling should improve the 'status' of women who have been 'degraded' and should honour the depths of their distress.

1.5 Conclusion

The research objectives: "To look at the experiences and circumstances that led to the decision to divorce, to explore the support factors that enabled the women to leave the abusive marriage, to explore the unique challenges facing women who have initiated a divorce from an abusive spouse and to look at the long-term effects of abuse on women" have been met as can be seen in

the findings presented in chapter four. The researcher has a better understanding of the circumstances, support factors, challenges and long-term effects of abuse and these are portrayed and described above.



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ADDENDUM 1: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your marriage – how and when you met.
2. When did you first felt threatened? (emotionally, physically or otherwise)
3. What type of abuse did you experience in your marriage?
4. When did you first make the decision to leave?
5. What were the specific events that lead to your decision to leave?
6. Had you tried/planned to leave before? (How many times)
7. When you left for the last time, what was the final straw?
8. Do you remember what went through your mind as you planned to leave?
9. At that time, what were the implications of staying?
10. What was your motivation for leaving?
11. What challenges did you face as you planned to leave? (Legal, financial, cultural/religious factors etc.)
12. What made it possible for you to leave? (e.g. Contributing factors, children, family support, finances etc.)
13. How long did it take for you to apply for the divorce after leaving?
14. Is there anything that you would like to add about your experience?

ADDENDUM 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am a student of social work at the University of Fort Hare. As part of my education I am conducting a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of women who have left an abusive marriage.

I have invited any woman who has been divorced for at least 1 year, who is between the age of 20 and 50 and who has children to participate. The results will only be used for research purposes and will therefore inform future practice for work with women who are in abusive marriages.

You will be interviewed by me and you will be asked to answer 12 questions that have been designed for this purpose. There may be questions that bring up uncomfortable or painful memories and I will be sensitive to this. If you would like to stop at any time, you are free to do so. I will destroy any information that you have shared up to that point if you so wish.

Any information gathered will be anonymous, and your name will not be included in any of the research material. The data will be recorded and grouped together. It will be analysed and documented as a group, not as an individual, and you will therefore not be identifiable through the study.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study and you may have a copy (summary) of the study once it is complete if you so wish.

If you would like to contact me with any queries or concerns at any time, you may reach me on 043 703 5309/079 498 9301 or you can contact my Supervisor, John Rautenbach on 043 704 7047.

Researcher: _____

Participant: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

ADDENDUM 3: EXTRACT FROM TRANSCRIPT ONE

9. At that time, what were the implications of staying?

I couldn't, it was not even...there was not even a thought of staying. There was no second guessing myself.

10. What was your motivation for leaving?

My kids (you say that very easily?) I mean there's no way they could have been... they saw a lot I mean fighting and breaking cupboard doors off kitchen cupboards throwing my, I used to have (I had a digi-cam) and he would throw it against the walls, jump all over it, having affairs, ridiculous things, I mean he smashed up computer monitors to pieces once, came home one night after being at a Tupperware party and I promise you it was a Tupperware party and all my clothes were lying, in - we didn't have a front wall, and my clothes were just lying in the road, all over the front lawn and I got inside and he had ripped all of the clothes out of the room, everything was a wreck, he had wrecked everything. He wouldn't let me in, I pushed my way in. (Was he every abusive towards your kids?) No (But indirectly?) yes

11. What challenges did you face as you planned to leave?

Well at that time we had one car so the logical me was thinking, not the emotional me, not at all cause at that stage I honestly, I was gonna leave one way or the other, and just I phoned my mom and I basically said to her this is my scenario, and she said what do you need, I'll help you with? And I just told (ex-husband) I don't care what you take, but I'm keeping the house 'cause my dad bought it for us and that was it. And he took

everything else, every single last thing including my children's beds. Everything, absolutely everything - (except their toys) but anything that was of any value, (So the major challenge was replacing all of that stuff?) Um, no because I moved to my mom, she had a granny flat (and what happened to the house?) I rented it out. I was going to sell it but ...

12. What made it possible for you to leave?

I had a very good support system, knowing that I wasn't the person that he said I was (and what helped you to know that?) I got to know myself, (the clinic?) after I applied for the divorce, around the 16th December, he came to my house, he wouldn't leave, he used to come sleep in the bed with me (laugh) it was terrible (after he left with everything?) No no it was while we were waiting for the divorce to go through. Things during that time got so bad that my mom took me to a psychologist, and I said to her that I don't know how I was going to make it through all of this. It was really, the house was empty and then I think I was in the clinic 5 weeks it was New Year's eve and I was in (section) by myself and somebody threw a brick through my front window in the lounge and I didn't have a phone or a car and (and in the meanwhile where were your kids?)